Evaluation of Positive Meaning as a Positive Leadership Strategy: A Case of Consumer Good Company in Indonesia

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Abstract—**This paper reports the evaluation of positive meaning-making practices as one of the positive leadership strategies in a consumer good company. Four strategies of positive meaning and effort in strengthening culture and identity examined from secondary data and informal talk of participants. Two company's video, seminar presentations, and a book were used as main data. The results reveal that building a sense of community and strengthening the culture and identity as well as creating a positive impact are the most apparent feature of positive meaning strategy.The discussions contribute to the concepts of positive meaning in the domain of positive leadership, and the practices applied can be referred for managers.**

Index Terms—**Positive meaning, positive impact, culture, sense of community.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Employees are involved and motivated to make meaning of what occurs surround them, and this behavior has become increasingly imperative in making an organization effective. In the organizational context, studies of meaning address both meaning in life [1] and meaning in and at work [2]. The concept of meaning is important in managing organization, for instance, in handling changes, due to it involves optimizing human functionality in facing difficulties of changes. Drawing from psychology, the meaning-making mechanism has been known in predicting physical health [3], better adjustment and more positive well-being [4] and have an important role in creating self-esteem and less depression [5]. Those outcomes will make a difference for the organization, especially when employee doing deliberately and actively.

According to Wrzesniewsky (2003), employees who are active in creating meaning in their work attempt to improve their content or social context. When work is seen as meaningful and valuable, an individual will approach it with more energy [6]. Actively meaning-making individuals consciously reflect on ambiguous or challenging events to revise their personal meanings, value, and goals, helping them face setbacks with a growth focus. Instead of giving up, they see difficulties as a personal calling, in which they are deeply involved and which is consequently in some sense enjoyable.

Meaning-making process of individuals can also be influenced by contextual factors, such as leadership. In the domain of positive leadership [7], one paradigm in positive organizational scholarship, the significant meaning is also adopted through positive meaning strategy in order to an organization built a positive climate. Positive meaning described as strategies which leader facilitates employees experiencing the meaningfulness in and at their work that enable them to see work as a calling and making an internalization of the organization's purpose and mission [7].

The positive leader could exercise a positive meaning strategy in providing examples and in influencing the subordinate or team. In showing positive meaning practices, the leader is expected to do something meaningful, significant, and have noble purpose [7]. When universal values are highlighted and stand out, such as caring, helping, and then the leader facilitates employee to be consistent and harmony with their internal values.

Apart from the above benefits, positive meaning could also increase the commitment, effort, and engagement as well as empowerment and satisfaction. On the other hand, it could also facilitate employee to alleviate the level of stress and improve the adaptability in a change initiative [8]. Despite these promises, empirical study, especially in the context of Indonesia is limited.

This study aims to evaluate the application of positive meaning strategy in the organization as one element of positive leadership strategies. The author hopes to contribute to the literature both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study responds to calls by Cameron and Spreizer [9] to enrich more explanation on the domain of positive organization on affirmative bias concepts. Practically, this study complements organizational practices using positive organizational scholarship approach in order to complement mainstream study that merely an extrapolation from existing negatively oriented constructs, deterministic views of employee attitude and behavior.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As meaning a subjective kind of sense, positive meaning at work may be defined differently by scholars. Among others, positive meaning at work may be seen as contributing to the economic contribution of one's family, have a positive impact on the organization (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). In positive leadership domain, positive meaning and how the leaders' strategies to develop it is essential for an organization to achieve an exceptional level of success. Positive leadership involves the implementation of various practices that facilitate individuals and organization realize

their highest potential, experience elevating energy, and reach the optimum level of effectiveness [10]. In similar fashion, Youssef and Luthans [11, p. 201] propose positive leadership as ''the systematic and integrated manifestation of leadership traits, processes, intentional behaviors and performance outcomes that are elevating, exceptional and affirmative of the strengths, capabilities and developmental potential of leaders, their followers and their organizations over time and across con-text''. According to Cameron [7], there are four strategies for leadership to conduct: positive relationship, positive climate, positive communication, and positive meaning.

