"The Human Comes First, And That We Feel"

Employee Engagement in a Purpose-Driven Organization

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Abstract

Title	"The Human Comes First, And That We Feel" Employee Engagement in a Purpose-Driven Organization
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Purpose	The purpose of the study is to contribute to the research gap on the relationship between employee engagement and a purpose-driven organizational mode.
Methodology	Our research, which adheres to the interpretive tradition of symbolic interactionism (SI) comprises a qualitative single-case study in a purpose-driven organization and follows an abductive approach. We generated our empirical data by collecting 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews and on-site observations.
Theoretical Perspective	For the analysis of the findings, we refer to the underlying tenets of the SI tradition to capture the meaning of employee engagement of members of a purpose-driven organization. In addition, we draw on Kahn's (1990) conditions for employee engagement as a theoretical framework to discuss the findings.
Conclusion	Our findings show that the purpose-driven organizational mode is related to the employees' engagement in a multitude of ways regarding the organization's external and internal purposes. First, the organization's external purpose is pursued by the employees due to their engagement through moral and religious beliefs. And second, the internal purpose provides the space for employees to raise their voices, and for leaders to act in a caring way, which in turn also enhances the employee engagement.
Key Words	Employee Engagement, Purpose-Driven Organizations, Not-For-Profit Organizations, Workplace Spirituality, Employee Voice, Caring Leadership

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Laura Hamminger & Annadora Prinz

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Abbreviations

CSR   Corporate Social Responsibility

FP   For-Profit

NFP   Not-For-Profit

SI   Symbolic Interactionism

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1. Introduction

"Engaged employees are emotionally attached to their organization and highly involved in their job with a great enthusiasm for the success of their employer, going extra mile beyond the employment contractual agreement."

With this statement, Markos & Sridevi (2010, p. 89) describe every employer's dream of the ideal employee. Strong employee engagement has been widely agreed upon by researchers to be highly desirable for organizations, being a potential source of competitive advantage and improving organizational performance (e.g., Mirvis, 2012; Saks, 2006; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Therefore, the concept of employee engagement has received a significant amount of attention from researchers in the fields of Human Resources, Management and Organizational Studies, since its first emergence in the 1990s. Compared to its predecessor concepts such as organizational commitment or employee involvement, many researchers and practitioners adopted the concept of employee engagement due to its more holistic nature (Saks, 2011). To this day, research on the topic is consistently growing and organizations are continuously looking for new contemporary ways to engage their employees.

At the same time, a relatively new phenomenon can be seen as people experience an increasing desire to not just work to earn a salary, but rather have a job that is perceived as personally engaging and purposeful. This can be traced back to the growing consciousness of both consumers and employees regarding the impact of organizations on environmental and societal issues, which is, in turn, increasingly pressuring organizations to exhibit concern and take action against the climate crisis and social injustices (Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012).

Therefore, with the employees' growing desire to be engaged in purposeful work and the consumers' growing demands for corporate social responsibility, a purpose-driven organizational mode can seemingly kill two birds with one stone. *"When companies are true to their purpose, ordinary employees can do extraordinary things."* Rey, Bastons & Sotok (2019, p. 5) argue for the case of purpose-driven organizations. Advocates for this 'moralization' of organizations even identify a movement towards being "driven by a concern for the public good that goes beyond the selfish calculations of economic actors" (Scherer et al., 2016, p. 273). In fact, the traditional organizational model of maximizing shareholder value at any cost has become an absolute taboo in recent years, at least regarding an organization's public portrayal of their motivations. According to Lyon et al. (2018), four-fifths of the Fortune 500 global companies regularly publish sustainability reports and thousands of companies have

signed the United Nation's Global Compact, pledging to an improvement of human rights and the treatment of the environment. Moreover, it has become a standard for companies to publicly state that their operations are fundamentally driven by underlying purposes that do not include financial profits, such as:

"Power progress together with more and cleaner energy solutions." (Shell, 2022)

"Refresh the world. Make a difference." (The Coca-Cola Company, 2022)

Starbucks Coffee Company (2022) even explicitly adds: *"As it has been from the beginning, our purpose goes far beyond profit. We believe Starbucks can, and should, have a positive impact on the communities we serve."*

However, the mere statement of an underlying organizational purpose and the standalone social responsibility measures applied by many organizations do not suffice to be characterized as truly 'purpose-driven'. Many companies are regularly criticized for partaking in deceiving or harmful behavior, such as greenwashing or window-dressing, thereby even making "a mockery of corporate social responsibility" (Lyon et al., 2018, p. 10). Therefore, while both concepts, employee engagement and purpose-drive in organizations, are highly contemporary relevant and ever-growing fields of research, the relationship between the two has yet to be thoroughly studied. Therefore, it is uncertain if a purpose-driven context really enables and encourages 'ordinary employees' to do 'extraordinary things'. In accordance with this notion, the research question of this thesis is defined as follows:

How is employee engagement related to a purpose-driven organizational mode?

This thesis will provide in-depth qualitative research on the relationship between employee engagement and a purpose-driven organizational mode at the not-for-profit organization Erikshjälpen. The organizational mode of Erikshjälpen is characterized by a twofold purpose-drive: First, the primary external purpose is the organization's support of children's aid projects all over the world. The means of raising money for these caritative activities constitutes another aspect of the organization's external purpose – providing an environmentally friendly opportunity for consumption, by operating second-hand stores all over Sweden. The second, not so publicly communicated but internally highly valued purpose, is to give local people a second chance in life through creating a supportive working environment. Therefore, in addition to volunteers and employees who apply on their own initiative, the organization also employs those who are ordered by court to complete a social service or have been placed by the Swedish

employment agency (Arbetsförmedlingen). To conclude, we consider Erikshjälpen to provide an ideal organizational context for our research on employee engagement, due to its twofold organizational purpose-drive, i.e., the external purpose of supporting children through profits raised by sustainable second-hand stores, and the internal purpose of focusing on support and well-being of employees.

