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Confined Purpose

*A study of the link between
individual and corporate purpose*

Kira-Friederike Brückes & Eric Jan Bloemen

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Supervisor: Sverre Spoelstra

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Abstract

This study explores the concept of an individual purpose, aiming to give an answer to the question of why we work. By giving an in depth, real life example of a sustainable company, a Swedish coffee roastery, we aim to uncover why it is people work there and how this interacts with the corporate purpose. By conducting a qualitative study of the link between individual and corporate purpose within the interpretive tradition, we discuss whether work is just about fulfilling basic needs or about more - a higher purpose. In addition we link this to the purpose of business, a debate that is relevant to this day; should a business pursue profits or purpose? We introduce a new concept, confined purpose, which captures the aim to pursue a higher purpose within corporate confinements. Furthermore the different expectations of society, to work and to follow your dreams, add to this confinement. Finally we comment on the knowledge-action gap present in sustainable living; the inability to transfer knowledge, ideals and intention into sustainable action. In addition, we argue how this gap might be an alternative explanation for greenwashing, as companies might experience this gap as well.

Keywords: Higher Purpose, Purpose of Business, CSR and Sustainability, Confined Purpose, Knowledge-Action Gap.



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1. Introduction

Work, an integral part of everyday life; with the average adult working around 40 hours a week, it is at work we spend most of our waking time. Yet, when asked, almost no one would want to work more, on the contrary almost 40 % of full timers would prefer to work less (Böheim, & Taylor, 2004). So why then, do we spend so much of our time there? The easiest answer is: to sustain oneself. We however, do not accept this as the only answer. As much as mankind works to sustain oneself, so too, could they work for a purpose. This research is focused on this higher purpose; why do people work and what higher purpose do they want to achieve with it? And how does this connect to the purpose of business?

1.1 Background

A purpose, the reason for which something is done (Oxford University Press, 2017) or even a higher purpose, having a meaningful goal to strive for aimed at achieving a greater good (Damon, Menon & Cotton Bronk, 2003) is an often explored topic in psychological research. Reason to work can be divided into several categories, and often the why of actions finds its source in either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Actions that either give inherent satisfaction, or actions that give satisfaction only because of the incentive attached to them (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992). In work many actions seem to be motivated by extrinsic factors, not the least of these are hygienic factors (Herzberg, 1966); things that do not act as actual motivators, but are rather needed to avoid dissatisfaction. These can be the salary or clean working conditions for example. While these factors are important to enjoy work, it is not what we are looking for. Our aim is to find out what the higher purpose for work is, by looking at an actual company: the coffee-roastery Yotti (name of the company and all employees were anonymized). Furthermore, we aim to link this higher purpose to the purpose of business. If individuals work with a purpose, so might corporations.

So why do businesses exist? A question that has been asked and answered countless times in the past century. In the early 70's Friedman shook the business world to its core when he stated that *"the social responsibility of business is to increase its*



profits” (Friedman, 1970, p.1). Since then this view has dominated, but also faced criticism (Vogel, 2005). Profits are no longer the only important thing, at least not to everyone. Rather, people argue, for a firm to act responsibly they have to consider each and everyone their business affects (Freeman et al., 2009). While this still means that profits need to be considered, it is no longer the sole consideration. This is what the debate comes down to; is a corporate’s purpose profit, or is there more? One source of critique comes in the form of corporate social responsibility (CSR), claiming that businesses have a responsibility towards society. CSR can be seen as an extension of purpose, the contemporary way to ‘do good’ as a business (Carroll, 1991). In this way, a corporation can officially pursue a greater good. A related concept is sustainability; to not negatively impact or degrade the environment and its employees. So what is the purpose of the individual and of business, and what role does sustainability play in this? By looking at a sustainable company in practice, we hope to shed light on the purpose of business. Specifically, by doing qualitative research in a coffee company known for its sustainability measures, we aim to explore and possibly find an indication for a contemporary answer to these questions.

The Case Company

Yotti (Y) is a well-known coffee-roastery with a long history in southern Sweden, and with around 60 employees a medium sized company. Currently they are amongst the biggest brands in Sweden of roast and ground coffee and continue to do well. The company prides itself on its sustainability practices and in particular on their sustainable coffee. While so far only a percentage of their coffee is sustainably sourced, they mean to go fully sustainable by 2019 and were recently placed highest of all coffee roasteries on the Swedish Sustainability brand index (SBI). Yet at the same time, they are owned by Aegis Sweden, a big corporation within fast moving consumer goods. While this umbrella company presents itself as a sustainable company, they have received much critique over the years. Several scandals have affected their image and they still carry these with them to this day. In present days they do support many sustainability projects, so the question is how sustainable they really are. It is precisely in this kind of company that we hoped to find an interesting purpose; both individually and corporate. In a company focused on sustainability, it will be interesting to see how this reflects in the purpose of the employees. Especially



the interaction between the smaller, sustainable company and the scandal-laden umbrella company, could give some very interesting insights.

1.2 Research Objective

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into individual purpose and its relation to corporate purpose. In order to find the individual purpose of the employees at Y, we believe a qualitative, in depth approach to give the best results. In addition, we specifically aimed to conduct our research in a sustainable company, as CSR and sustainability practices can be seen as a company's ability to do good, an extension of corporate purpose. Therefore within this study we will explore individual purpose and the connection to both corporate purpose and CSR, by bringing a specific example into the picture. Specifically we try and link our outcomes to the overarching question of 'the purpose of business'. This is a particularly interesting topic for us, as we both stand at the start of our own career path, so the question of why people work has never been more relevant to us. Additionally, we are personally interested in a sustainable lifestyle for ourselves, and sustainable work in organizations. This interest is not just personal, but societal as well; sustainability has become more important, as reflected in the UN Sustainability Development Goals (United Nations, 2016) while at the same time the traditional way of working 40 hours a week is put into question. With this study our ambition is to get a deeper understanding within a specific company. Therefore we worked together with a coffee roastery in Sweden that uses sustainable coffee beans and has been placed among the top 100 companies in Sweden on the Sustainability Brand Index (SB-index, 2016).

As it stands, the debate about the purpose of business is very much divided; both profit and purpose are hailed as the one end goal to strive for. Therefore with this study we hope to contribute to this debate, hoping to find which side of the argument holds the stronger claim. Furthermore we aim to give a unique perspective by starting with the individual purpose and then linking this to corporate purpose. What role the individual plays in the purpose of business and the interaction between the two will make for interesting arguments. As an additional guide in our research, next to overarching purpose, we formulated guiding research questions. We have followed an abductive and interpretive approach and therefore adjusted our questions throughout



the process. However, two questions remained constant and provided an overarching direction to our thesis:

- *What do the employees of Yotti believe to be their individual purpose of work?*
- *How does this individual purpose interact with and compare to the corporate purpose?*

By answering these questions we aim to provide both a specific and more general perspective on purpose; both for the employees at Yotti, as well as what their answers indicate within the context of current literary debates. First and foremost we focused on individual purpose and tried to give a unique viewpoint by comparing it to corporate purpose.

1.3 Thesis Outline

The thesis will consist of several distinct parts, together making a whole. Within the second chapter, we give an overview of current theory and literature. The main purpose of this chapter is to make the reader aware of the meaning of the main topics and present the existing debates surrounding these. The main part introduces the topics of individual and corporate purpose, clarifying the differences between reasons and purpose, and presenting the ongoing debate on the purpose of business. We further discuss different expectations of society, to simply get a job, or to follow your dreams. Further, we go into greenwashing and its relation to CSR and corporate purpose, and the knowledge-action gap, in which intention does not always lead to action.

Following this theoretical background we present the methodological approach we took to conduct this study. We introduce critical theory and social constructionism and explain why we chose these concepts by introducing our philosophical assumptions within the interpretive tradition. Based on these assumptions our overall qualitative, abductive research design is illustrated. Furthermore we describe our choice of the case company and the sampling of our interviewees, followed by an introduction to reflexivity and methodological limitations.



Based on the theoretical background and our methodological approach we move on to our empirical findings, in which our interpretations are being presented and argued for. After introducing the case company, Yotti, we discuss the individual purpose of the employees at Yotti, the corporate purpose of Yotti and the view of the employees on sustainability. The individual purpose of our interviewees seems to be working for a sustainable future, to achieve a greater good. The corporate purpose however, while leaning to the side of profits, takes more of a middle ground, valuing sustainability as well. Finally we find that there is a difference between the way the employees approach sustainability at work and in private. This chapter stays close to the spoken words, before linking them to theoretical concepts in the next chapter, the discussion.

Subsequently, in the discussion, we compare and contrast those findings with the earlier presented literature. This leads us to suggest that the debate on the purpose of business could do well to not pick one side over the other, as a more balanced view seems to be closer to practice. A comparison of individual and corporate purpose, leads us to introduce a new concept, the confined purpose. This concept suggests that different expectations force individuals to adjust their purpose in a way that it fits within their company and society. Finally, we discuss the knowledge-action gap, as many interviewees had trouble putting their sustainability beliefs into practice in their personal life. We further suggest companies could suffer from the same problem, which could be an alternative explanation for greenwashing.

Finally, everything is wrapped up in a conclusion, in which we also come back to our research questions. A summary of the main findings is given and their implications both for practitioners and researchers are discussed. Lastly we give an indication for future research, reflect upon this study and end with concluding words from our side, finding that maybe there is a chance to change the world.



2. Theoretical and Literary Background

In this chapter we sketch out the theoretical framework that will be used to interpret our findings, put them in perspective and contrast them later on in this paper. We start with discussing individual purpose, what it is, why it is important and what it means to the individual. In that context we go into intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and distinguish the concepts of higher purpose and meaning. This is followed by an overview of the current debate on the purpose of business. Multiple perspectives are being discussed in order to give as broad a picture as possible, starting with the classic debate between Friedman and Freeman and followed by a more contemporary view. Furthermore the concept of CSR and its connection to corporate purpose is explored before we discuss the interaction of individual and corporate purpose. Afterwards we go into some more modern concepts: the expectations of modern society that might have an influence on the above mentioned topics, to strive for money and dreams; greenwashing, both its meaning and effect on the perception of CSR; and the concept of the knowledge-action gap, as a possible way to describe the often found inability to walk the talk.

2.1 Individual And Higher Purpose

In order to understand the purpose of work we both need to know what it means to have a purpose, and what the current view on the purpose of business is as a whole. By defining and delineating these concepts, it becomes possible to discuss them individually and in comparison. In short, a purpose is the reason for which something is done (Oxford University Press, 2017). However, this does not tell us enough; in this paper we are not simply looking for a purpose, but for the higher purpose of employees. This is an important, yet not that easily made distinction. Higher purpose can be defined as a reason that goes beyond fulfilling simple needs, beyond achieving happiness; it is about having a meaningful goal to strive for, aimed at achieving a greater good (Damon, Menon & Cotton Bronk, 2003). To give an everyday example, someone might go to the supermarket to buy food, the purpose here can be as small as wanting to eat, yet a higher purpose would be more along the lines of *“I need this*



food to feed my children, so I can raise them in a healthy way". The action is the same, but the difference can be found in the reason why an action is done. This concept translates into work just as well; to find the higher purpose of employees, we need to look more to their reasons than their actions. Why do people do things is the question we need to answer.

Especially in the working environment the major distinction is often made between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to explain the 'why' of actions. However, this concept is applicable to our everyday life, not only within work. Vallerand and Bissonnette (1992) define it quite simply: Intrinsically motivated behaviour is executed for the sake of doing it, extrinsically motivated behaviour is executed as means to an end. A classic example is play, an activity found in both humans and animals. Play seems to have an intrinsic purpose, people play simply to play; the reason to do it is already included in the activity (Sutton-Smith, 2009). This is distinctly different from actions that have an extrinsic motivation attached to it. For example, one does not bet on a horse race for the inherent satisfaction of it, but rather for the (extrinsic) financial reward it might bring. A higher purpose can be expected to carry intrinsic motivation (Harackiewicz & Elliot, 1998), to reach the goal will give satisfaction on its own, the satisfaction is not dependent on any external reward attached it. In work then, a higher purpose would therefore be something that carries this intrinsic motivation, something beyond payment.