Positive meaning emphasizes the meaningfulness that can become a source and also the results of one's work. Employees could create positive outcomes when they have a sense of meaningfulness, significant, and noble purpose [7]. When the positive meaning strategies are appropriately applied, the positive outcomes could be in the form of commitment, efforts, engagement, and empowerment as well as satisfaction. On the other hand, the effect of positive meaning may also alleviate the level of stress, sense of cynical, and improve adaptability in facing change [8].

A. Meaning at and in Work

Meaning *at* work describes the relationship of organization members with their organization. Prat & Ashford [12] suggest the term "identification" that explains the commitment of organizational member in what they do that seek contribution and involvement. The mechanism involves a sense of belonging and often provide satisfaction.

Using another term, Prat & Ashford [12] also propose meaning at work involves *internalization*, where members complete their work as a manifestation or adoption of the organization's goals. Internalization facilitates an individual to assume the organization's purposes and aligning their behavior to the organization values, mission, and activities. Especially when those values and mission are an inspiring one, the employee felt confident that what they are doing is appropriate and sound. Since most of the organizational values are universal when leaders highlight values such as caring, helping, they facilitate employees to align the organizational values with their own set of values.

The orientation employee has in doing their work also explain the meaning in work. Wrzesniewsky and her colleagues [13], [14] discuss seeing a job as a calling, and this is a category seen the most productive for the employee. More than career-oriented, or merely doing it as a job or task, an employee is doing their job because they love the job or tasks. The tasks are inherently satisfied and making the contribution other beyond the self.

This meaning *at* work may have an implication for what employee meaning *in* their work. Meaning *in* their work involves how employees see their work as meaningful and in line with their personal values, a worth doing to support their career, and has an impact on other works or succeed. If employee aware and active enough to manage the meaning-making process, it may produce many valuable outcomes, such as engagement. Study of passion, from Pettula and Cardon (2011) can be referred in gaining the ideas of meaning-making. When an employee does their work passionately, work can be interesting and is often the

source of great pleasure.

Study of job crafting, that capture employee in redesigning their work, also can be referred in seeing how meaning-making at work truly works. According to Berg and colleagues [6], the employee could cognitively alter how they perceive task. For instance, they could change they perceive about the task, or see their job as a collective whole as opposed to a set of separate tasks. Other studies suggest it could be conducted through reframing the social purpose of work to aligning the employee's passion [15] or deliberately changing thoughts or beliefs about the job to cope with adversity [16]. Above ways of meaning in and at work may produce individual outcomes in ways of changing the meaning of work, positive experiences.

B. Positive Meaning as a Buffer to a Challenging Situation

The positive meaning strategy is not only effective to make an employee more productive and gaining positive outcomes. It also lessens the negative impact of challenging situations. Wrzeniewski [17] and also Berg with his colleagues [6], examine the meaning-making strategy when employees are facing challenges. Furthermore, Heuvel *et al.* (, focusing their study on meaning-making during changes at the organization also highlighted the importance of positive meaning. According to these researchers, since employee needs to balance the job demand (Demroutti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) and job resources (Bakker& Demorouti, 2007), positive meaning again could play an important role in lessening the perception of negative consequences of change. At the same time, it may improve the effectiveness of individual resources. Hence, although changes cause adverse events, the employee could still achieve work goals, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Demourouti, Bakker, nachreiner, *et al.* 2001).

Positive leaders may facilitate employees to establish positive meaning *at* and *in* work by several strategies, such as showing the exemplars and provide the advisory to their subordinate. The next section review literature involve this facilitation

C. Facilitating Positive Meaning

Leaders are responsible for instilling purpose and meaning into the employee work life, and it may be a key in leadership success. Four main strategies of positive meaning are proposed by Cameron [7]. Firstly, leaders show that the work has an important positive impact on the well-being of human beings. Showing employee that their work creating impact by arranging the meeting with the beneficiary, and recognize the impact. In a study about call center, Grant [18] describes that the interaction of beneficiary and hearing directly from them about the significance of one's work would create greater meaningfulness. A higher purpose, something that social benefit over and above the monetary payoff shared by the employer and employee, the collective good, also may produce increased meaning. If a leader could make employee has this kind of purpose, it will make the pursuit of profit more rewarding than just obtaining profit.