The data was collected through this single-case study with the use of 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and on-site observations at a local Erikshjälpen store. Moreover, an abductive approach and the interpretive tradition of symbolic interactionism (SI) was chosen to analyze the qualitative material. This tradition was considered to be the most effective in capturing the meaning for the employees of the purpose-driven mode in relation to their engagement as it recognizes reality to be socially constructed through the role of subjective meanings (Prasad, 2018).

Our findings indicate that the purpose-driven organizational mode relates to employee engagement in three main ways: First, the employees are engaged through their personal beliefs, which turns the organization's external purpose into their personal purpose and thereby gives meaning to their work. Second, the organization's internal purpose creates a safe space for employees to raise their voices, which makes them feel heard and empowered, thereby enhancing their engagement. And third, the purpose-driven leadership caters to the employees' heterogeneous needs, allowing them to engage in their individual ways. However, the findings have also shown that the caring leadership style is most likely to cause a clash of purposes, as some employees may perceive the extensive support for their colleagues as being a hindrance to the pursuit of the organization's external purpose.

The thesis begins with a review of the existing literature on the concepts of employee engagement and not-for-profit organizations, concluding with setting out our research question. Subsequently, the methodology of our research approach is outlined, and the case organization is described in detail. The next chapter provides an in-depth description and analysis of our main findings through the conducted interviews and observations, followed by the discussion chapter which elaborates on the connection between the findings and the literature on the key concepts. Finally, the conclusion provides a summary of the most significant findings, as well as implications for practice, future research, and the disclosure of limitations.

2. Literature Review

Employee engagement has been a widely researched, popular and also debated concept in recent decades. Due to its initial prominence among practitioners and consulting firms, it has been primarily researched in profit-driven companies and therefore leaves room for further research in purpose-driven organizations. This literature review will first discuss the history and conceptualization of employee engagement, including its relevance and effects, and its counterpart disengagement. Subsequently, Kahn's (1990) model on the conditions of employee engagement will be described and expanded by contemporary engagement research. Thirdly, the contexts of employee engagement research regarding the distinction between profit-driven and purpose-driven organizations will be analyzed. Lastly, the research question will be presented.

The literature reviewed draws primarily on academic research, complemented with practitioner literature where relevant. Moreover, the literature presented can be categorized as core literature, which further comprises both, upstream and downstream literature, in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the concepts.

2.1. Employee Engagement

The term employee (or "personal") engagement was originally coined in Kahn's 1990 paper "Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work", where he defined the concept as:

"the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694)

Before Kahn's (1990) influential paper on employee engagement, similar or overlapping concepts have existed in academic business literature, such as employee involvement, participation, satisfaction, and commitment. To this day, employee engagement research has often been diluted and complicated by the overlapping or interchangeable use of these similar concepts. However, it is argued that engagement is a distinguished concept, due to its more holistic nature (Saks, 2011). For instance, while organizational commitment refers to "a person's attitude and attachment towards their organisation" (Saks, 2006, p. 602), engagement goes beyond an attitude, as to the extent to which individuals are "attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles" (Saks, 2006, p. 602). Moreover, it is different from employee involvement, as involvement is "the result of a cognitive judgment about the need satisfying

abilities of the job" (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004, p. 12). Engagement, on the other hand, is "concerned more with how the individual employs his/her self during the performance of his/her job" (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004, p. 12). The conceptual uniqueness of engagement is also supported by Hallberg & Schaufeli (2006), who found that work engagement, job involvement, and organizational commitment are three distinct constructs with their own corresponding characteristics.

In the beginnings of employee engagement research, the rapidly increasing interest in the topic was mainly driven through explorations and publications by practitioners and consulting firms, and the lack of academic and empirical research even led to presumptions of employee engagement being a mere management fad among some researchers (Saks, 2006). However, this does not seem to be the case yet, as the interest seems to be ever existing today and the plethora of research on the topic keeps growing (e.g., Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Mirvis, 2012; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Moreover, academic and empirical literature have since caught up with the practitioner literature, with wide-ranging and in-depth research on the concept, it's antecedents and consequences (e.g., Markos & Sridevi, 2010; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Saks, 2006). As the large volume of publications on the topic has entailed a manifold variety of definitions of employee engagement by practitioners and academics, without any widely established consensus, this thesis will adopt Kahn's (1990) original definition of the concept. In addition, Kahn's (1990) developed model of three psychological conditions of engagement will be elaborated in a subsequent section.

2.1.1. Relevance and Effects of Employee Engagement

Although the definitions of employee engagement are hotly debated and without consensus, the view on the significance and value of engagement within an organization seems to be widely shared by practitioners and academics. High employee engagement is generally said to have a positive effect on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and the ability to adapt to change (e.g., Mirvis, 2012; Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004; Saks, 2006; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019), as well as organizational performance, including the company's stock price, income growth and overall financial performance and productivity (Gross, 2011; Mirvis, 2012). Furthermore, employee engagement is claimed to be negatively correlated to intentions to quit, absenteeism and counterproductive behavior, such as misconduct or theft (Gross, 2011; Mirvis, 2012; Saks, 2006). Hence, employee engagement is often seen as a highly valuable competitive advantage and organizational efforts to enhance engagement are viewed as crucial.