However, many actions are motivated by external factors, which can still be important reasons for people to work, while not being a higher purpose. Herzberg (1966) coined these as hygienic or 'KITA' (kick in the ass) factors; things that do not act as actual motivators, but are rather needed to avoid dissatisfaction. These extrinsic motivators include salary, interpersonal relations and working conditions. People work to earn a salary, to pay for their living expenses and such. Yet, according to Herzberg (1966), this is not an actual motivator, being paid is not the higher purpose of people's work. Rather, as we need wage to sustain ourselves, the absence of salary would lead to major dissatisfaction. Hence, while a higher purpose needs more than simply avoiding dissatisfaction, these factors are still important. In his two-factor theory Herzberg (1966) therefore describes a scenario in which employees are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated as the ideal one. The question arises, whether or not everyone



has a purpose; objectively seen we cannot all live in a perfect scenario. However, it seems that we might need a purpose; individual purpose is found to be related to well-being (Savolaine & Granello, 2002), in which one's *raison d'être* in effect reaffirms itself.

Purpose giving meaning; while it might sound trite or pleonastic, it should not be disregarded that easily. It was Viktor Frankl (1985) who argued first, that meaning was of paramount importance to mankind, these days it is accepted in psychology that a sense of meaning is necessary for a healthy state of mind (Damon, Menon & Cotton Bronk, 2003). Since the modern human spends almost half of their waking life at work, having a purpose at work could therefore mean the difference between life feeling meaningful or not. Purpose and meaning, two closely related concepts, yet different. Both seem to be important for well-being, both positively (Ryan & Deci, 2001) and negatively; studies show that a feeling of meaning- and purposelessness can lead to severe depression and even physical decline (Reker, Peacock & Wong, 1987). Having a purpose on the other hand can help us survive the direst of situations (Frankl, 1985). Still, the difference between purpose and meaning is not always clear, yet an important one. Meaning, gives a reason to exist, while purpose gives a reason to pursue our goals. If purpose, or the pursuit of goals, has a positive impact on well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001), it is purpose we should look at, as this is what provides direction and action in work. Having a purpose could mean the difference between being content with a job or not.

2.2 The Purpose Of Business

Having discussed individual purpose and higher purpose from a more general perspective, we turn our eye to business. If we want to answer what the individual purpose of work is, it is important to know what is perceived as the general purpose of business. As with everything in research, there is no one straightforward answer to this, rather we mean to present the different views on the topic.

It seems like an impossible task to answer to question what the contemporary views on the purpose of business are. A myriad of views exist, but some stand out as being the most important in the field. For good reason, one of the classic debates still



dominates the field, the one between Friedman and Freeman. Friedman's view still carries a lot of weight in the current business world; the purpose of business is to increase its profits (1970). One can argue whether this is a higher purpose or not, as striving for profit might not achieve a greater good or give inherent meaning. Yet, according to Friedman (1970) profits can indeed be a higher purpose. Increasing the profits of a corporation would be for the greater good, according to his views on capitalism (2009), as he argues that the free market and capitalism are the gateway to a prosperous society. Therefore, by means of a trickle-down economy, increasing profits actually achieves a greater good. Freeman et al. (2010) go the other way with the stakeholder theory, in which they claim that businesses carry an equal responsibility towards all of their stakeholders. No longer are profits the all-important bottom line, the one thing that always needs to be considered. Rather, they argue, for a firm to act responsibly they have to consider each and everyone their business affects. While this still means that profits need to be considered, as shareholders are stakeholders as well, it is no longer the sole consideration. In a way, this has led to the idea of the triple bottom line, first introduced by Elkington (2004), in which people, planet and profits all have to be considered and are equally important.

This idea of the triple bottom line leads to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In order to connect these theories, it is important to understand the term CSR. The concepts of CSR and sustainability are regularly used in tandem and often overlap. CSR implies the approach to take responsibility towards different stakeholders (not shareholders); employees, the environment and consumers should all be taken into account and treated fairly (Carroll, 1991). Furthermore CSR could therefore support the purpose of a corporation (White, 2005), for example by pledging to improve working conditions in third world countries, instead of maintaining or negatively impacting current practices. In this way, a corporation can officially pursue a greater good. Sustainability is a related but different concept. A sustainable business can be seen as one that "*survives and persists*" (Costanza & Patten, 2005, p.1), meaning that the business does not negatively impact or degrade the environment and its employees, and so can go on ad infinitum.

Originally CSR seemed more in line with the views of Freeman et al., in the sense that true CSR goes beyond generating profits (Davis, 1960). However, while the



contemporary discussion has mainly evolved around arguing for and against Friedman or Freeman, alternative theories have been established. Carroll and Buchholtz (2009) for example say that profit is the bottom line, but once profitability is reached corporations have the responsibility to look at their legal responsibilities and then at ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. In a sense they therefore agree with both, extending Friedman's main argument by Freeman et al.'s. Another more contemporary view seems to go back to Friedman's stand, even though proponents of this view claim to disagree with Friedman (Vogel, 2005), arguing that there is a business case for CSR. They argue that pursuing CSR practices could lead to profits in the long run (Edmans, 2012), even though profit is not their priority. Yet, research does not seem to back up the business case for CSR, on the contrary, an overview of research shows that there is no clear economic benefit to CSR (Aupperle, Carroll & Hatfield, 1985; Vogel, 2005). Like any other business venture, it can have both negative and positive consequences: *"some firms will generate long-term profits from some socially responsible activities some of the time"* (Reinhardt, Stavins & Vietor, 2008, pp.17-18). The appeal of the idea however is understandable, in that it removes the perception of purpose and profit being incompatible, giving way for companies to pursue purpose while keeping the bottom line in mind. Unfortunately, the discussion does not seem to be closed this easily, as the correlation is not found. Either way, profit is not the only positive outcome a practice can have. Research in other directions does imply that CSR-practices correlate with employee well-being. Positive relations have been found between CSR and the following: attachment and performance (Lee, Park & Lee, 2013); commitment and performance (Ali et al., 2010), and engagement (Mirvis, 2012). Whatever the purpose of business is, CSR seems to be here to stay; CSR- and sustainability-reports are becoming the norm rather than the exception. Whether or not CSR is a true translation on corporate purpose, it has gotten its own spot within business and will play its part in the years to come. And so the debate still rages on and, while more nuanced, can be explained in a few lines. On the one side, people argue that the purpose of business is profit, on the other people argue that the purpose is 'purpose': to do good aside from or even beyond profits.



2.3 Individual And Corporate Purpose

With a clear view on what constitutes a higher purpose in individuals and on the current state of the debate about the purpose of business, the interaction of them becomes interesting. Some people make the argument that a corporation is a single entity (Blumberg, 1990), which would mean it could have the same higher purpose as an individual. It is argued that corporations have attained legal ‘personhood’ (Winkler, 2006) and to a certain extent have agency within society (Soares, 2003). However, their ability to act legally as a person and make independent choices as an entity does not mean that a corporation necessarily has one unified purpose. Friedman (1970) says that a corporation is free from responsibilities, because only individuals carry these responsibilities and while many disagree with this statement, it does make sense. Since a corporation is not only a single entity, but rather multiple (to a very high extent) individuals, one can expect the corporate purpose to differ according to each of these individuals. Since each individual carries his or her own purpose, they might even influence the corporate purpose with their own (Hemingway & Maclagan, 2004). Therefore, one can look at the purpose of the employees in order to get a picture of the corporate purpose. If one can influence the other, by finding the individual purpose each employee pursues, one might also be able to find the purpose of business within a corporation. However, the question arises, which one came first; as with a classic chicken or egg discussion, one could argue that the individual came first. Every corporation started with an individual or a group of individuals with their own purpose, this in turn shaped the corporate purpose. In this sense, one can argue that individual purpose creates corporate purpose, as argued first by Hemingway and Maclagan (2004).

Yet, just like corporate purpose and CSR practices might partly be shaped by the individual purpose of the employees, one might also expect an interaction going the other way. Potential employees might look for practices that match their idea of purpose in a company (Bingham et al., 2013). Thus, a company might attract people who think they share the same purpose or view on CSR. In that case the belief of the individual is what is important, it is about them believing the company's values correlate with their own. With concepts like these influencing each other, it is all about how they are perceived by one another. So by choosing a workplace with a



similar purpose the individual makes the corporate purpose his/her own. This enables the individual to execute that purpose and in turn commitment to the company increases (Bingham et al., 2013).

If the individual makes up the corporate purpose, one could expected to be a natural extension of the other. Therefore the corporate purpose would reflect the individual purpose, however if this does not apply, the question arises where these differences come from. One explanation could be groupthink (Janis, 1971), in which together the individuals are less than the whole. When working together, individuals might not push their own thoughts forward, but rather go with the consensus. If nobody puts emphasis in his/her individual purpose, the end product might not be in agreement with any of the involved individuals. Research has shown individuals to subjugate their individuality to the group and show a lower sense of moral judgement (Neck, & Manz, 1994). Questions that are still rather unexplored concern the effect employees at the bottom of the hierarchy can have on corporate purpose and conversely how much the voice of the higher echelons in the company counts (Harackiewicz & Elliot, 1998). It is hard to tell how much bottom-up communication actually takes place in a company. An in-depth look at a specific company could expand this discussion and give it a new angle.

2.4 Modern Society And Its Expectations

When discussing purpose, the general view on purpose within modern (western) society is a central part. Since society shapes views and opinions, in turn it will shape the purpose people have. However, again, there is a contradiction in the discussion on the approach society takes. Society has different expectations of corporations that often seem to contradict each other, wanting both business and charity (Carroll, 1991). The same can be found among the individual, with different expectations that are clearly in contrast. On the one hand, we have the concept of ‘following’ your dreams, *“probably the most commonly expressed inspirational concept ever created”* (Kirk, 2013, p.1). This idea is often repeated in popular literature, education and everyday life. Children and adults alike are told to follow their passion and that doing so will lead to a successful life; it might be the most given advice in graduation ceremonies. A simple Google search shows the prevalence of the advice. However, on



the other hand comes the advice to simply find a stable job, to make money; people often tell others not to follow their dreams, but rather do what it takes to survive. Both advices can be understood, but when looked at together the contrast becomes very clear. The main expectations of our society are opposed to each other, much in the same way as is made clear in the debate about the purpose of business.

Besides the contrast revealed here, purpose is just as much a construct of society as is anything else. Social constructivism (Berger, Luckmann & Zifonun, 2002) is often used as a way to escape having to explain a concept, and while it may sound easy to call something a social construct, it does not mean it has no value or impact. Rather, one should always keep in mind that everything could be a social construct (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), yet not disregard it because of this. Even if purpose is a social construct, this does not make it less important to the individual. It does however mean that purpose can differ in different societies (Bingham et al., 2013), and that a purpose might not be as inherent as one believes and relies heavily on wealth and social background (Bingham et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The satisfaction one gets out of purpose might be inherent, but a purpose itself not being inherent means that it can be acquired and can change over time. So individuals can adopt the purpose of the corporation and the corporation can adopt the purpose of the individual.

2.5 Greenwashing

One point of critique on CSR that has gotten traction over the past years is the idea of greenwashing. Greenwashing can best be described as a company creating the mere image of being sustainable, while not acting sustainable at all (Laufer, 2003). In a more empirical sense Delmas and Burbano (2011) define it as *“the intersection of two firm behaviors: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance”* (p.65). As a result, they argue, it weakens the trust consumers have in seemingly sustainable companies in general. The general consensus is that companies that practice greenwashing do so intentionally and to a certain extent maliciously, by abovementioned ‘positive communication’ about non-existing actions. While it is unclear exactly how prevalent greenwashing is, their research does point to a rise in recent years (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Regardless of the prevalence, the mere existence of the term has weakened the trust many



consumers place in sustainable companies. This brings into question how one can find the purpose of a corporation; any official statement can be deception or at least misdirection, rather than an actual statement of purpose in the truest sense of the word.

2.6 The Knowledge-Action Gap

In the following we will introduce the concept of the knowledge-action gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2013). In essence it comes down to a difference between intention and behaviour; people may have a certain ideal and intend to pursue something, yet fail to turn this intention into action. For example, someone might know about the effect of global warming and intend to act in an environmentally sustainable way, yet still fails to put this ideal into practice (by for example driving a highly polluting car). The knowledge-action gap has been specifically identified in sustainable consumerism, making it extra relevant (Barth et al., 2012). It seems that being aware of the environmental impact current consumer-patterns have, does not to have a direct effect on this pattern. It is particularly salient in the context of sustainability, as agency is actually extremely high in this particular context. One cannot change where a shirt is made, or a tomato is grown, but the consumer can decide not to purchase the product. The only thing standing in the way is the consumer him/herself. So it is in this situation that the knowledge-action gap becomes so clear. Somehow, caring for sustainability does not seem to translate directly to action. When we apply this phenomenon to individual purpose, employees might not actively pursue their purpose even when they truly believe in it, especially when there is no immediate consequence attached to it (Segar & Richardson 2011). This might be both, at work and outside of it.