Secondly, connecting the work with an important virtue or personal value [19]. Here, management attaching that employee work has is most meaningful to individuals and the benefits produced by the organization. The universal values, such as caring, helpfulness, or generosity help employee

value their works.

Thirdly, facilitating employee to see their work has an impact that extends beyond the immediate time frame or creates a ripple effect [20]. When management highlights the long-term impact of one work, the employee tends to felt it is more meaningful. As one of basic need or drive of human potential is to create a legacy, extending their influence beyond the short-term and highlighting the longterm consequences, is more meaningful rather than merely seek for the immediate personal benefit [21]. Closely related to the long-term goals, Pratt and Ashforth [12] propose two main strategies involves achieving the target. First, to concentrate on promoting the goals, values, and beliefs of the organization, and secondly to focus on changing the nature of the relationship between employees. In practice, these strategies may reinforce each other, as changing one belief may change the way they relate to the organization.

The visionary leader may also play an important role in making a connection with employee longterm goals. Leaders who are, through their thinking and action, seen as visionary or transformative, will make employee perceive and believe that they are in the right and respectable organization. Strategies and practices that reflect an idealistic or future-oriented may inspire members in a way that they could provide a sense of special, feeling enriched and meaningful as this may reflect the aspiration of individuals [12], [22].

Fourth, leaders could build a supportive relationship or a sense of community in employees. Sense of community is assumed as a fundamental feature of meaningfulness where an organization could enable it by reinforce and sponsor contribution goals between employees. Employees working hours make them being at the office longer than they stay at home. What they experience in the relationship at the office, highly depend on how the organization employs the practices that build organization communities, where people emphasize a sense of caring and the oneness. Pratt and Ashford [12] suggest that one strategy that an organization can emphasize practice that engages community building by creating family-like dynamics at work. In this strategy, organization, through their managers and HRM program foster making work more family-like, and recognizing supporting and supporting members family lives (pratt & rosa). Signaling a caring orientation could also by encouraging trust and openness, demonstrating personalized attention and humor, displaying inclusiveness and compassion.

D. Cultures and Identity

In order to make four previously mentioned strategies works and effective, leaders should consider the combination of strengthening cultures, ideologies, and identity, as it may be the other ways to fostering positive meaning. Positive cultures that conveyed by certain values chosen by the organization may provide a sense of positive identity for members. According to Quinn and Quinn [22], positive leadership indeed involves shaping, building and sustaining leaders, members, and the organization itself. The employee felt that the organization is part of their own and also inherently appreciate or value the positive values. The more organization could represent these positive values through their programs, exemplars, standards, or artifact, the easier

the installation for an employee could be [23]. The employee will sense they are part of the organization and will put the best effort into realizing it with the work. The success of the organization will be seen as their success.

III. METHOD

This study uses a deductive qualitative [24] approach a single case study. This method is chosen to intensively explore how positive meaning practice employed by the management of the organization studied. This is comparable with Yin's [25] suggestion where a single case study can be conducted to describe a phenomenon and real-life context occurred. While the external validity of a case study is relatively limited [25], the purpose of this method is not to generalize the specific results, but to explore more new ideas and develop the theory from the results.

A. Data Collection and Participants

Initial data collection was conducted through informal talk with the managers of the company who have more than 5 years experience in the company to provide a broad perspective of the issue studied. The primary data was collected through two company profile videos, two seminar videos, and one book. A careful procedure using secondary data in qualitative research is conducted, as suggested by Ruggiano & Perry [26]. Moreover, the examination of relevant documents available; such as the company's website and social media related to the topic studied is also conducted [27].