2.1.2. Disengagement

As a consequence of the perceived significance of employee engagement, its counterpart disengagement presents a major threat to organizations (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Disengagement as defined by Kahn refers to "the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances" (1990, p. 694). According to a 2008 Towers Perrin survey, only 21% of employees were fully engaged and the Gallup Employee Engagement Index 2010 found that only 33% of employees were engaged on their job (Mirvis, 2012). In the US, this engagement gap has even been estimated to cause an annual loss of $300 billion in productivity (Saks, 2006).

2.1.3. Factors of Employee Engagement

Since the initial emergence of the concept, it has been a key concern for organizations to enhance employee engagement (Saks, 2011). Therefore, a large number of studies aim at identifying factors that impact employee engagement and its counterpart disengagement. For instance, the Gallup Employee Engagement Index comprises 12 'factors' of engagement (Fleming & Asplund, 2007), Saks (2006) determined the significance of three 'antecedents' of job and/or organization engagement, and MacLeod & Clarke's (2009) concept comprises four 'enablers' of employee engagement. This paper will adopt the term 'factors' to refer to these concepts related to engagement, as it does not imply nor exclude causality.

Among the most frequently mentioned factors are for instance the employer's perceived concern on their employees' health and wellbeing and organizational support (e.g., Saks, 2006), feeling valued and involved (e.g., Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004), opportunities for job development (e.g., Beardwell & Thompson, 2017), empowering leadership (e.g., Popli & Rizvi, 2016), employee voice (e.g., MacLeod & Clarke, 2009), etc.

In his pioneering study on the concept of employee engagement, Kahn (1990) identified three psychological conditions correlating positively with an individual's level of engagement: *psychological meaningfulness*, *psychological safety*, and *psychological availability*. This model has since been utilized and refined by various researchers (e.g., May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Saks, 2011) and encompasses many subsequently identified factors within at least one of the three conditions. Hence, Kahn's (1990) model will now be further elaborated and complemented with recent literature on employee engagement in organizations, as to provide a basis for this research paper.

Psychological Meaningfulness

The first of Kahn's (1990) conditions, psychological meaningfulness, refers to individuals feeling "worthwhile, useful, and valuable – as though they made a difference and were not taken for granted" (p. 704). Similarly, Saks (2011) acknowledges the significance of meaningfulness in relation to employee engagement and establishes a connection to another concept in organizational research – workplace spirituality. Saks (2011) argues that "meaningfulness appears to be at the heart of workplace spirituality and employee engagement" (p. 328). Correspondingly, Pfeffer (2015) describes that "values-based" or "values-driven" organizations are "better able to engage the hearts and the minds of their people" (p. 27). It is important to note that workplace spirituality is generally associated with concepts such as "meaning, purpose, and a sense of community and connection to others" (Saks, 2011, p. 318) and possibly, but not necessarily, linked to religious beliefs. Kinjerski & Skrypnek (2004) offer the following definition of spirit at work: "the experience of employees who are passionate about and energized by their work, find meaning and purpose in their work, feel that they can express their complete selves at work, and feel connected to those with whom they work" (p. 27). Paloutzian, Emmons & Keortge (2015) define the term spirituality as "a tendency to strive for those values and purposes that express whatever the individual person feels is ultimately meaningful" (p. 74). Saks (2011) moreover complements Kahn's (1990) model of meaningfulness *in* work, which relates primarily to finding meaningfulness in specific task-related performances, with the role of meaningfulness *at* work, which goes beyond that. Ashmos & Duchon (2000) describe spirituality as a potential source for a sense of purpose and meaning, in situations where employees feel like they are part of a greater purpose or mission extending beyond self-interest.

In line with these concepts, one factor of the Gallup Employee Engagement Index is defined as: "The mission or purpose of my organization makes me feel my job is important" (Fleming & Asplund, 2007, p. 286). In addition, the first of MacLeod & Clarke's (2009) four enablers of employee engagement, 'strategic narrative', can also be linked to Kahn's (1990) psychological meaningfulness. Strategic narrative is defined as "a strong, transparent and explicit organisational culture which gives employees a line of sight between their job and the vision and aims of the organisation" (p. 31). The factor is tested through the question to what extent employees share the values of their organization (Dromey, 2014), which also illustrates the importance of the extent of the employees' understanding, as well as alignment between their personal values and beliefs, and the organization's mission and purpose (Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson, 2003).

In conclusion, the overlapping concepts of psychological meaningfulness and workplace spirituality are crucial to be considered in research on employee engagement, as supported by May, Gilson & Harter (2004), who found that meaningfulness is the strongest predictor of employee engagement among Kahn's three psychological conditions, as well as Saks (2011), who states that workplace spirituality has the potential to "promote and create high levels of employee engagement" (p. 318).

Psychological Safety

Kahn's (1990) second condition, psychological safety, refers to the employees' perception on the extent to which they feel "able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (p. 708). Self-expression is seen as a risk that is continuously evaluated by individuals according to its safety. In his study, Kahn (1990) found that situations that promoted trust were characterized by predictability, consistency, clarity and a non-threatening nature. In other words, employees felt safer to express themselves when they were able to predict and understand the boundaries and consequences of their actions. Moreover, Kahn (1990) identified four factors that influenced psychological safety: interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, management style, and process and organizational norms.