2.7 Chapter Summary

Individual purpose in work constitutes a reason to work by pursuing a greater good. This purpose in turn can create meaning for the employee; it provides inherent satisfaction and is distinctly different from external motivators and hygienic factors. In turn, a sense of meaning is connected to mental and physical well-being. Corporate purpose however does not have a clear definition; in the current debate a distinction is made between profit as the sole purpose, or the purpose of doing something more.



Many argue that a corporation has to take every stakeholder into account; in contemporary business terms this translates into CSR. This can be seen as a statement of purpose, and as such CSR practices are part of many organizations today. With sustainability reports, CSR managers, and a general focus on being (at least) perceived as a responsible company, it has become a part of today's business. So CSR appears to be a translation of corporate purpose into somewhat of an action plan and corporate purpose can be built up by the combined purpose of the individuals in the organization. It seems to be a nice package, where CSR and sustainability practices translate from the individual purpose of the employees. Society further places different expectations on the individual, both to follow your dreams and to simply get a stable job. This coincides with the contrast found in the debate about the purpose of business. Purpose seems to be a social construct. Finally, there appears to be gap between knowledge and action; translating an ideal or purpose into action seems hard to do. This gap is especially salient in sustainable consumerism.



3. Methodology

In this chapter we present the methodology we used in our research and argue for the choices we made. We start with our philosophical assumptions within the interpretive tradition in order to give a better understanding of our background. Within that context we further describe the concept of social constructionism. Afterwards we illustrate our research design and the reasons for which we chose qualitative research and an abductive approach. Following this we get more concrete and describe the process of our data collection and analysis within the case company. We further describe our process of coding, sorting and reflecting in order to come to the interpretations and results that will be presented in the empirical chapter later on. After that we also go into the reflexivity of our research, followed by a short reflection on possible drawbacks and flaws in the research design.

3.1 Philosophical Assumptions

As we as the authors believe that the philosophical grounding or assumptions do influence the research design, we will identify those first (Creswell, 2013). This will later on build the groundwork for the research design and make it easier for the reader to understand the choices we took. This applies both to our research design and to the way we interpreted the data later on. Our philosophical assumptions will be identified and explained in order to give the reader a thorough understanding of our worldview.

The philosophical grounding we are taking is based on the interpretive meta-tradition within the post-positivism tradition (Prasad, 2005), which takes a sceptical starting point and is based on “*careful interpretation and reflection*” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p.9). The two main parts considered in this are ontology and epistemology; according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) these are much more the determinants of good research than the methods themselves are. Ontology describes the nature of reality, while epistemology describes how reality is known. Based on a phenomenological stance we do not claim to know our interviewees’ reality, interpretation or thoughts but rather try to make “*fairly qualified interpretations*” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p.172) based on the empirical material.



However, we do believe that social structures are manufactured by and dependent on society, as described by Prasad (2005) and Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009). In order to unravel these structures we focussed on close, rather than lengthy observations (Prasad, 2005), by conducting relatively few interviews but going into depth with each interviewee. More precisely, these social structures are not reliant on their own ontology but are “*produced or accomplished out of the daily social interactions of individuals who routinely manufacture these categories in and through language, ideas and action*” (Prasad, 2005, p.70). Empirically speaking, the storytelling process is more important than the story being told (Boje, 1991, cited in Prasad, 2005). Therefore we take the stance that ‘reality’ is merely constructed through actions (Merriam, 2002) and is therefore interpreted by society itself and can only be re-interpreted by us (Prasad, 2005). There is no one truth and we are merely taking the position of re-constructing social concepts. Hence we are conducting our research in the social constructionism paradigm, as described by Creswell (2013) and Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009). While social constructionism follows the post-positivism tradition, which takes a more problematizing view (Prasad, 2005), the positivist tradition would focus on a somewhat true reality that can be evaluated objectively. Hence we identify with the post-positivist tradition and take our stance within the interpretive tradition, as described above, and conduct our research following the social constructionism paradigm.

3.2 Research Design

In the following we describe our research design and therefore the core our methodology in more depth. In order to do so we go into main points, like the choice of a qualitative study and an abductive approach. This lays the ground for our data gathering and data analysis, which will be explained in the following chapters.

A main choice to be made when starting a research is between a qualitative and a quantitative study. This choice relies heavily on the worldview of the researchers. Based on our phenomenological stance, as described beforehand, we chose to do a qualitative study, which focuses on the subjects that will be studied, more specifically on their point of view and social interactions (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Quantitative studies on the other hand starts with the researcher’s interest and what



they feel like should be the central points of a study. While we work with guiding questions we will focus on interpreting social structures based on the empirical data gathered, rather than looking for one specific answer to those. The goal is to explore and uncover deeper meaning and phenomena, and our research questions serve as a guideline to do so. While we will connect our findings to theory and try to make contextual indications, we are aware that our findings cannot be completely generalized (Creswell, 2013; Gibbs, 2007).

This brings us further to the choice of approach taken in our study. Usually research either follows an inductive or deductive approach, again, depending on the philosophical assumptions of the researcher(s) involved. While a study following an inductive approach assumes their findings to be generally true, those following a deductive approach apply general rules to specific cases (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). We take a more modern and alternative approach, the abductive one. The abductive approach includes characteristics of each approach and starts with empirical data and then puts it into theoretical context in order to then explore an underlying pattern. Therefore abduction is not simply a combination of those classic approaches but a developed alternative. This also means that our theory continuously developed and adjusted over the course of the study (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009), which also applies to our research questions. These developed and changed over the course of the beginning of this study in order to understand the emerging patterns rather than shaping those to our convenience.

Based on the choices of a qualitative study and an abductive approach one can still go into many directions, depending on the orientation in which reflexive research is taken. Popular choices would be grounded theory, hermeneutics, postmodernism and lastly critical theory, which we followed. Critical theory is sometimes referred to as critical hermeneutics or triple hermeneutics and was inspired by philosophers such as Marx, Kant and Freud (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Critical theory in a sense combines “*a phenomenological stance with commitment to social critique*” (Prasad, 2005) and is by definition rather critical. Furthermore it is intertwined with the interpretive tradition we are taking. While this might seem contradictory it is possible to blend these in order to create a synergy and bring a critical voice into the picture (Prasad, 2005).



3.3 Data Gathering

As we were interested in the correlation between CSR practices within a company, their employees view on those, and sustainability in general, we were looking for a company that is both involved in sustainability actions and promotes itself as a sustainable company. We decided to contact Y, a Swedish based coffee roaster who claims to value sustainability highly and scored within the Top 100 on the Sustainability Brand Index. While our exact goal has slightly changed over time, the company has still proven to be a great choice. What was especially interesting to us was the interaction of Y, which seemed to be this very sustainable and responsible company, and Aegis, the scandal-driven umbrella company. Furthermore the salient identification with the brand in the region was a factor that made it an interesting company to work with. Interestingly enough, while so many Swedes assured us that this was their coffee of choice, the minority of those in our direct social environment was aware of them belonging to this big corporation.

The main source of data for this research was obtained during semi-structured interviews with employees, who work at Yotti or rather ‘for the Yotti brand’ within Aegis. While we aimed for ten interviews in the beginning, the company provided us with seven interviews, which makes up about ten percent of all Yotti employees. Five out of these interviews were conducted over the course of two days at the Yotti site in a conference room; during each interview two interviewers and one interviewee were present and the interviews were recorded by two phones at the same time. One interview was conducted and recorded over the phone with two interviewers present, and one interview was conducted and recorded over the phone by one interviewer. All interviews were between 20 and 42 minutes long. Further sources of data are the Aegis and Yotti website as well as the Aegis sustainability report, as there is no separate report available for Yotti.

Interview design and sampling

Our contact person within Yotti selected our interviewees, even though we did send him a flyer to send to all employees we believe he selected the interviewees personally. Therefore this can be categorized as random purposive sampling according to Creswell (2013); while we lost control over the sampling, this method



does improve credibility. We noticed that all seven interviewees worked either in management or in an administrative role and can be categorized as knowledge-workers; all of them were more or less involved in sustainability work within the company. The majority worked in marketing and the rest was more closely involved in the coffee production itself. We interviewed four women and three men, which allows for an even gender distribution. Due to the fact that Yotti is a rather small company we will not give an introduction to each interviewee here; every interviewee received a random name for the sake of this study. The name does not indicate gender, age or position of the person the quote derives from and was chosen from a list of typical Swedish names and got assigned without order; furthermore the names are not listed in the order they were interviewed. For completeness however, we would like to mention the given names shortly: Viktor, Julia, Noah, Johan, Lisa, Stina and Sarah. As this research focuses mainly on personal believes and the connection to corporate believes, we are certain that it is not necessary for the reader to know, which exact position each employee holds. As Aegis officially owns Yotti, everyone is employed as Aegis employee with responsibility within the Yotti brand. While this can provide a bias, especially when it comes to their feelings towards the interaction between Yotti as a brand and Aegis as umbrella company, we do believe this did not turn out to be a problem.

All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, based on a rough guideline of topics and questions prepared by the researchers based on the below mentioned categories. All interviewees were encouraged however to share thoughts and opinions coming to their mind, even if they might not be directly related to our question. All the interviewees got to know before the interview were the facts, that we are interviewing them for a master thesis and that we were interested in CSR.

- Person / Work (Who are you and what do you do here? / What do you like and dislike about your Job?)
- Purpose of Work (What is the goal of Yotti? / What makes you get out of bed and go to work in the morning?)



- Sustainability (How important is sustainability to Yotti? / How important is sustainability to you?)
- Communication / Management (To what extent is the company vision shared? / To what extent is sustainability engagement encouraged?)

Several questions were unchanged for each interviewee, as we believed they provided a good basis for understanding their position. The first of these “*What make you get out of bed in the morning?*” was used both as an icebreaker and an introduction to the topic of purpose. The last of these, “*Why do you work?*” was asked at the very end, as a possibility for them to wrap up the thought process they might have been going through throughout the interview. We wanted to give the interviewees the possibility to answer this question subjectively without knowing the direct purpose of our study. While we do not expect the interviewees to answer our research question we thought this fit both in order to simply find out what they think and to compare this to their former claims. In order not to bias their answers to the main interview this question was always asked last.

3.4 Data Analysis

In the following we describe our data analysis, after having gathered the empirical data as stated above. In order to do so we go through the process step by step based on the research design and philosophical stance we take. As our interviews took place on different days throughout the course of three weeks, we did not wait for all interviews to be done, but transcribed them as soon as possible after they were conducted. Out of the seven interviews, three were transcribed by one, and four by the other researcher individually. After the transcription of all interviews we went on to read through all transcripts in order to get a complete grasp of the data we had acquired. Based on our first impression we went on to sort that data into different categories that came up, whether dominant or not. This was again done individually with a distribution of 3 to 4 interviews and included assigning quotes to these categories. Afterwards the transcripts were exchanged and each researcher went again over the transcripts s/he had not sorted in the first round.



Based on the emerging framework we reduced data to those patterns that were either emerging very regularly or stood out as interesting to us. This reduced data was again sorted into categories and reduced to especially interesting parts. Based on this we tried to build a coherent line of argumentation while staying reflexive throughout the process; this included consistent and conscious re-reading and re-evaluation of our raw and sorted data. By interpreting our data we tried to re-construct our interviewees' reality and find out underlying meanings. These interpretations were then taken into frames of reference in order to "*inspire, develop and reshape theoretical ideas*" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p.273). Afterwards we took a more critical approach to interpretation and reflected again upon those. Based on those outcomes, and according to the abductive approach, we built our empirical findings as presented in chapter 4 (Empirical Chapter), and connected those back to theory as presented in chapter 6 (Discussion).