Several triangulations were performed to validate the data collected. They also can provide insights in interpreting the data. The triangulation provides integration and comparison between the data, resources, and inclines to improve the internal validity of data [28].

B. Analysis

Content of videos, book, and social media posting were evaluated using the method of content analysis. Descriptive codes based on the theme and criteria drawn from the theoretical framework, and pattern matching procedures [29] in comparing the predicted theoretical with the observed empirical pattern was managed in interpreting the data. Codes were entered using NVIVO11 for descriptive analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Brief Profile of the Company [1]

The company was founded in 1979 as a healthy food company with several lines of products and brands. Company has two factory units and employed around 3000 employees. Organization's vision is *"helping our customer to achieve a long healthy life* through *our reputable and leading brands."* Using "Inspiring a nutritious life" as an organizational tagline, the company attempts to inspire people through healthy lifestyle and positive management. Leadership and work practices are also directed to living up the company mission.

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[1] Most of this section is adopted from the *Positive Organization* paper of the company, in judging process of the Positive Organization Award, October 24, 2018.

The founder of the company believes the company should share the four set of corporate values. *Integrity*: stands for what is right and consistent between what is said and what is done; *Collaboration*: a belief of togetherness is a key for the high achievement; *Innovation*: think and act in a different way; *Respect*: do to others what you want others to do to you; *Excellence*: do the extra miles at work.

Furthermore, the company has four leadership philosophies called *empat lensa (four lenses)* that function as a foundation in the decision making of employees. *Knowledge*: what we know today may not be applicable for tomorrow; *System*: the belief that things are connected, influencing each other; *Variation*: checking for the situation, the trend line, high or low before reacting; *People*: most of the time people are willing to give their best.

The value of **Integrity** is applied in many actions and program, including in managing the company's canteen, where it provides the employees' free lunch. The menus serve only healthy food without coconut milk and following the high living standard. Management believes that selling healthy foods should integrate with a healthy lifestyle at the office. Building a trustworthy working environment is another example of imbuing integrity. The organization believes that employee would optimize their effort at work, and put the best interest of the organization. If there is a disfunction occurred, or people having a mistake, it is acceptable and could be fixed by the organization.

The integrity values are also applied in implementing the performance and reward system, where the company believes that intrinsic control should dominate over extrinsic control. The financial incentive is minimized, and including for the sales division. Sales target is always seen as a flexible and dynamic aspect where it could be varied according to the situation. With this approach, formal performance appraisal is not seen as an absolute measure. Performance management is assessed by team or department's leaders with their own approach, by implementing a community approach, where leaders and subordinate discuss the performance more informally. As a "family", the employee will be nurtured without labeling them with a certain category of performance ranking.

The application of **excellence** and **innovation** values can be seen in how The company put people development positively, by emphasizing the growth and development program as a backbone for people management. The company has developed a comprehensive program: Nutrifood Business Course for its executive comprise basic and advance level. Managing People Series (MPS: comprise 7 sessions of training for managers in managing the team member). Nutrifood Leader's Insight (#NLIGHT; a monthly program that is presenting a unique speaker of a prominent figure. Additionally, it has a Learning Forum that facilitates the independent learning process in each division.

The value of **innovation** is also prevalent; for instance, the company has a special program, namely Festival Inovasi Nutrifood (FIND –Nutrifood Innovation Festival). This program is conducted to facilitate innovation results from employee and units in the year through.

Respects as another value, are represented in the several policies, including the norm of seating in the canteen, where there is no difference between level. Managers or entry-level are served in the same way, in menu term or in seating arrangement. As for office arrangement, there is no special room for leaders; all of the table and chair are free to be seated. There is no partition between seniority.