The concept of psychological safety also displays strong links and similarities to a driver of engagement that is among the most frequently identified in contemporary engagement literature: employee voice (e.g., Beardwell & Thompson, 2017; Dromey, 2014; Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004). The concept of employee voice refers to the extent to which employees feel able and empowered to express their opinions and ideas and are listened to and valued by their managers. An ideal environment for engagement is provided when employees are (or at least feel) involved in decision-making, and management acts upon good suggestions by employees (Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004). Similarly, Kahn (1990) provides an example of members of an organization feeling safe in situations where they are not afraid of sharing their ideas and concepts, even being aware of the risk of failing. MacLeod & Clarke (2009) also identified employee voice as one of the key enablers of employee engagement, which was studied by Dromey (2014) and extended by the finding that genuine dialogue and involvement are necessary conditions, rather than simple one-way communication. Furthermore, the concept of feeling safe to express one's voice also relates to another factor of employee engagement in the Gallup Index, which was operationalized as: "At work, my opinions seem to count" (Fleming & Asplund, 2007, p. 286).

While most of the literature discusses formal employee voice, which relates to prearranged and regulated practices and structures, such as surveys or meetings, to provide the employees with a possibility to express their voice (Marchington et al., 2016), Marchington & Suter (2013) also characterize informal employee voice as an important component within the concept of employee voice even though this form has gained little attention in research yet. This form refers to the direct face-to-face exchange and communication between staff and management that provides opportunities for improvement (Marchington et al., 2016).

Psychological Availability

The third of Kahn's (1990) conditions, psychological availability, is "the sense of having the physical, emotional, or psychological resources to personally engage at a particular moment" (p. 714). This notion is also supported by May, Gilson & Harter (2004), who found that resources available was a positive predictor of availability. It is important to note that 'resources' includes but is not limited to material or financial resources. Rather, the emotional and psychological resources, such as the feeling of being part of a supportive, assisting community, are seen as crucial (Saks, 2011).

The concept of psychological availability is also related to what Kahn (1990) describes as 'distractions', which people constantly experience as members of social systems, and the extent to which they are able to withstand these distractions in favor of engagement. The types of distractions that influence availability are described as: depletion of physical energy, depletion of emotional energy, individual insecurity, and outside lives (Kahn, 1990).

While psychological availability seems to primarily refer to an employee's individual dispositions and efforts, Saks (2011) argues that organizations have the potential of providing their members with these physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary to fulfill their work-demands. This highlights the essential role of the leaders of an organization directly impacting employee engagement. According to Popli & Rizvi (2016), this understanding has also reached top executives in recent years, who realized that "they need to be responsible and accountable for employee engagement, rather than leaving it for HR to action" (p. 965).

In addition, the concept of psychological availability can be linked to various of Gallup's factors of engagement, operationalized in statements such as "I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right", "My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person" and "There is someone at work who encourages my development" (Fleming & Asplund, 2007, p. 286). Moreover, one of MacLeod & Clarke's (2009) enablers of engagement

can also be linked to the support of employees' psychological availability – 'engaging managers'. These managers are characterized as people who treat their employees as individuals, coach them, and give them scope.

In line with this notion, Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson (2017) argue that an increasingly popular contemporary view suggests that "employees who feel better equipped to manage stress, anxieties, uncertainties and change has triggered a wealth of means of improving employees' well-being" (p. 119). This equipping of employees can be supported through leadership, which is defined as "influencing ideas, meanings, understandings and identities of others within an asymmetrical (unequal) relational context" (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017, p. 3). In the context of targeting employees' "inner needs", they also see it as a tool to "privilege employees' psychological well-being and welfare" (p. 119). Correspondingly, in a study among 160 employees, Moss (2009) found that employees feel securely attached in situations where their leaders exhibited behavior of emotional support and provision of recognition for the employees' contributions. Moreover, Popli & Rizvi (2016) also argue that leadership is "one of the single biggest factors affecting employee perceptions in the workplace and workforce engagement" (p. 968) and Carasco-Saul, Kim & Kim (2015) identified leadership as a key antecedent of employee engagement. In an extensive literature review, they found that engagement is impacted in different ways by various styles of leadership, such as transformational, authentic, charismatic, and ethical leadership (Carasco-Saul, Kim & Kim, 2015). However, although leadership is one of the most studied topics in contemporary organization sciences, the link between employee engagement and leadership is still lacking extensive investigation (Carasco-Saul, Kim & Kim, 2015).

2.2. The Contexts of Employee Engagement Research

The subsequent chapter will explore the concept of employee engagement in the context of different organizational modes. First, research on employee engagement within the traditional for-profit firm will be explored, especially with a focus on the link to companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Then, a link will be established to employee engagement in not-for-profit organizations, where research is currently still rather scarce and predominantly quantitative in nature.

2.2.1. Profit-Driven Organizations

'For-Profit' or 'Profit-Driven' organizations are characterized by their intrinsic nature of being motivated by profits, the most extreme form being a traditional organizational model with the goal of maximizing profits and shareholder value (Rey, Bastons & Sotok, 2019).

The concept of employee engagement, being originally closely linked to practitioner literature and consulting firms, has been researched predominantly within the context of these traditional for-profit businesses (e.g., Anitha, 2014; Markos & Sridevi, 2010), aiming to identify effective HR and managerial efforts to enhance engagement and thus overall organizational performance. In recent years, with a growing popularity and demand for corporations to act responsibly and sustainably regarding climate change, social injustices, etc., topics of CSR can be found increasingly in organizational research. Consequently, the connection between CSR and employee engagement has also been explored by several researchers, such as Glavas & Piderit (2009), Mirvis (2012) or Caligiuri, Mencin & Jiang (2013). The general conclusion of these studies seems to be that CSR and employee engagement are positively correlated.

Due to external benefits such as reputational gains or access to new customer segments, and positive internal effects on recruiting, retaining and engaging employees, many contemporary organizations make use of CSR concepts and measures (Mirvis, 2012). However, these CSR initiatives are commonly hardly integrated in the organizational model. They are often rather seen as a tool that could easily be substituted or completely removed, without causing too much change to the overall business operation (Lyon et al., 2018).