3.5 Reflexivity

In the following we address what is commonly referred to as reliability and validity in order to measure the level of 'correctness' of research. These measures however apply rather to quantitative methods and cannot be applied one on one to qualitative research. Therefore we chose to use the alternative approach of reflexivity within qualitative research. Reflexivity is used in qualitative research in order to reflect upon biases and is used mainly as an approach towards a 'validity strategy' by introducing the reader to the authors' background and its possible influence on their interpretations (Creswell, 2013). Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) do not completely agree with this, because they argue that the whole point of reflective research is to look at inconsistencies and weaknesses rather than conducting objectively 'valid' research, therefore they suggest a reflexive metatheory framework instead. This framework has been used within our data analysis in order to enhance reflection by giving room to multiple versions of interpretation. This framework includes different levels of reflection throughout the sorting and interpretation of empirical data: "*handling of the empirical material, interpretation, critical interpretation and reflections*" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p.272). By allowing multiple interpretations there is more room given to reflection and connection to theory, too. Hence we wrote down our first interpretations individually of the empirical data,



exchanged our ideas and evaluated those critically, by going from there we were able to take our interpretations further. For example, when the interviewees mentioned that they were not living sustainably in their private lives, we could have just accepted this as is, but it did appear odd to us. So we connected these statements to the whole interview and asked ourselves, why they do not walk their talk and what possible underlying issues there might be. After critically reflecting upon this we got to the knowledge-action gap and connected this theory to the statements and to ‘walk the talk’. In order to fill the reader in on our background we have also included our philosophical assumptions in the beginning of the methodology.

3.6 Limitations

While we did our best in order to conduct a fairly credible research, it does have its limitations. These limitations are further another result of the reflexive approach, as we believe that one should be aware of their limitations. One limitation to this study could be the limited amount of interviews we were able to conduct within the company. In the beginning we aimed for ten interviews but due to the high workload and a limited timeframe the company was only able to provide us with seven interviews, lasting no more than forty minutes each. While we still feel that we have gotten enough out of those interviews to build our analysis on, a few more or longer interviews might have granted even more or deeper insights. Additionally it could have added another layer to our research if we had had the option to interview non-knowledge workers. However, the downside of this simultaneously improved credibility, as we did not do the sampling.

Furthermore we had hoped to be able to get a less formal insight by attending a sustainability meeting. Again, this was not possible and a triangulation of data was therefore not within the scope of the study. While this is not necessarily a source of bias, the ability to triangulate our findings would have given us the opportunity to decrease any bias. Another point to address is the fact that we conducted our research in one company only. Surely there could have been some positive impact from expanding this research towards more than one company. However, we took the decision to rather connect the data within one company to their specific corporate background quite early and stand by it. Rather than being a form of bias, it simply



focuses the intent of our study in a different way; when given the choice between breadth and depth, we decided to go deeper.

Further limitations can derive from bias and background of the researcher(s). For example, both authors are generally very interested in the topic of sustainability and try to strive for a fairly sustainable lifestyle themselves. Generally all interpretations are to some extent influenced by our own background and worldviews. By using reflexivity throughout the analysis we aimed to expand on our initial interpretations and to be aware of the impact of our own social background. Despite these limitations we are certain to have conducted a fairly critical study that was positively influenced by being written by two authors, the use of reflexivity and an overall awareness of the limitations.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has been used to lay out our methodology from philosophical assumptions to limitations. In order to bring finalize this methodology chapter together, we bring the main points together in a compressed summary. The research is rooted in interpretivism within the post-positivist tradition. Within the paradigm of social constructivism we conducted a qualitative research with an abductive approach, which has further allowed us to stay reflexive and go into depth within our data gathering process. In our analysis we applied critical theory and stayed reflexive throughout the process, which we assured by applying the reflexive meta-theory framework as suggested by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009). Since we believe that reality is merely a construct that can only be interpreted in order to get to the underlying structures, this has been crucial in order to conduct a trustworthy study. The case company has provided us with seven interviews of 20 to 40 minutes, which have been transcribed, sorted, interpreted and argued for based on our philosophical stance and methodological approach. Within that process we applied Critical theory by constantly re-reading and re-interpreting data. While there are limitations connected to the amount of data and our personal background and biases, we have conducted this research to the best of our abilities in order to conduct a coherent study.



4. Empirical Findings

In this chapter we present our empirical findings based on the conducted interviews and our data analysis and underline those with quotes from the interviewees. This chapter serves to narrate the reader through our findings and interpretations of what we got out of the interviews. First we present the company in a short case presentation, both as company on its own and in relation to the umbrella company Aegis. This should give the reader a feeling for the company and the context in which the employees experience their work. Afterwards our empirical findings are laid out in three main sections: *“A Process of Discovery: Finding the Higher Purpose”*, *“Yotti’s Purpose of Business”*, and *“Sustainability as a Purpose and a Lifestyle”*. These sections reflect both our main areas of interest as well as the main subjects that have been discussed within the interviews. Obviously these sections and interview-quotes show a fraction of all the data we gathered and illustrate the most interesting parts and the road to our interpretations. Each section is structured with smaller sub-headings in order to give a better overview of the individual themes that came up within the main topic we addressed in the interviews. Often these are specific themes that were not addressed by us directly but came up naturally within the process of our semi-structured interviews. These include the differentiation between reason and purpose, sustainability within Y and the coffee industry as a whole, and sustainability as a corporate issue versus in the private life of the interviewees. Finally we summarize our findings before we move on to the discussion, where we will link our findings back to theory.

4.1 Case presentation

Yotti is a long-established coffee roastery that was founded in in the late 19th century in a middle-sized town in southern Sweden, by a Brazilian merchant whose last name gave the company its name. While the founder died shortly after, his wife kept the company going. Her second husband even took on her name, which was highly unusual in that time. Due to this the company could go on under its current name and thrive as a family business. A few years later two of their most well-known coffee blends were created and still exist in the portfolio. Yotti is furthermore still located in



its original town and even kept the location, which the factory moved to in the 1950s. One century after the company was founded the majority of shares were sold to Aegis Sweden, who is now operating as umbrella company for Yotti. Out of convenience the company name is often shortened to “Y” in written texts, which we will do too, throughout this document. Nowadays Y has around 60 employees, who are all employed at Aegis, is still located in the same town and has grown into a company one cannot get around without knowing in Sweden. Especially within the region of Skane the people feel very connected to the brand and are proud of their regional coffee. As a true Skane-citizen it is expected to buy Y-coffee only for your home, other brands do not come close in quality and identification. In 2015 and 2016 Y even won the a Swedish Brand Award, which evaluates a brand’s strength based on customer satisfaction. Furthermore the company takes big pride in constantly developing their coffee and their sustainable sourcing.

Sustainability within Yotti

As mentioned above, sustainable coffee sourcing is something the brand prides itself on. Looking at their website there is more information on their sustainability work than on the company and its history itself. While there is no CSR-report for Y itself, the website brings the message across. Just looking at the main-page, ‘Coffee by Women’ is the second header out of four to choose. This is their very own sustainability project, which is an initiative that was born within the Yotti factory and focuses on educating and supporting women to become coffee farmers. Furthermore a big step for the brand at the moment is to certify their coffee with the rainforest-alliance certificate and the first certified packages are just now coming into the stores. At the moment this means that at least 30% of the coffee is sustainably sourced but their goal is to certify 100% by 2019. On a more local level Yotti wants to reduce their CO2 emissions up to a point of no environmental impact until 2030; by building a ‘green’ factory they have already reduced their emissions by 90% as of January 2017. This factory runs on hydroelectric power and fully biodegradable biogas. Furthermore Y donates trees and seedlings to coffee farmers without binding them to sell the grown coffee to them. All these efforts have been awarded with the 55th place on the Sustainability Brand Index within Sweden, which was also the highest rank amongst all rated coffee roasters in Sweden; in 2016 they were placed 61st and ranked



lower than two of their competitors.

Additionally Yotti is included in Aegis's concept of 'Creating Shared Value' (CSV), which is their version of what is commonly called 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR). In their CSV report of 2016 they state as an overall goal to "*continuously improve our green coffee supply chain*" and thereby to improve rural development and the UN Sustainability Goal 'Quality Education'. Furthermore they have teamed up with other initiatives like Solidaridad in order to educate coffee farmers and therefore improve coffee production in the long run. On the Aegis website Y is additionally listed as one of their 'case studies' amongst their CSV projects. This describes Y's collaboration with Sustainable Management Services (SMS) and their effort to train and educate farmers mainly in Kenya, which is the main place of origins for Y's coffee. This collaboration has also resulted in the current certification with Rainforest Alliance. Unfortunately this part of their website is a little out-dated and still shows their goal to achieve 100% sustainably sourced coffee by 2015 but not whether they reached it or not and which new goals they have set for themselves. An indicator that the target was not met is the fact that not all of their coffee has been certified by the Rainforest Alliance.

Aegis as Umbrella Company

Aegis is a big corporation within fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) that includes over 2000 brands, many of which are well-known. They present themselves as a company with a leading role in nutrition and health. The company exists since 1866 and is known under its current name since 1905, has its global headquarter in Switzerland and its Swedish headquarter in Helsingborg, right next to the Y factory. Aegis promotes itself as a company that cares about nutrition, quality and taste and wants to improve health and nutrition throughout all stages of life. They definitely present themselves as a corporation are engaged in various sustainability actions, e.g. by supporting the UN sustainable development goals.

Despite all efforts Aegis seems to take in presenting itself as a responsible company it has received a lot of critique over the years. While it is safe to say that all FMCG corporations have had their fair share of scandals and have been accused of child



labour, usage of palm-oil, pollution and similar common critique points, Aegis does seem to attract scandals more than its competitors. A scandal that is still in the minds of people is its ‘Baby formula controversy’ from the 1970’s in rural African countries. According to critics Aegis has caused children to die due to them selling formula to women who were not informed or able to sanitize their water before mixing it with the formula. Furthermore they seemingly ignored to inform women that they would not produce any more / enough breast milk after having used formula, which made them dependent on purchasing the formula. The company itself however does not accept any kind of responsibility. A more recent scandal targets Aegis’s view on the debate whether water is a human right or not. As the biggest producer and supplier of bottled water the company obviously want to sell their product and has taken a stance for themselves in interviews. While this shows Aegis’s internal loyalty this surely does not sit right with people looking to attack them. According to activists the company further sources water without a valid permit in California. This critique in particular has led to many people worldwide to ‘boycott’ the company, or at least their bottled water.

4.2 A Process Of Discovery: Finding The Higher Purpose

In a corporation where sustainability seems to be a core value, we were very interested in how this would reflect in the individuals working there. What would their individual purpose be and can it be linked to the corporate purpose? The interviews themselves were kept very casual, with each drinking their own cup of coffee. This, combined with a more conversational way of interviewing, created the appearance of a chat in a coffeehouse, more than an official interview. The interviewees seemed to feel at ease and comfortable to talk about anything. We did not ask specifically for their purpose, as we do not expected out interviewees to answer our research question. Instead, a lot of questions were geared towards the subject, which gave the interviewees ample opportunities throughout the interview to reflect on their own purpose. We were interested not only in their answer, but the road that would lead to these answers. Obviously, it was not something that people think about on a daily basis. In a way, this surprised us, should people not ask themselves more regularly why they work? For an activity that consumes the largest part of your waking life, one can imagine the reasons for doing so should be clear. Yet, it turned



out to be a discovery process; the interviewees each had to consider and develop their reasons throughout the interview.

Meeting Basic Needs

Among most interviewees a pattern appeared, where they started with a more light-hearted approach, but got more serious and philosophical as the interview progressed. The question what gets people out of bed in the morning was met with a variety of responses, mostly light-hearted and funny:

“Right now I think it's the sun. finally, because right now I wake up around six. Which I never do, so. Otherwise I think it's my phone. my phone is ringing.” (Viktor)

“I think it is mostly [...] the product, because I love coffee and it is a product that almost everyone loves.” (Noah)

Yet this type of response quickly gave way to somewhat common reasons: hygienic factors necessary to enjoy work, or at least not dislike it. These constitute common reasons for work, which can be expected to be found among most people in a multitude of companies. After the jokes, their first consideration turned to survival. Why does one work? To sustain oneself. In Y, these hygienic factors seemed to be quite constant for all employees and can be summarized in two main points: money and companionship. Money, the basis of the capitalistic system and in the eyes of many, that which makes the world go around. So it came as no surprise that being able to sustain themselves was seen as an important reason to work. Only after this was considered and deemed acceptable, did they turn to any deeper meaning. It might seem logical that one would first make sure his basic needs are met, yet at the same time the interviewees themselves seemed to view this as the wrong answer, trying to cover it up or explain their first reaction.