B. Themes

As a deductive study, theoretical framework suggested previously was used in analyzing the themes emerged. Relative frequencies of coding categories that emerged in data found are: showing positive impact 26.7%, connecting virtues and important values 3%, showing longterm benefit 13.3 %, and building sense of community 65.7 %, and managing culture and identity, 28.8%. The next section focuses on the theme that seems dominant; building a sense of community and managing culture and identity.

C. Building a Sense of Community

Practices in applying the corporate values as part of strategies in forging and creating positive meaning are so evident. In building a sense of community, a specific tagline intentionally created to call the organization as a "second home" for the employee. This also can be seen as an important aspect of the organization to show that it cultivates the sense of brotherhood and family. A manager comments on this distinctiveness:

I think one of the advantages of this company is a nice working environment. All employee felt that the organization loves them, like having one sister who took care of you. The one who takes care and handles you when you have problems or getting sick. They also care about our career development. When you want to upgrade yourself, just let them know. All friends are really like our own family. There are numerous facts that the office provides a relaxed atmosphere.

To boost up the sense of community, the internal communication and engagement team in the company designing programs that foster a positive atmosphere. Routinely, they lead a yearly Department Gathering and Family Gathering for increase family engagement each other, a monthly coffee morning where department talks about values, and a town hall meeting with the CEO in order to build the intimacy between employee and CEO, as well as to facilitate immediate direction from the CEO. The company also uses sophisticated engagement tools such as Enterprise Social Network through Facebook's Workplace. This initiative is not only facilitating the closeness between employee, but also maintaining and developing cross communities in the divisions, and employees in the country.

As a company with a higher proportion of the younger generation, Nutrifooders – the term for the employee – are encouraged to maximize the power of social media. The company uses popular hashtag #RumahKedua (#SecondHome) and #FunWorkAtNutrifood to show the public that creating a pleasurable workplace is in line with the company's mission.

To strengthen and nurture the meaning of fun work, the company also believe in fostering the authentic self of employee. Promoting the authentic self is reflected in a free attire policy where employees could freely choose the way they express themselves in clothing. This also reflects organization support of one's true self, where the more comfortable employees with what they wear, the more they perform. This could attract the younger generation where

some studies found that millennials express their self.

This view of creating a sense of community of second home workplace is confirmed by the CEO of this company.

This organization can be managed as a family. We perceive this company as our second home. This is not as normal as most of the companies are managed. Our philosophy is that we believe, for most of the time, people work at their best. This belief makes people motivated to put their best effort. So that we do less on using incentive or punishment. Since we believe that if get the right person, the job inline with his or her passion, they will do their best. We want them to make a contribution.

D. Corporate Culture and Identity

The comment above also shows that internalization of the culture direct individuals to adopt the organization's purpose and priority as their own. This way, the loyalty of the individual to the organization is clear, and the behavior enacted in realizing the mission and activities of the organization. The orientation of work and work internationalization could be seen as a positive meaning [7].

Another manager in the video describes the similar notion of positive meaning practices:

Here we are taught that what we develope this company not merely as a business, but meaningfulness business. Since our products enable people to live healthier, we can influence so many people. This is what makes me said to myself and others that "I do something different".

Another comment more specifically on the leadership style of the managers in developing culture, that instilled by most employees.

For me, this company is really interesting. What management try to built here is the atmosphere, and also culture. The most determinant is the role model from those at the top, go through the lowest level. Since the role model so consistent, then the other is also consistent. They are so passionate about doing that, and also there are so energetic.

Most employees in the video realized that the role of corporate values could function as a guidance of the attitude and behavior of the employees. Leadership concept emphasizes the contribution of the greater goods, more than themselves and company. Although institutionalizing the corporate values always highly challenging attempts, the employees are generally agreed that it is so important.

We have to admit that values instillation in an employee still needs many improvements. But we always put our best efforts using several strategies, so that the process could be better from time to time. For instance, we have many human resources event trying to foster the values of innovation. We have an innovation program that promotes new ideas and their application in units and department. We celebrate it and also awarding the winner.

Other participant reveals how the company creates artifacts and symbols at many office corners, in order to remind and reinforcing values the company shared.