2.2.2. Purpose-Driven Organizations

In contrast to businesses that supplement their profit-driven organizational mode with certain CSR activities, not-for-profit organizations (NFPs) are an organizational mode that fully integrates social responsibility through being driven by purpose rather than profit. As this organizational mode is applicable to the case organization of this thesis, it will henceforth be referred to as "not-for-profit" and "purpose-driven" synonymously. Purpose can be seen as the "overarching commitment to society that includes broader aims, such as 'making a difference', or 'improving lives', or 'reducing harm'" (Rey, Bastons & Sotok, 2019, p. 4).

Still, commercialization plays a substantial role for many NFPs, as revenue is a necessary means to the end of achieving their purposes (Hinton, 2020). The similarities between CSR-practicing companies and NFPs provide a shared base for research. Especially the research on the link between social responsibility and employee engagement offers valuable implications for

research on employee engagement in purpose-driven organizations. However, the insights of this area of research are also limited in their applicability on NFPs, due to the difference in the extent of being driven by purpose rather than profit.

While there is a moderate amount of research regarding the connection between employee engagement and a company's CSR efforts, research on the impact of a purpose-driven organizational model on employee engagement has been neglected. The few existing studies found that employees of NFPs, similar to companies with CSR activities, can be highly engaged through drivers such as mission attachment and belief in their organization's purpose and values (Word & Norton, 2011), as well as work-life balance and work design, including job fit, autonomy and meaningfulness (Nguyen & Pham, 2020). Furthermore, studies focusing on the interconnected concept of employee satisfaction, which includes analyses of factors such as the workers' self-reported well-being and loyalty to their organization, found that employees of not-for-profit organizations generally score higher on satisfaction than employees of traditional for-profit firms (Benz, 2005; Tortia, 2008). However, in general the research in the field of employee engagement and related concepts in the context of purpose-driven organizations has been predominantly quantitative in nature, such as through surveys with predefined and inflexible answer options. Thus, the topic is still lacking in-depth qualitative findings.

2.3. Research Question

Employee engagement has been recognized as an important and relevant concept in recent decades. However, research has been predominantly quantitative in nature and certain factors that have been identified as significant in various studies, have been neglected in further research on employee engagement. For instance, the three psychological conditions identified by Kahn (1990) and related factors of engagement, such as workplace spirituality, employee voice and leadership, still call for further qualitative research. Furthermore, the majority of studies is primarily focused on the context of profit-driven organizations and research on engagement in purpose-driven organizations is still lacking.

For these reasons, a purpose-driven, not-for-profit organization constitutes an interesting point of departure for further research, and this qualitative study therefore aims to explore the following research question:

How is employee engagement related to a purpose-driven organizational mode?

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological foundation of this study. We begin by stating our philosophical considerations that rationalize our choice of working within the interpretive tradition of SI (symbolic interactionism) and lay the groundwork for our research approach. Furthermore, information is provided about the case company and how the empirical data was collected, sorted, reduced, and analyzed. Lastly, we address our application of reflexivity, as well as some limitations within the study.

3.1. Philosophical Grounding

An interpretive tradition was chosen to understand how employee engagement is related to the mode of a purpose-driven organization. Interpretivism considers reality not to be objective or based on truths as a positivist tradition would do (Prasad, 2018). The choice of this tradition influences the ontological and epistemological considerations, whereby ontology refers to the nature of being and reality and epistemology to the nature of knowledge. Within the interpretive traditions, reality is both subjective and determined by social contexts and individual constructions of meaning (Prasad, 2018). Thus, knowledge is also best comprehended by examining the subjective interpretations and constructions of various actors. Instead of emphasizing the explanation of human behavior, the focus lies on the understanding (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019). By adopting this interpretive stance, we recognize that reality is socially constructed through acts of social interpretation, meaning-making perception, and the role of subjective meanings. As cited in Prasad (2018), this is often referred to as Weber' s principle of *Verstehen*, which places the understanding of meaning and intentionality above causal explanations. We aim to get an insight into this subjective construction of reality and knowledge, which is strongly influenced by social dimensions (Prasad, 2018).

Therefore, this thesis has been mainly influenced by the interpretive tradition of SI, as it assumes that events and objects have no intrinsic meaning other than that assigned to them by individuals during daily social interaction (Prasad, 2018). Because SI is about individual, subjective experiences that create meanings, language is a building block of social reality (Fine, 1992; Prasad, 2018). Philosophers in this tradition argue that interaction occurs in such a way that individuals continually interpret the symbolic meaning of their environment and act on the basis of that implied meaning (Bell, Bryman & Harley 2019).

Blumer's (1969) three fundamental assumptions from Mead's theory of mind, self, and society, constitute the underlying tenets of this tradition. As mentioned in Prasad (2018), these three central ideas of the SI tradition are:

(1) human action depends on meaning

(2) different people assign different meanings to objects

(3) meanings are not predetermined but constantly changing through individual interpretations.

Another crucial concept within SI that builds on Mead's philosophy is that of *role taking*, which can be described as the human tendency to constantly behave and act according to the social situation he/she finds him/herself in. Through roles and self-images, individuals give meaning to any social situation and articulate their own place in it. This specific process of meaning-making, called "defining the situation," characterizes another building block of SI (Prasad, 2018).

The three tenets of SI are both explicitly and implicitly repeatedly referred to in the analysis and discussion of our findings and used as a lens in order to understand the underlying mechanisms of employee engagement in a purpose-driven organization. A specification of the exact application of these principles within the SI tradition is given in Chapter 3.5 on Data Analysis.