“Of course the main reason is to pay my bills, ... but the older I get, it's more important to work in a company with good leadership ... and I think that sustainability has been a big question for me and it's important to create value



for me as well.” (Noah)

“I think that a lot of people will say oh I'm getting paid and so on. And well yeah that is definitely a reason, but I don't think that is my main reason. I think, I love, I love making a difference.” (Viktor)

It is interesting that money is not seen as the main reason to work, even though it is accepted, and expected, in our society to engage in this form of social contract. One rents out part of his/her time to perform labor, in turn one can reap the benefits that come from production, the welfare-state and so on. Yet maybe it is no longer enough, at least not to them, because even when no other reason was given, they still felt inclined to justify their answer:

“[About why she got up in the morning] my salary and that I have to work. No but, I mean, yeah. It's pure survival more or less, right? In the end.” (Julia)

To us it felt like all interviewees agreed that money was a necessary and welcome part of the job, however it did not seem to be the main point of their work. The same can be said about companionship. While they did not feel the need to justify themselves, companionship still did not seem to be more than another reason to work. Rather, it was mentioned as a very welcome addition to their work. Having nice colleagues and enjoying the working environment can be expected as something that makes work enjoyable. At Y they all did agree that having a great team helped them enjoy work a lot:

“I spend more time at work here than at home. So basically my two-thirds of the day I spend on the work, yeah in the workplace. So it is quite important that if you like, that it is a good place to be in.” (Julia)

“I have great colleagues, I love my team.” (Johan)

As mentioned, this did not seem to be the inherent purpose to their work and in turn, was not what we were looking for. Why did they choose this company specifically and was there an inherent, or deeper, purpose? By taking the approach of gradually



approaching the real answer, instead of forcing them to answer immediately, we were able to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Beyond Needs: A Purpose

Once the more inconsequential answers were out of the way, there was room for more in depth interpretations to come to the foreground. In a sense, we lead them through a path they shaped themselves, in order to share the end goal. Most of the interviewees were able to articulate another deeper reason for why they work. These seemed to be more of a higher purpose, rather than basic needs. In short, they can be divided in three categories: personal challenges, having an impact and doing sustainable work; the last two seemed to be very related. To be challenged and the be able to grow personally was deemed as very important to people; not to be stuck in one place, both personally and in their work, was a strong motivator. At Y, there seemed to be both the desire and the opportunity to be challenged:

“I mean to personally evolve my knowledge about the stuff that I do and also I aspire for future career moves and so on. I don't like to stay in one spot, but to just try to develop as well. Both, personally and professionally, as well. That is basically what I do, or why I do it as well.” (Julia)

“But I think that the main reason that I go up in the morning and come here with a smile is, because I get to get challenged every day, I get much responsibility and my own projects.” (Noah)

“I'm personally looking for a challenge and also an environment I can impact. Positively.” (Stina)

As Stina already mentioned, preferably they would like to be challenged in ways that help them have a positive impact. Specifically, to have an impact on the future of coffee in a sustainable way was deemed as very important. This gave a personal twist to the more general purpose of doing good. It seemed that our interviewees were aware of the relative high environmental impact of the coffee-industry. However, rather than feeling down about this, they seemed more hopeful and motivated. In their eyes it is very possible to change the coffee industry for the better, a process they



believe to be working on already. Here we can see a higher purpose, to help the coffee industry be sustainable and, in doing so, make it possible for coffee to be there in the future:

*“I need to have something that I believe in and [...] have a purpose. With every day, what I'm doing. That's why I'm working. [...] I want to contribute to Y and the coffee of the future. So I have a purpose with working. I do.”
(Johan)*

“I would like to make a stand for the future. I would like to make a mark, make change. [...] I would like to have my kids be proud of me.”(Sarah)

Having an impact seems to be inherently intertwined with doing sustainably work for the employees of Y, as their way of making coffee is based on doing it as sustainable as possible. This both personalizes their purpose, while at the same time making it shared amongst each other; in a way, they have created an individual purpose amongst each other. So they are individually motivated with a shared sense of purpose. In their mind the future of coffee depends on helping the coffee farmers in other countries, because without them, no one will be able to enjoy coffee:

“With the coffee by women for example, I can see that it really makes a difference in other countries and for other people and I think that is the main reason for me working.”(Viktor)

In the company itself, sustainability is mentioned constantly, both in regards to current and future practices; it was interesting to see to what level this was reflected in the employees. Beforehand, we were interested to find out whether purpose would come before work or work would create purpose. While we cannot answer this question exactly, it did seem that they have considered sustainability more since working there. It can be expected that a sustainable company both attract people who care about sustainability, while at the same time increasing commitment to sustainability as well. Rather than one leading to the other, they probably influence each other. For many, it has become a purpose on its own:



“I have been thinking more about sustainability. [...] The environment is of course very important for the planet and I know that if we all do something, we can do much.” (Noah)

“I think that sustainability has been a big question for me and it's important for me. to create value for me as well.” (Noah)

“It's for the globe and for our children, I mean I would like them to have a good life as well. and so that is important to us, to do as much as we can. Both in Sweden, but I mean, even more in the different countries.” (Sarah)

Putting all these responses together the main purpose of work for our interviewees seemingly is to grow professionally, to have a positive impact and to be and become sustainable. The constant talks and considerations about sustainability seemed to create value for the employees. Some of the statements made seem to follow the more official description of Y's sustainability work, but their commitment does seem genuine. In this sense we believe they use the official description to articulate their own beliefs, rather than simply using them to give a believable statement. The aim to grow the company into a sustainable future seems to have given them a higher purpose. The employees seemed to honestly believe in these values, they spoke with conviction and did not change their views throughout. They do not just love coffee, they specifically aim to make coffee a product to be proud of.

Money Talks but Purpose Trumps

We were curious if they would back this opinion up when offered the choice between keeping things as they are now, or switching to a higher paying job with less focus on sustainability. Surprisingly, all of them chose to stay sustainable. Even if everything besides sustainability stayed the same, no one chose more money. We expected some to react like this, yet the unanimous agreement was a surprise. Some answers were very straightforward:

“I think it's more important to have a work that you believe in and that you want to go to everyday.” (Johan)



“No, this is important enough to stay.” (Andreas)

Others were more strongly worded in the same vein; sustainability is an integral part of their work, it defines them and their company. This question seemed to strengthen their opinion on sustainability, making them even more convinced of the importance of it:

“As I said, I'm a sustainable person. I think it's the right way to say that I love sustainability and I don't think that I would work for a brand that does not work with sustainability. Definitely not.” (Viktor)

“I wouldn't feel great about it if I knew that we are buying coffee from farms that are grown in a bad way. People don't get paid and stuff like that. So yeah, it wouldn't be really attractive to work for the brand. So if Y would decide to just let go of everything I would maybe consider to switch company.” (Julia)

This seems to be in line with their higher purpose; if the opportunity to both have an impact and be sustainability goes away, the void that is left might be enough to leave the company altogether. Not all interviewees were this strong in their conviction. The increase in pay did seem attractive to some. However, even those who were more doubtful still never chose purely the money:

“I mean that would be attractive for a while, yeah, for sure. But not in a long time, no.” (Lisa)

“Money talks. But it depends. If there is a company that for example, they have 30% sustainability 70% business, might be so if I get double the wage.” (Julia)

The final answer to what the individual purpose of the interviewees seems, as everything in life, to be layered, complex and ambiguous. However we did identify certain themes and similarities. A good working environment and decent pay is necessary, yet people want more. The need to grow, and have a positive and sustainable impact seems to be the actual purpose of the employees of Y. More



money could not convince them to leave these ideals behind. The question is whether these beliefs also translate into action, yet they did seem truthful in their responses. Reflecting on the struggle most had with articulating an immediate answer, we believe that this does not mean that the answer was not there before. It felt more like it was simply effortful to bring their inherent purpose to the surface; it had always been there, yet deeply held beliefs are not always easy to explain. In this sense, they did not simply create a purpose to fit the interview, to fit to social expectation of having a reason. Rather, we helped them along to articulate what they already knew. And in the end, one can only hope to do good in their job and in doing so be happy:

“[when discussing why she works] To be happy, I think. I wouldn’t be happy without working. I mean, it brings happiness. To life.” (Lisa)

4.3 Yotti’s Purpose Of Business

After focusing on the interviewees’ individual purpose at work, we will now go deeper into the corporate purpose or how the interviewees perceive this. While the main part of the interview was focused on personal views, goals and opinions, we did dedicate some of the interview time to talk about the company. Y does not state an official goal or vision on their website, so we asked the employees what (in their view) the goal of Y is. Funnily enough about half of them got the question wrong and were quite confused about us asking about the ‘gold’ of Y. While we never found out if there was any hidden gold in the factory, after setting that straight, there was a consensus over the direction Y is going in.

For all our interviewees the answer seems clear - Y wants to be the biggest brand in Sweden when it comes to roast and ground coffee. Becoming the number one is the biggest goal the company has and is envisioning; some of our interviewees even knew the market share of Y and of their main competitors. This is a common vision for companies to have and an answer that can be expected. However in the corporate case this is more than a hygienic factor, this is what a company actually works towards, strives for. It is quite interesting though, that while this answer seemed obvious (some even laughed giving the answer), there is no official statement of the company on this goal:



*“To become the biggest brand in Sweden within coffee, of course *laughs*
The biggest roast and ground brand. That's our vision and our mission
laughs” (Johan)*

*“Y, uh, of course wants to become the number one brand in the local Swedish
coffee industry, when it comes to at least market share and value.” (Stina)*

*“[...] our main objective is to be the number one in the Swedish market.”
(Lisa)*

Compared to the reaction we got when asking about personal goals, there did not seem to be any need to justify the fact that the corporate goal is focused on profit or market share. On the contrary, this seemed to be a very acceptable and common goal to them. Some did formulate it in a more visionary and less profit-focused way, their answer still reflected the same thing:

“The goal of Y is that every swede will drink it.” (Julia)

100% Sustainable Coffee

Yet again, becoming ‘the biggest’ is a goal both sustainable and unsustainable companies pursue. The question is much rather how a company intends to reach that goal and why it believes to deserve being the biggest. What is it that this company in particular brings to the market other companies do not offer to the consumers? This brings us to the next point. Right after and without much elaboration on the goal of becoming the biggest, most of the employees mentioned sustainability, without us having to follow-up. The argument could be made that sustainability was very much on their mind as a result of their former journey towards a higher purpose and therefore biased them. However, it did seem genuine that sustainability was a huge topic within the company, especially as the topic was met with much enthusiasm. Our interviewees were really warmed up to the topic and elaborated widely on it. Especially Viktor was very passionate about the sustainability actions of Y:

“The goal is to be number one coffee brand in Sweden definitely. But also one



goal is to have 100% sustainable coffee [...] Yeah, so that's definitely a big goal and that's all we're working for every day.” (Viktor)

Viktor’s passionate way of talking about this made it clear that, while mentioned secondly, sustainability is not a secondary topic for him. On the contrary, he really seemed to care about it and clearly spends a lot of thought on sustainability at Y. He carried on talking about the place sustainability has in Y’s future plans, which he and all our interviewees were very informed about. It became very clear in all interviews that sustainability really is an everyday topic, even for those who are not directly working with it in their daily work. Everyone was well-informed about the sustainability actions Y is taking and why.

“Actually right now we are the biggest brand, for roast and ground. So right now we can put that on the side and focus 100% towards our sustainability goals. [...] I think that the sustainability parts will build our number one brand for the future. Actually. So I think that's a big part of being the number one brand.” (Viktor)

In this way there seemed to be a connection between the two goals and so sustainability became part of the main goal. By being sustainable the company would be able to reach their overall goal and stand out from the market. Sustainability will not only be something the employees care about but the deciding factor in building up the success of the brand. Their extended sustainability actions will be the factor that should bring the brand forward and make Y stand out from their competitors. Viktor’s explication on the matter almost feels like he tries to justify his passion for sustainability here, even though it is not the main corporate goal in his eyes. This is interesting in two ways; for one this is exactly the other way around compared to the individual purpose, where the monetary goal seemed to need justification. Secondly Y actually states officially that their vision is to reach “100% responsibly grown coffee beans”. Employees do not seem to be aware of that though, as their unanimous response to our question showed.