We don't want corporate values only as an empty slogan. Those values should be reflected in our policies and rules. Please visit our office, there are labels and statements that expose the implementation of values. For instance, we forge employee to use stairs instead of lift, as we are so much support the healthy lifestyle. Foods that the company freely served for employees contains healthy food that so much in line with the company tag line "inspiring Nutritious life".

E. Showing the Positive Impact

Company explicitly emphasize their willingness to contribute to a wider audience, as one of the corporate identity. While it is not stated as one of the values, but the company eager to express it in the acronym of the values. They call their set of values as I CARE. The CEO expresses the initiative:

We want to show that this company is not only established for the owner or the employee, but also much beneficial for people in general. When the employee also holds a similar principle, we could hope that they do their work in an optimum way. And I think what our employee performs show that this statement is valid. They proved it.

The role of a leader in integrating positive meaning with imbuing corporate values is dominant. Most of the employees agree in seeing the leaders as an exemplar for positive meaning strategies [30]. The data obtained showed that managers often invite the employees to adopt corporate values as well as the culture in their works life. A manager tells this in the corporate video:

I like being in this company, that concern on how much we need to make the contribution to our surrounding and for our country as a whole. This company not only pursue *for-profit*, but also intend to contribute to the communities. As our slogan, "inspiring nutritious life", we, employees and leaders intentionally invite people to have a healthier life.

In fostering the prosocial motive, one unique program that the company initiating is fostering volunteerism in employees. Employees are facilitated by one day leave for those who want doing such an activity. The company believes that the altruism and prosocial motive should become an important character of the employee and should be nurtured even with the small activity for the sake of greater good benefit. This initiative becomes a requirement for those who want to be promoted.

V. Discussion

This study contributes to the literature and organizational practices in a number of ways. The findings show that positive meaning strategies characterized by the meaningfulness that leader wants to create so that employee is seeing their work or the membership of an organization as a beneficial and significant. Input from participants and the secondary data show that positive meaning strategies are apparent in the organization and gaining a positive impact. Studies show that the more employee believes that they are doing the right things, the more meaningfulness the work (Grant, 2008). From the response, we could predict that the level of meaningfulness may impact the positive outcomes and the extraordinary performance in the organization [31]. Furthermore, the enthusiastic response the employee also shows that there is a high level of satisfaction with the organization as well as a job. As *in* work, the positive meaning strategy and practices in order to employee internalizing the organizational purpose and values to their personal purpose and values. Also, they internalize the culture and mission of the organization completely and absolutely and believe what they are doing is well and right.

Volunteerism, as one way for the company to build a sense

of positive impact, is an interesting area to be studied further. Concept of prosocial motive in an organization [32] is worth to be explored for this purpose, especially in the practical level. Seeing contribution as a goal is one character positive leadership that differentiate it from other leadership approaches or normal organizational behavior. In positive leadership, the orientation of employee and organization often emphasize more on the greater good [10]. In the process of positive leadership, besides realizing the achievement goals, the employee is also expected to design and fulfill their "contribution goals". Achievement goal saw full of self-interest, where the outcomes mostly for personal gain and interest. The contribution could predict a positive meaning for the employee as they gain something meaningful that hardly could get from achievement goals [33].

This study has several limitations. An in-depth interview with senior managers or the employees should be conducted to enrich the source data. Furthermore, the data analysis should employ a team to provide more alternative perspective in interpreting data.

VI. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study to evaluate the positive meaning practices as one of the positive leadership strategies, and this expands the limited empirical studies in this area. The results suggest that four facilitating strategies of positive meaning are apparent; showing a positive impact, connecting virtues and values, showing work extend beyond short term period, showing a positive impact, and building sense of community. The last two strategies are dominating the practices involved in the company. Strengthening the culture and identity is also needed to make these strategies more applicable. These practices inform the concepts and practices of positive meaning-making at work, however the critical question for future research is maybe how these practices affect the outcome of the company.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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