3.2. Research Approach

To answer our research question and carry out a distinctive analysis, the research is conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews in the context of a qualitative single-case study using an abductive approach.

Abduction is generally considered as a combination of inductive creation of theory from empirical findings and deductive empirical testing of established theories (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). However, Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018) suggest that abduction is not simply a mixture of induction and deduction, but that it contributes an additional element of understanding. They point out that abduction is multilayered and shifts between theory and empirical facts, with each successively being reinterpreted in influence of the other. We regard abduction as suitable for our research because it combines the advantage of gaining a basic insight into relevant theories and literature before entering the field. Nevertheless, this approach

allows to conduct the research without being too substantially influenced by existing theories through an exhaustive literature review beforehand. According to Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019), taking an interpretivist stance means that researchers can come to surprising findings. Abduction, in contrast to deduction or induction, allows to master the shift between theory and findings in order to classify possible surprising findings in the literature.

To perform a nuanced analysis, a single case study with semi-structured, in-depth interviews is considered an appropriate research approach. According to Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019), a single-case study of an organization leads to a more in-depth analysis of an organizational phenomenon than a multiple-case study. Besides the advantage of being able to capture a more holistic picture by focusing on one organization, a single-case study also allows for better reflection on the change of meaning and the pluralist meanings of different individuals within the organization. As mentioned before, these fundamental components of the SI tradition are taken up throughout the thesis as a lens for analysis and a new perspective.

To grasp the different meanings for the analysis through the SI-Lens we conducted interviews within the case-organization. As Kvale (1996) points out, an interview has a structure and a purpose, and it is the researcher who controls the situation by guiding it through follow-up questions. Thus, we prepared guiding questions to ensure semi-structured, in-depth interviews. However, the interviewees were also encouraged to speak freely in order to permit deviations that could raise significant themes that were not covered by the questions in our guide. Thus, in line with the symbolic interactionism approach and our focus on employee engagement in an organization driven by purpose, conversations were initiated that led to reflections on how employee engagement is perceived. In this way, we intended to pinpoint markers in the language and key themes.

3.3. Case Context

After identifying the mentioned research gap regarding the literature on employee engagement in purpose-driven organizations, we started looking for a suitable organization to collect our empirical material. After consulting a professor, who was a senior researcher in the focus group 'Degrowth' at Pufendorf IAS for advice, we were recommended to carry out our research at the second-hand store Erikshjälpen. As we, the researchers, have visited the Erikshjälpen stores in Lund several times and found the concept very interesting and inspiring, we decided to follow this recommendation and visit one of the stores to ask for a collaboration. Contacting the manager turned out to be very straightforward, as we went to the store without announcement. He accepted our request immediately and we were able to start the interviews the following

week. From our first interview with the store manager, we understood why our inquiry to collaborate for our master's thesis was so uncomplicated: as the name implies, Erikshjälpen ("Erik's help") is a purpose-oriented organization that is driven by the goal to help others. In this case, it meant helping us to conduct our research. Although helping students is of course not the actual focus of the organization, this further indicates that their embedded values of caring and supporting even go beyond the scope of the organization's official purposes.

Erikshjälpen is a children's rights organization which is financed in part by donations and in part by its non-profit second-hand stores. In total, 59 stores operate within Sweden and two in Norway (Erikshjälpen, 2022). The organization is driven by a two-fold purpose: the external purpose is to help children and the environment, and the internal purpose is to take care of its employees. To the outside world, mainly the external purpose is communicated.

Firstly, the most outwardly communicated external purpose is to help children in need. Erik Nilsson, eponym of the Erikshjälpen stores, was himself a sick child who made it his life's mission to help other children in need. A year after Erik died at the age of 37, the organization Erikshjälpen was founded in 1967. From the vision of helping children in need, the idea of the selling second-hand pieces to donate the proceeds to children's aid projects around the world was born. Furthermore, the organization is in close cooperation with the Christian church, as they work jointly on certain projects as well (Erikshjälpen, 2022).

The second external purpose communicated by Erikshjälpen is to have a positive impact on the environment by offering a range of second-hand items in its stores such as clothes, furniture, and books. By collecting and reselling these items, the organization claims to be part of a circular economy where things that have already been produced are used for as long as possible (Erikshjälpen, 2022). The following graphic, Figure 1, from Erikshjälpen's website illustrates their understanding of a *Circulär Ekonomi* (circular economy).
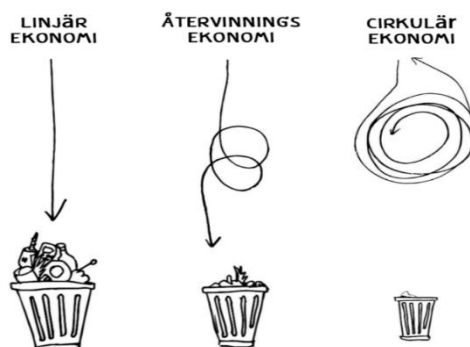

Figure 1: Circular Economy at Erikshjälpen (Erikshjälpen, 2022)

Costumers have the opportunity to purchase second-hand products, which means a saving of resources compared to the production of a similar new products. In addition, Erikshjälpen offers incentives to the donors of the products. For instance, they pick up furniture from the donators' homes and give them a small *Fika* (usually coffee and pastry) for their items as a symbol of their gratitude. In this way, Erikshjälpen encourages people who want to get rid of their items to donate them to the organization instead of throwing them away.