In other interviews it further becomes clear that sustainability is not only seen as a goal, whether secondary or not, and something important in itself, but also as a way to



make the brand somewhat better. The employees believe that sustainability is not just a stamp that is being put on their coffee but something that makes their product premium compared to other brands. This is where Y is acting more responsibly, where the brand wants to be better than others. Producing good and premium coffee seems to be an important part of their work that is at the same time intertwined with the sustainability work they are doing. Again, sustainable coffee equals good coffee for our interviewees:

“I think their company goal is to be a premium brand, with not only to be a premium brand with good coffee but to be premium brand with sustainable coffee. [...] but I think their main goal is to create coffee with great taste and and with coffee farms to grow coffee to the future, I think.” (Noah)

“I think the ultimate goal is to just keep doing the coffee that we are doing today [without] compromise on quality or where we source beans. That is also why we work a lot with for example coffee by women, which is Y’s sustainability project [...]” (Julia)

In this way sustainability becomes vital to the brand, makes it part of the product’s identity. By making it a necessity to keep the coffee industry sustainable for the future, it naturally sounds even more important. Lisa takes sustainability as part of the brand identity even further by saying:

“The challenge I think is [...] to keep the quality of the coffee but still be, still be sustainable. [...] our main objective is to be sustainable in our heart more or less.” (Lisa)

Think Globally, Act Locally

Generally all interviewees were quite informed and opinionated about the coffee industry as a whole, showing that they have put thought into it. Both the quest to make Y’s coffee more sustainable and the sustainability of the coffee industry as a whole seem to be discussed quite a lot. There is a consensus that sustainable coffee is a goal that can be realized but will take a lot of work at the same time.



“I do think you can get one hundred percent sustainable coffee farming all over the world. Well I hope so at least. but it is up to us and it is up to other big brands and coffee farms to work for it.” (Viktor)

“[...] you need to ensure that initially the, the basic training of all the local farmers and the sourcing origins we have, [...] knows how to farm coffee in the best and most efficient way because that will improve the yield and therefore income, making it an interesting industry to work in. Also, by making sure that you have high enough of an income that creates the foundation to ensure that health care and schooling is taken care of as well. So that creates the incentive locally for this to continue with uh urbanization that you see everywhere you gonna have issues finding people that want to work extremely manually with potentially a low income uh, in farm field, so you have to create a win-win situation there. (Stina)

The fact that they have such an insight knowledge into the bigger picture of coffee shows yet again how important this is not only to the company as a whole but to the individuals, too. This is where they can fulfill their higher purpose and make it the company's higher purpose, too. Again, the financial goal seems to be the 'hygienic' factor, the goal that is expected to be set as a company vision. This time however, it is not only acceptable to strive for this goal, people also work towards this. Having a higher purpose is therefore not only something they strive for personally but also something they convey in a corporate sense.

Keeping it Local

A third topic that seems to be important to the employees is the local heritage of Y. While this is not something they seemed to be as aware of as of the former two goals, it comes up during various interviews. Lisa is the only one who identifies it as a specific goal for the brand:

“[...] so that's a goal I think to be, to to keep the knowledge in Helsingborg and to keep it here and to to uh educate around our brand or the heritage I think.” (Lisa)



“Yeah, they [the swedes] are [very connected to the Y brand]. And it's a very, I think it's a very strong advantage for the consumer that it's still produced in Sweden and it's produced in Helsingborg and it's very, I mean it's a very important brand for, for Helsingborg.” (Lisa)

Stina also feels very strongly about this and even though she does not identify it specifically as a goal, she does believe it to be a part of Y's identity, saying:

“Well there is a very strong brand identity locally in the factory, uh, since it is uh very old local brand, which uh people [...] has grown up with. Uh so that is a strong uh Y identity.” (Stina)

“Also when we build these initiatives we're of course making sure that the joint knowledge within the Y business here locally in Helsingborg is gathered before we draft everything.” (Stina)

This is very interesting as most employees we interviewed also chose to work for Y because they were from Helsingborg and had a personal connection to the brand.

“Because I'm born here in Helsingborg and uh been passing by during my uh earliest ages here uh. So I really believe in the brand uh because I always drank Y coffee.” (Johan)

“Well there is a very strong brand identity locally in the factory, uh, since it is uh very old local brand, which uh people [...] has grown up with.” (Stina)

“I applied [...] here in Y. because I lived in Helsingborg and I wanted to be in a big company. And also I loved coffee, so it was my first and only one option actually.” (Viktor)

When being asked about the relationship between Aegis as an international umbrella company and the local identity of Y, Johan reassures us that this is not only important to the employees but something Aegis fully supports. Generally the interviewees did not lose a negative word about Aegis throughout the interviews. Whether asked



directly or indirectly each and every one of them seemed to be very content with the fact that this scandal-driven corporation was in charge of their brand. On the contrary, we got the overall feedback that Aegis makes many things possible for Yotti and drives the company forward both in a financial and sustainable way. Much rather were people happy to be employed by a corporation and the only criticism voiced was over bureaucratic procedures.

“They [Aegis] want to keep the brands local and uh before it was the Yotti family who owned the Y brand. [Telma] decided in the 80's to sell Y to Aegis. [...] And uh she made that decision due to that Aegis's trying to keep the local feeling.” (Johan)

In general it seemed like all employees had a very clear and coherent picture of where Y as a brand is going and which goals the brand is trying to achieve. Furthermore there seemed to be a consensus with these goals. Looking back at the individual purpose this is quite interesting, as in their individual work purpose seemed to be more important than money, while the corporate goals puts financial success first. However, the interviewees got much more passionate about the sustainability and local identity, even though they identified ‘becoming the biggest’ as the foremost vision. Still, the cause seems to overshadow this foremost priority and so sustainability becomes vital to the brands’ success and identity.

Furthermore, looking back at the individual purpose the perception of what is acceptable and what is not therefore seems reversed. Individually they were aware of their basic expectations towards money but saw the need to defend this. On a corporate level the main corporate goal was focused on profit, but deemed ‘normal’ in the business world. From this point of view it was perfectly acceptable. This is interesting because Y does present itself as a rather sustainable company and one could expect that people working there care for the cause, as they do. Furthermore it is interesting to see how the higher purpose of the individuals does line up with the corporate higher purpose in the end. Both pursue the goals of acting sustainably not only for themselves or for the company, but in order to make the coffee industry as a whole more sustainable. By pursuing this in their work the individuals can have the



much-wanted impact on the world.

“I really do [believe the coffee industry can be sustainable]. If everyone is working together, to make it more sustainable. Because it's not just Aegis' uh interest [...], it's all the other coffee brands as well and the consumer at the end.” (Johan)

4.4 Sustainability as a Purpose and a Lifestyle

As sustainability was such a strong topic within their individual work and for the company as a whole, we expanded our line of questioning into their personal beliefs. We were interested to see how our interviewees handle the question of sustainability in their personal life, since they had such strong and informed opinions on the coffee industry as a whole. It was quite interesting to see that while sustainability seemed to give them a purpose in their work, it was not necessarily a big part in their everyday life. More specifically, they did value it yet failed to act sustainably in a consistent fashion. As an employee it was important for all of them that consumers should know of their efforts and not look for labels; as private individuals however we did find most of them to not take their own advice.

Working Sustainably

As mentioned before, Y's sustainability actions are something the employees are rather proud of. This is quite interesting since Y does not strike one as the sustainable brand on the shelf amongst its competitors. It is not the main subject connected to the brand, as it is much rather famous for its local heritage. Even apart from the fact that Aegis is the umbrella company Y does not market itself well in this regard. The only thing that can be found on some of their packages is their 'coffee for women' campaign, which conveys gender equality more than sustainability itself. Especially within the much-critiqued coffee industry it is hard to stand out with one's sustainability efforts and Y surely was not the first one to get active. However, for Lisa it was especially important that consumers know about the many sustainability actions Y takes. She would like to see consumers recognizing that the company is not only sustainable 'on paper' but has been sustainable long before their efforts to certify their coffee with the rainforest alliance label. The fact that people need that



certification to ‘trust’ the brand seems to genuinely upset her:

“[...] we shouldn't really need the stamp for [ourselves]. Because we know that we're doing loads of initiatives out there”

“But the consumer [does not know]. [...] I mean they don't trust us, because we're, we're too big. I would like to see that the consumers say ‘Okay they're big, they have muscles, they can really change the world’.” (Lisa)

Noah has similar opinions about the topic. He works daily on sustainability projects and is constantly involved into the question on how to bring the message across to the consumers. For him it is less about the stamp and more about actually educating people beyond what a stamp can do. He would like consumers to do their research and ideally show them the whole process a coffee bean goes through.

“But it's hard. Because we are talking about it all the time when we are creating content, how can we educate the customer to only buy sustainable coffee and learn, show them the way from the coffee bean to the cup.” (Noah)

Johan brings these views together in an informed way; he is aware of the consumers’ needs and accepts them as such, but is frustrated by the little information that certification carries. Like Lisa he expresses the demand towards consumers to look behind labels and to reward actions rather than marketing strategies by trusting the brand and therefore choosing their product over others.

“[...] we're trying to keep track on the trends and also do good for the environment because that's what's Aegis been doing for years, but now the demand for [...] certification on the pack [is] huge under consumers [...]. But we can't really communicate it with a label on pack.” (Johan)

Viktor even has an emotional stance towards this, agreeing with the point Johan made. His personal engagement into the matter shows how much he actually cares about it:



“Because we are doing a lot of work and we are putting in a lot of money in our projects but we can't communicate it as much as a certification can. And that is actually very sad.” (Viktor)

In a way it seemed almost like some took the consumers' demand for a certification or label on their packages as an insult. While a label usually indicates something good, such as responsible sourcing, it did not seem to sit right with them that the label would only show a portion of their efforts and could not carry the whole story. The employees really wanted to show the consumers the personal investment and passion for sustainability they have.

“[...] also that is important for us to tell the customers, that when we go to trade and negotiate prices we also say that okay guys coffee is quite expensive now, because it hasn't rained in quite a long time” (Julia)

Again, Y does not convey the image of an extensively sustainable brand overall and the rainforest alliance certificate does not convey the image of being the 'best' of the available labels. The latter is attributed to the fact that this label in particular does not guarantee a minimum income and can be obtained with only 30% certified beans. As Y is so proud of their sustainability actions and want to convey those so much, it could be expected of them to strive for a 'stamp' that stands for 'more', even if they themselves do not agree with the demand for certification.

Living Sustainably - Or Not?

However, while they did demand these actions from their customers, they did not live up to their own expectations either. When we asked them about sustainability choices in their own life, almost all of them had to admit to not look 'behind' stamps and labels either. While we would have expected our interviewees to look what other companies do behind their labels, Lisa was the only one to hold up her own arguments when asked about her choices as consumer:

“I'm not seeking for a stamp. I'm seeking for, I mean, uh we had a discussion how if we should buy organic bananas or uh not and I said, well I'm not really



fan of bananas at all, so let's [not buy them] if they're bad.” (Lisa)

Others recognized that they cannot absolve themselves completely of looking for stamps though and had to admit that they do not follow their own advice:

“I'm trying to buy other products as well that's responsibly or sustainably sourced as well. If it's organic or ... yeah.” (Johan)

“So yeah, then I buy, actually I don't like saying that I look at the certifications on products. [...]. I mean I don't go to for example Finder's webpage to search for the sustainability work behind their product. I mean, if I see that they have fair trade then I buy it.” (Viktor)

This was quite interesting to us out of various reasons. First of all, as mentioned above, this contradicts what they expect from customers. Except for Lisa they do not walk their talk. For the rest it seems like the ideals they value at work are not necessarily ideals outside of work. This is not what one might expect from a person who is that informed about sustainability and works so much with it; even talks about it very passionately when linked to what they do professionally. They even claim that sustainability is their higher purpose and make it the company's higher purpose - so why is this not a thing in their personal life? Especially when someone, as Noah, is aware of this fact, it seems almost ironic that this person would not act on it.

“Yeah, I do [value sustainability personally]. But I'm not a good example. I want to be a good example, but I'm not going to lie.” (Noah)

On the contrary, some felt like a justification was needed:

“Well, I bike a lot and I walk a lot. Unfortunately I have problems with knees, so I can't bike everywhere. So I do have a car, but the car is just standing in my parking slot outside my apartment. I don't need it actually. (Viktor)

There seems to be a gap between knowledge and action most of our interviewees



cannot cross. They know that labels do not tell the whole story, that they could live and be more sustainable and yet do not do it. This leads to the question whether their strive for education would actually lead to a change in consumer behavior. If they fail to act in the same situations where they criticize their customers, education and availability of information might not turn out to be the solution. Rather, labels should either convey more information or we need another method to influence sustainable consumerism. Yet again, if they do not care for further education about other products, why should their consumers?

4.5 Chapter Summary

From the interviews we can conclude several things. Therefore we give a condensed version of our main findings and interpretations. Furthermore we go into questions that emerged from these findings, which we will take into the next chapter for discussion. The employees of Y seem to have multiple and varied reasons to work, resulting in a strong motivation to come to their work every morning. For them individually there are a few factors that need to be covered, such as a decent pay and nice colleagues. As soon as these are covered though, they looked for challenges in their work and a higher purpose, something that would make their kids proud of them. Within Y there seemed to be a consensus that by working sustainable and thus having a positive impact can fulfill that higher purpose. In relation to the corporation our interviewees had similar unanimous views. First of all Y strives in their opinion towards being the biggest brand within their branch, and secondly wants to be as sustainable as possible. An additional factor that came up more often than not was the goal to keep the brand local, even though it is dealing with a global product. The one thing that was a constant recurring theme though, was the focus on sustainability. Both personally and company-wide it was named time and time again as a priority. It seems to fulfill a higher purpose individually and collaboratively alike. The employees at Y really seem to work together towards that same goal, seem to be united in their purpose to make the world a better place and in their belief that the coffee industry can be and become more sustainable. In their personal life however this was not such a striking priority. On the contrary, privately this topic became surprisingly unimportant and they really do not walk their talk.



This chapter has shown the most interesting and salient findings of our research. While it has brought some answers we were looking for when we started this research it has also brought up some questions. Why is the desire for money acceptable for corporations but frowned upon in individuals? Why would someone with such high standards towards sustainability in their work not pursue the same goals in their free time? How does their desire to educate match their failure to act themselves? These are all questions we will take into the discussion.



5. Discussion

In the following chapter we put our empirical findings into context. In order to do so we summarize our findings and contrast them back to the concepts introduced in the literature review. We try and take the discussion a little further and argue for implications we see in this study, therefore we go back into the concepts of individual, higher and corporate purpose as introduced earlier combined with our findings. Based on these concepts we argue for a mismatch between individual and corporate purpose, combined with mixed societal expectations, and introduce our concept of a *confined purpose*. This concept explains how the employees strive to still pursue their purpose within the confinements of this mismatch. Furthermore we link our findings focused on sustainability in corporate and private life back to the knowledge-action gap. This phenomenon does not only explain the inability to ‘walk the talk’ but, so we argue, might even give an alternative explanation for greenwashing. In the end we summarize our point before moving on to the conclusion, in which we connect our arguments made in this chapter back to our research question and take our argument further by identifying possible implications for future research.

5.1 Higher Purpose Or Lower Needs?

From the empirical data we have gotten a lot of information concerning the individual purpose of the employees of Y. The journey of the employees throughout the interview was filled with realizations about why they work. However, a reason to work is different from a higher purpose to work. While they may not have realized this themselves, the interviewees addressed everything from need, to reason, to purpose. It is up to us to differentiate between these, to bring order, to establish what their perceived higher purpose is. First we can discount several of the reasons to work that were given. Hygienic factors, as introduced by Herzberg (1966), like wage is definitely a reason people and the employees of Y work, yet they do not constitute higher purpose. In line with theory, we expected to find these as main points of dissatisfaction avoidance; necessary parts of a satisfactory work environment. Even enjoying the company of your colleagues and being challenged does not constitute a



purpose of work. While it is a rather intrinsic factor, it still falls into the ‘KITA’ factors according to the two-factor theory (Herzberg, 1966), and is not aimed at achieving some greater good. This does not mean that these reasons are not important to the employees, and the employees at Y valued these factors highly; these requirements have to be met for them to not dislike work. Yet higher purpose goes beyond a reason, it much rather is the aim to achieve a greater good (Damon, Menon & Cotton Bronk, 2003). To simply be challenged is not a higher purpose; no greater good is achieved in the process.

With this information in mind, looking at our interviewees, we see two things that might be considered their higher purpose; having an impact, and acting or working in a sustainable way. If the goal of the employees would have to be defined in one sentences, we could say that they strive to have a positive impact within Y and on the coffee industry as a whole; to make it more sustainable starting today. In this goal they actively strive to achieve a greater good. Their passionate way of talking about these actions and their goals to work towards this in Y really shows their investment into this; it indeed seems to make them ‘happier’, constitute to their well-being. Arguments can be made about whether or not this is even possible, since the whole supply chain from bean to cup is very labour intensive and carries a huge carbon footprint. Maybe their whole commitment to change the coffee industry comes more from groupthink (Janis, 1971), where they have created this shared purpose, without really considering whether it is even remotely possible. Furthermore the question arises to what extent this lines up with the actual corporate purpose or whether this is just wishful thinking. Yet, even if their purpose was not achievable, it still is a purpose to them. As they do believe that the coffee industry can be sustainable, although they were all very aware of the multitude of challenges standing in their way, the possible unachievability did not even come to their mind.

In the end, and beginning, this is what we were looking for. The reason the employees of Y see in their work, their higher purpose. It was very interesting to see that this higher purpose was shared among all interviewees, and more importantly, it did seem like they all actually believed in this goal. Furthermore they all claim to believe so much in it, that they choose this purpose over money. It will be interesting to see what this shared higher purpose will lead to, whether they will be able to actually change



the coffee industry for the better. Whatever happens, the employees of Y seem to have found a true reason to work. Even if this purpose is just a social construct they have build for themselves, it does seem to give them direction and motivation. As purpose has a positive impact on mental well-being (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009), it is no surprise that the employees at Y are so content with their work. There definitely are similarities between employees of Y and current literature, their aim to achieve a greater good gives them a higher purpose and creates meaning.

5.2 The Mismatch Of Corporate And Individual Purpose

After having established the individual purpose of the employees of Y, it is interesting to compare and contrast it with the corporate purpose. In contrast to the literature about a higher purpose, which is mostly in agreement, the debate about corporate purpose is an unresolved and fierce discussion. Would our interviewees take the side of Friedman or Freeman, or go a completely different direction? The corporate goal of Y was described by the employees as firstly becoming the biggest and secondly becoming more and more sustainable; going along with a more contemporary approach by taking the best of both worlds, as for example Carroll and Buchholtz (2009) start to indicate.

A question connected to the interaction of individual and corporate purpose is, whether one caused the other. Do the goals of Y attract employees with a similar purpose, or do the individuals bring their purpose to the company, and in doing so shape the corporate purpose? As with all (qualitative) studies, it is impossible to find true causation. However, based on Y, arguments can be made for both cases. As a corporation is made up from individuals (Friedman, 1970), it would make sense, that the corporate purpose is created by individuals as well. However, while we do not believe this absolves responsibility from the corporation, it does give an indication as to where purpose might come from. Hemingway and Maclagan (2004) agree and argue that individual purpose creates corporate purpose. In Y we see indicators for an interaction between corporate and individual purpose, meaning that both influence each other. While the employees looked for a company that would fit their values, the company also communicates their stance on sustainability and the actions connected to it very frequently. Corporate purpose in the beginning might be shaped by



individuals, and is constantly readjusted by the current individuals in the company, while at the same time it influences the individual purpose of the employees. Hence, the individuals make Y strive for more sustainability, and Y's stance on sustainability reinforces the employees' values.

Perhaps even more interesting than the interaction between purposes, are the differences. While the purposes appear to be very similar, it is in the prioritization and justification that we can see the differences. Individually, the employees of Y prioritized sustainability over money. This can be expected, prioritizing higher purpose over hygienic needs. When talking about money, all interviewees were quick to justify and nuance their answer. It was not the most important thing to them, simply a matter of survival and necessary. However, when talking about the company, they unanimously prioritized money over sustainability; there appears to be a mismatch in prioritization of purpose. When asked about the corporate goal, without hesitation all of the interviewees mentioned being the biggest, as the most important goal and did not feel the need to justify their answer. Hence, when it comes to individual purpose, money apparently is an answer to be ashamed of, yet in corporations it is a normal and expected answer. So, why is this, why is a corporation allowed to be greedy, but a person is not? We believe this can be explained by looking at the current paradigm, the biggest social construct there is. We live in a capitalistic society, where money is often the end goal; an example of how Friedman's view still persists. Yet at the same time, a movement has developed where individuals should not look for money, but satisfaction as Kirk (2013) suggests. People should strive for something else, something more, yet are so far only able to do so within the confines of capitalism. It seems impossible to adhere to both expectations of society, to 'simply get a job' and to 'always follow your dreams'. In this sense the mismatch might be inherent to our current societal paradigm, where expectations seem to clash. A clash between social constructs, created by ourselves, which also means they can be changed, if we just tried (Alvesson, 2013). However, there is not simply a mismatch between individual and corporate purpose, it goes even further; we see a mismatch between corporations and society. As society develops towards expecting to have a higher purpose in work, while corporations strive to make more and more money, high pay is not enough anymore. Corporations also need to offer more, it needs to have a vision or purpose



(potential) employees can identify with, something greater than profit. So while the corporation needs to make money to exist, it is also expected to follow the new rules of society by striving for something of greater importance than money.

Over the decades the debate about corporate purpose has had very demarcated sides, should companies strive for profit or purpose? Often in literature, the two sides are presented as mutually exclusive. Friedman (1970) argues that the sole responsibility is profit, Freeman et al. (2010) say a corporation should care for more. Yet we have found that in Y it is not as clear-cut, no clear distinction can be found. Employees of Y identified both profit and purpose as a goal and seemed content with that. What this suggests, is that there is no ‘right’ side in the argument, as in in our study both sides were accepted as reasonable. Rather the more contemporary view by Carroll and Buchholtz (2009) seems to be present here: profit does come first but once that is reached, sustainability is just as important; both can co-exist. While we can only speak for Y here, maybe this indicates that a new time has come, one where it is not money-focused corporations against non-for-profit organizations, but one where both can be content; both can do good and still make enough money.

5.3 Confined Purpose: The Boundaries Of Capitalism

So how does this mismatch between purposes of individuals and corporations influence the personal pursuit of a higher goal within the company? Do they manage to extricate themselves from the rules or do they comply? Individually, paying the bills is no longer a reason, but a necessity. One has certain financial obligations and work is needed to meet these as Herzberg already argued in his two-factor theory (1966). However, when given the choice between a higher income or more sustainability, all of the interviewees chose sustainability. This, we believe, shows the difference between need and want. They need to support themselves, yet they want more out of their job; something more important, a higher purpose. Having such a higher purpose increases life satisfaction, as it is our purpose that we actually pursue (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Yet it is deeply ingrained in people that they have to work to sustain themselves. In today’s society it is expected of one to work and earn their living, not working is frowned upon. This basically is grounded in our capitalistic state of mind, in which those who do not work live off on ‘our’ hard work and taxes,



so-called ‘social parasites’. However, amongst our interviewees this was not even a question, all of them liked their work, wanted to work. At the same time we see that just work and pay is not enough for people, they want this higher purpose. This purpose however has to be achieved within the confines of society and the company they work in, the place at which they try to achieve that purpose.

Therefore we came up with a new concept: people have what we call a *confined purpose*: pursuing their higher purpose to the best of their ability within the corporate confinement. At Y, the higher purpose of the employees has shown to be ‘having a positive impact on sustainable coffee’ it still has to fit into the corporate goals. Our interviewees believe however that that corporate goal is to be the biggest, to grow, to meet a purpose of profit above all else within the triple bottom line. Sustainability, so they believe, comes second within their company. However, as we discussed above, individually there is resistance to this idea, because personally they do not value money above everything else. Yet again, with this resistance comes acceptance and readjustment already. By making their individual purpose vital to the overall success of the company, the employees still get to pursue it. Research in other areas suggests that a mismatch between corporations and individuals, for example in culture, can lead to an identity-crash (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). The same might be expected from a mismatch in purpose. However, instead we argue that employees adjust to the confinements within the company but keep their purpose rather than change it, as an identity-crash would indicate. People believe they cannot change the rules, so they simply abide by them while trying to achieve as much as possible; they confine their purpose to the possibilities they are given. Specifically the employees adjusted to the fact that Y focuses on money first and made sustainability a part of the brands success. They are confined to collectively work towards becoming the ‘biggest’, yet pursue their own purpose. The fact that the company actually does not state anywhere officially to pursue profits over sustainability is actually almost irrelevant in this scenario, as this is first of all the subjective truth of our interviewees and secondly could be company internal information that simply is not published anywhere.