In addition, Erikshjälpen also pursues an internal purpose, which is to help all types of organizational members and give them a second chance by making their return or start to work-life as pleasant as possible. Thus, the organization states that they do not only give objects but also people a new chance (Erikshjälpen, 2022). Owing to the fact that many employees at Erikshjälpen have a background in mental and/or physical illness, drugs, unemployment, or difficult family situations, the organization has a very heterogeneous employee environment. In addition to volunteers, who work on an unpaid basis, and permanent employees who have long-term contracts, there are also workers who are sent by the *Arbetsförmedlingen* (Swedish employment agency) for work training or perform a court-ordered social service in order to avoid a prison sentence. This also provides the unusual situation where, in addition to the permanent employees, unpaid voluntary workers meet temporary workers who do not work there on their own initiative, but rather need to complete mandatory work at Erikshjälpen.

The structure of the Erikshjälpen store in Lund can be broken down as follows: At the top is the management team which works in close cooperation with the subordinate supervisors. Then follow the 10 heads of departments who supervise the permanent and temporary employees as well as the volunteers within their departments (e.g., fashion, furniture & books). In total, the store consists of 35 permanent employees, 42 temporary workers, and around 40 volunteers.[1]

3.4. Data Collection

The subsequent analysis refers to empirical material that was collected during four visits in an Erikshjälpen second-hand store. The data has been collected during interviews, ongoing observations as well as the attendance of a breakfast meeting with many organizational members. As indicated, this site has been chosen for its purpose-driven organizational mode which also focuses on employee well-being and support.

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[1] For reasons of clarity, in the course of the further paper we will use the term "employees" when referring to all types of staff, i.e., permanent employees, volunteers and temporary workers. If it refers only to a specific type of staff, this will be explicitly mentioned.

3.4.1. Interviews

This study includes interviews with a variety of organizational members of the Erikshjälpen store. To obtain a balanced sample, participants were selected on the basis of their representation of the positions within the organization (i.e., manager, supervisor, permanent employee, temporary worker and volunteer) to cover a large variety of perspectives and thereby create a comprehensive picture of the organization. Furthermore, in order to create a suitable research sample, the criteria that participants must speak English was defined upfront. Snowballing techniques (Noy, 2008) were used to identify relevant and willing interviewees. The total sample includes 12 interviewees.

The names and occasionally the genders of the participants were changed to guarantee anonymity. The length of the interviews was between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours. This was also dependent on how comfortable the participants felt in the interview situation. As indicated, many of the employees suffer from mental/physical health issues or other formative experiences, which also had an influence on their motivation and engagement in their work at Erikshjälpen. Some of the interviews were therefore shorter because we sensed that the participant did not want to go into further detail, and we respected that decision. But precisely because we also addressed highly sensitive topics, it was important in the context of the interviews that we give the participant the feeling of a safe environment. Therefore, as the interviewers, we intended to enter the participants *lifeworld* and conducted face-to-face in the back office of the store in order to better perceive the reactions of the participants and to adapt our further questions accordingly (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interview guide, which can be found in Appendix 2, includes a general overview of the main topics covered, but at the same time allowed us to be flexible in responding to interviewees' narratives, which went hand in hand with the abductive approach to exploring our dataset. This allowed for a two-way conversation and enabled participants to describe their perspectives in an unprompted, vivid, and detailed manner (Bryman, 2018).

3.4.2. Observations

It is argued that besides interviews, observations are also an appropriate data collection method within the interpretive traditions (Prasad, 2018). Thus, in addition to constant ongoing observations, we conducted one in-depth observation and joined a morning meeting with all employees on-site. At the beginning of the meeting all participants were informed about our role as researchers. Before, during and after the meeting we were able to have informal discussions with the organizational members, which helped us to compare the impressions from our observations with the answers we received during the interviews. Through the means of

ongoing observations, which were conducted before and after interviews, we looked at the ways the employees interacted with each other. These ongoing observations took place in the breakroom, the café as well as in the store.

3.5. Data Analysis

According to Rennstam & Wästerfors (2018), sorting, reducing, and analyzing are essential parts of the process of crafting an analysis. This chapter provides a reflection on the chosen methods of sorting and reducing the data through focusing on themes and crafting stories, as well as on the analyzing process, where we work within the tradition of SI to identify what constructs the relationship between employee engagement and a purpose-driven organizational mode. Subsequently, the reasoning behind presenting the findings in form of excerpt-commentary units will be elaborated on.

After the collection of the empirical data, it is sorted and reduced by looking for the most relevant themes. According to Ryan & Bernard (2003), who follow Agar's (1979) and Opler's (1945) terminology, a theme is an abstract construct that conceptually links expressions. Adopting Ryan & Bernard's (2003) approach, we investigated the data and asked: "What is this expression an example of?" (p. 87). For the process of sorting, scrutiny techniques such as looking for metaphors, repetitions, analogies and linguistic connectors were applied to deal with the problem of chaos and the lack of order within the material (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Sorting the material was followed by cutting the material with the use of processing techniques, i.e., by looking at wordlists and applying the key words in context-technique (KWIC), to address the problem of representation (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). We reduced our findings to three themes – each linked to the relationship between employee engagement and a purpose-driven organizational mode. The decisive criterion in selecting the themes was that these were referred to most frequently, which leads us to assume that they are of great importance to a large proportion of employees.

In line with Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995), we used our field notes as a basis to craft a story for those who were not present in the field. The three identified themes are explained through storytelling, which serves as a reduction principle and furthermore enables a sense of context as it prevents a fragmentation of the empirical data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). As indicated, we look through the lens of SI to analyze our empirical data. We draw on Blumer's (1969) three fundamental assumptions which claim that *human action depends on meaning*, whereas *different individuals assign different meanings* which are not predetermined but

constantly changing through interpretations (Prasad, 2018). The presentation of the empirical material in form of storytelling is also suitable for analyzing the *role taking* that is characteristic of the SI tradition (Prasad, 2018). Thus, the three tenets of SI and the different roles taken by individuals are identified within the stories and explain how they illustrate the relationship between employee engagement and a purpose-driven organizational mode.