Now the discussion becomes whether this is a problem or not. Should we try and



change the paradigm, the belief that it is okay for companies to value profits above all else? Or does it meet our survival needs while giving us enough freedom to grow and pursue whatever else we want? The ability to pursue our higher purposes at all should be something to be thankful about; not many times in the history of mankind could we look past our direct needs. Yet, now that we approach this society of abundant production, it might be time as well to change our way of thinking. It might be time to break free from the confined purpose and focus solely on our ‘true’ overarching purpose, to build a new social construct in which the individuals dictate corporate purpose. Only then we could find out, whether or not it is possible to be sustainable first and foremost and achieve long-term success and a greater good alike because and not despite our sustainability efforts.

5.4 Why Knowing Does Not Lead To Action

A final point of discussion is the difference between knowledge and action. While not directly related to the previous points, we feel like this is actually quite a salient point to make within our area of interest. We are talking about the phenomenon of the ‘knowledge-action gap’ (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2013), which can be seen in many instances of life, like charity or sustainable living. People know and believe in certain causes, but to then transfer this knowledge into action is harder than it seems. This means that people can be fully aware of a cause and even truly believe in it, without necessarily acting on it at all.

In Y specifically we found a lot of evidence for the knowledge-action gap. All interviewees claimed, truthfully we believe as they spoke with conviction as they spoke with conviction, to value sustainability; yet often when asked about their personal life they seemed to lack action. This is in line with previous research done on sustainable living (Barth et al., 2012). In their work they do actively pursue their purpose, so there is not a complete lack of action. Yet in daily life, they seem to have trouble translating both the knowledge and ideals they have gotten in their work to consistent sustainable living. Interestingly, they also complained about not being able to educate people enough about what goes on in Y behind the certificates. However, when considering the knowledge-action gap, even thorough education might not lead to significant results, like changing consumer patterns. As far as we can tell, people



are perfectly capable of truly having a certain ideal and at the same time not act accordingly, as we have seen in Segar and Richardson's research (2011). The cause for this gap, the constant recurrence of inaction, however, is still not known. Yet it does deserve more attention, since it does prohibit people from taking the right actions. If educating alone is simply not enough, we have to consider what is needed to force that step into action. What is it that can make us walk the talk, when even people with passion for sustainability cannot make that step? However, without more research being done, all we have is conjecture.

It is interesting however, to continue this line of thought to companies in general. Since all companies are run by individuals, we can expect the same knowledge-action gap, the same divide between having an ideal or purpose and actually acting upon it. Along these lines it could be expected to find great differences between the ideal plan and the executed reality. Take for a concrete and fitting example CSR-reports. Oftentimes companies are said to practice 'green-washing', saying they do good or want to do good, but then not actually doing it (Ramus & Montiel, 2005). While this is not something we found in Y, our findings might give a different interpretation of a corporation's failure to act. What if this is not a conscious or malicious action, as is often stated about greenwashing (Laufer, 2003), but rather a consequence of the same phenomenon, the knowledge-action gap? We do believe greenwashing exists; however we suggest that not every company that does not manage to live up to its ideals practices greenwashing. Rather in some cases this phenomenon might give an alternate explanation. And what does it say about us as a society to expect this from companies? Since we as people are making these same mistakes, can we blame companies for it? Rather, we should consider why this gap persists and how we can bridge it. When we take the knowledge-action gap into account, we might understand why many companies fail whatever grandiose plan they make. As many other companies, Aegis has set certain goals to reach in 2020 for Y and it will be interesting to see how many companies, including them, will actually reach those goals by 2020.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Having compared our results to existing literature we can conclude several things. First of all, the employees of Y seem to conform to expectations set in the literature.



Hygienic needs were deemed as important, yet mainly as dissatisfaction avoidance. Their higher purpose was found in what they considered to be a greater good, improving the future of coffee in a sustainable way. Where individually the employees clearly prioritized their higher purpose over money, they were very clearly about the corporate purpose being profit first and sustainability second. Putting this into the context of the debate about the purpose of business, initially they seem to agree more with Friedman. However, where the debate is clearly divided, we found no such divide in reality. Rather we argue for a combination of both profit and purpose when talking about the purpose of business. The mismatch between individual and corporate purpose can be explained by the concept of a *confined purpose*; the employees do pursue their own individual purpose, but have to do this within the confines of our own social constructs. They have to always work within the bounds of their company and society. Finally, we found indications of the knowledge-action gap; the employees were unable to take their stance on sustainability to their personal life. Taking this phenomenon further, we believe that this gap between intention and action, between ideal and reality, could also apply to companies. Maybe some of the things we believe to be greenwashing are simply a failure to act.



6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into individual purpose and its relation to corporate purpose. In order to do so, our guiding questions were: “*What do the employees of Yotti believe to be their individual purpose of work?*” and “*How does this individual purpose interact with and compare to the corporate purpose?*”. While the employees did not seem to be directly aware of their actual purpose and first had to go through somewhat of a realization process, they believe that their purpose of work is to have a positive impact by working with sustainability. Especially within Y they want to work towards a more sustainable future for the coffee industry as a whole. They want to have an impact on the world or make their kids proud of them and they believe to be able achieve this by doing the sustainable work they carry out at Y. Whether this is achievable or not is not important to them. While at first glance this individual purpose and the corporate purpose of Y, as a sustainable company, seem to line up, we have found there to be a mismatch. This mismatch we believe leads to a confinement, which we explain in the concept of the *confined purpose*.

6.1 Main Findings

In order to put the individual purpose into context with the corporate purpose we looked at the similarities and differences between them. Our main finding from that undertaking was the mismatch between the individual and corporate purpose. Individually the employees did mention money and challenges as reasons to work, however money could not stand up to their goal to work towards sustainability; especially when asked specifically. Their look at the corporate purpose did feature profits first and sustainability second but in this context these goals seemed to be rather balanced, co-existing in the company. Personally, money was the means to the end of surviving, but sustainability gave them a real purpose; in business sustainability coexisted with the goal to make profit and to become the bigger brand. These findings implicate that it is possible to have a higher purpose and to execute it in a company, to agree upon a higher purpose to work towards across individuals and corporations. However beneath that we can also see that, while working on their



purpose, they had to abide to Y's rules and confine their purpose. This was especially salient in the fact that sustainability was rather used as means to the end of helping the brand grow and the employees had to accept that main goal. Even though this is not an official statement Y makes, it just is an expected and accepted goal for the company to have. In that sense the employees could only pursue their purpose to the extent, they believe the company confined and allowed them to, based on the social construct capitalism puts on them.

Since the work at Y is so focussed on sustainability, one could have expected the employees to live rather sustainably outside of work, too. However, we did not find most of them to 'walk their talk' in their free time. Rather, they engaged in behaviours they criticized in their consumers, such as looking for labels instead of questioning the actual sustainability efforts brands take. However, as they were aware of their inaction it is rather an indication of a gap between knowledge and action, rather than the classic 'walk the talk' scenario. From their work at Y and within the coffee industry they know that some brands use labels for marketing and they themselves wish that consumers would actually educate themselves. Transferring this to other areas in their life however, the knowledge did not lead to them acting the way the demand from consumers. This phenomenon is known as knowledge-action gap, the inability to transfer knowledge into action as we see here.

6.2 Practical And Theoretical Contributions

Based on our findings and the aforementioned phenomena the question arises how these contribute to both the academic discussion and to practitioners. Some starting points for those have been mentioned in our discussion, pointing out differences or links to existing discussions on the topic. Our main theoretical contribution is in giving an example for a company in which purpose and profit can co-exist. While we mentioned before that the 'war' around the purpose of business seems to rage on, always finding evidence for one or the other, it might be time to make a compromise work. Yotti makes it work both on its own and as part of a big corporation that is commonly perceived as profit focused. Maybe after all there is a 'business case for CSR' in a way that does not care to prioritize one over the other. Further implications can be made on the interaction of individual and corporate purpose; looking closer at



the impact corporate purpose has on individual purpose and vice versa. While much research has been done on both sides of the coin, as well as on purpose in general, we suggest that the perception of a purpose and the effect on the higher purpose of that perception makes a difference. Lastly, it can be implied that behind the oh-so-famous ‘walk the talk’ there is a knowledge-action gap that explains why it is so hard to go from knowledge to action, from the walk to the talk. This can be applied both to individuals and companies and could mean that not everything that is labelled ‘greenwashing’ is that, but maybe more a problem between knowledge and planning, and acting these plans out.

More practically our findings can be applied in various ways. For one, and in our opinion most importantly, practitioners can take away that it is important to have employees who find a purpose in their work and to give them the possibility to follow this higher purpose. Earlier research has already shown that both having a purpose, and the possibility to execute this purpose in a company, are connected to life satisfaction and commitment. The fact that employees at Yotti value the sustainability work over anything else at their work, no matter what their age, implies that not only ‘Generation Y’ is looking for more in their work. In a way this reinforces our former implication for researchers to redefine the idea of choosing either profit or purpose. Rather this shows that one can facilitate the other: using sustainability work to grow and using profit to reinvest into sustainability work. In the end we only have this one world and if more companies would make the change, then maybe everyone can actually have that positive impact they wish to make.

6.3 Implications For Future Research

As mentioned before, our research does have a limited scope, as it was conducted in one company only. Rather than making broad statements by proving hypotheses in a quantitative study we have chosen to go in depth with our interpretive approach. While objectively seen we cannot provide a representation of a larger group, we do believe that taking a closer look can unravel social structures and their true impact on society much better. We would like to see more research that focuses on individuals, looks at paradigms and less obvious phenomena. Following that line of thought we would like to see the discussion on the purpose of business taking a new turn. Maybe



it is time to leave Friedman and Freeman behind and take a more contemporary view, as suggested by for example Carroll. Another interesting topic is to what extent the perception of a company's purpose and its 'real' purpose coincide. We were only able to look at the perception the employees had of their company's purpose and its effect on the employees. However, it would be interesting to see to what extent there can be a 'real' purpose or whether this is just made up by the individuals (and their perceptions) anyway. Would an official purpose, no matter how congruent with the employees' value, actually change anything for the pursuit of their individual purpose?

Lastly we would like to see research that does not only identify the problem of walking the talk, but looking behind it, identifying where the knowledge-action gap comes from and to explore how to tackle it. While this will probably be topic mainly psychological researchers will be interested in, we believe this is just as interesting to organizational research. Most importantly it would be great to see more research that goes beyond, for example, the talk and the walk, but unravels phenomena and the influence underlying social structures really have on individuals and businesses alike. Hence, instead of just looking at superficial reasons one should search for the reason behind the reason, go that extra mile instead of impressing with big sample sizes.

6.4 Reflections And Final Words

In the end our focus clearly shifted throughout the process of this study, which is a great advantage of the abductive approach. We started out with our interest in the contemporary view on the purpose of business, which brought us to higher purpose for both individuals and corporations. While we hoped to uncover social structures and phenomena beneath, it was interesting to see how much the corporate purpose, or the perceived corporate purpose for that matter, is based on capitalistic expectations. These expectations seem to confine the employees even more than the company itself, which led us to the concept of a confined purpose. Coming across this has surely exceeded our expectations we had at the start of this study.

Furthermore it might be salient to the reader that we are quite critical of social structures and especially the system of capitalism. Our interpretations are based on



our worldview and to some extent surely reflect both positive and negative implications we see in sustainability work, corporations and the purpose of work. However, we are confident to have been reflexive enough in order to criticize our own interpretations and thought processes in order to look behind both our and the interviewees first take on ‘reality’. We gave our best to make this research about a peak behind the curtain of Y, while giving it our own voice and thereby possibly a new angle. For practitioners, researchers and employees of all kinds alike. What if employees could shape the purpose of business and put sustainability right next to profit rather than below? Our interviewees hoped to have a positive impact on the world and yet relied on Yotti to provide for their purpose to be accomplished. While they surely accomplish something within their work, imagine what they, or anyone for that matter, could do if they just were more aware and could then close the gap between knowledge and action? Maybe, one could conclude, we were able to change the world after all. Then again, Alvesson would probably disagree, arguing that *“People tend to mystify rather than clarify what they are doing, even for themselves”* (2013, p.150).



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