The identified themes are presented in three stories about employee engagement within the purpose-driven organization Erikshjälpen. The first story, *'It's not money, money, money'* relates mainly to theme of religious and moral beliefs among the employees, discussed through the concept of *'Workplace Spirituality'*, as the good cause of the work is an aspect that engaged every interviewed organizational member. The second story *'They Always Listen'* entails data regarding the theme *'Employee Voice'*. The final main theme *'Caring Leadership'*, and its effects on employee engagement within a purpose-driven organization are presented in the story *'We Don't Judge, We Support'*.

The stories about the findings are presented in form of excerpt-commentary units, a method of argumentation established by Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995). It consists of an analytical point, a short orientation, an empirical excerpt, and an analytical comment, whereby the comment aims for a critical interpretation of the data. This method ensures that the argumentation is based on empirical facts, in this case the stories about our key themes, whilst at the same time including a theoretical message, i.e., the analysis of engagement through symbolic interactionism (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). By creating excerpt-commentary units, we get a handle on the empirical material and gradually put together a story to make the data accessible for the reader (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

3.6. Reflexivity

This chapter examines our take on reflexivity and how we implement it within our research. According to Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018), reflexivity consists of two characteristics, which are the careful interpretation and reflection. The former focuses on the importance of being aware of how interpretations are influenced by factors external to the empirical data, such as theoretical and prior assumptions, and the meaning of language. Reflection refers to the importance of critically questioning the object investigated and the researchers themselves as the constructors of the study within their context (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). We subsequently present three aspects in which we adapted reflexivity.

Firstly, regarding our choice of a case organization, it was important for us to be influenced by as few existing prior assumptions as possible. As mentioned, Erikshjälpen was recommended to us by a professor as a suitable organization for research. Because we both had visited the stores, but had no significant knowledge about the business model, we felt that we could implement a reflexive approach in our research without being too influenced by pre-existing assumptions.

Secondly, since we are two researchers, we have been able to address existing preconceptions as we continuously debated our interpretations of the empirical material. In addition, we found that communicating in our native language German promoted reflexivity, as we were able to express our interpretations in a more subtle manner and ensured that no details were lost in translation.

Lastly, we have positioned our study within the interpretive research tradition of SI, which means that we refrain from revealing objective truths but rather aim to explore subjective meanings (Prasad, 2018). Thus, we do not generalize the findings of our study, as they cannot be seen independently of its case context (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Instead, we let the data guide our research rather than relying on our own assumptions, in keeping up with our abductive research approach and symbolic interactionism. The application of reflexivity prompted us to rely on the inherent strengths of the two-way, dialogic nature of semi-structured interviews within a qualitative study at a single case-organization. However, limitations within this research approach among other constraints will be addressed subsequently.

3.7. Limitations

This chapter addresses the limitations regarding the chosen method of conducting research to analyze the relationship between a purpose-driven organizational mode and employee engagement.

The first limitation is of a generic character, in the sense that it concerns the validity of qualitative studies in general. It is important to be noted, that the qualitative nature of the research method entails a high level of subjectivity (Styhre, 2013). One of the main criticisms of qualitative methods is that it is based on a small subjective scale which makes the results difficult to be replicated in further studies. This means that these studies cannot provide generalized conclusions (Bryman, 2018). However, the strength of the qualitative research with its non-statistic orientation and subjectivity is the adequacy for the understanding of complex, nuanced, and context-dependent social processes (Prasad, 2018).

Furthermore, conclusions based on well-crafted qualitative research can generate theories about a variety of phenomena (Bryman, 2018), once the perspectives, techniques and styles in qualitative research have been tackled (Prasad, 2018). Within our philosophical grounding as well as in the previous part about reflexivity, we have acknowledged the subjectivity of reality and knowledge and the impact external influences can have. Thus, we have acknowledged that our results cannot be replicated as they belong to a certain context and have been filtered and interpreted through our (SI)-lens.

Secondly, we would like to highlight the limitations of the language barrier that we encountered during our empirical data collection. Even though we were able to interpret and discuss our findings in our native language German, the use of English as the interview language, which is neither the native language of most of the interviewees nor of us researchers, may have deprived us of potentially valuable nuances in descriptions. We were able to counteract this limitation to a certain extent, for example by encouraging the interviewees to simply say the Swedish word when a particular word was missing. Since all interviews were recorded, we were able to translate the word accordingly in the post-editing process. In addition, it was important for us to signal a safe setting for the interviewee with regard to this limitation. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2015) the quality of content produced in interviews depends on the relationship between researcher and interviewee and is also based on the interviewer's ability to create a safe and secure environment. Thus, we tried to overcome the language barrier with a lot of humor, empathy, and patience.

4. Empirical Findings and Analysis

The following chapters elaborate and analyze the findings of the research on employee engagement at the purpose-driven organization Erikshjälpen.

First, in the following chapter 'Dedicated Employees', some findings will be presented that demonstrate the extent to which employees engage themselves at the organization. With these insights we aim to establish a base for understanding the subsequently presented themes on the impact of beliefs, the emphasis on listening to the employee's voice and the caring leaders within Erikshjälpen.

These three findings will be presented in the form of stories which contain empirical material from the interviews and observations at Erikshjälpen. Each theme will be analyzed through the lens of SI. The first theme '*Believe It or Not*' provides insights for religious and moral beliefs as a motivator to pursue the organization's purposes. This theme relates mainly to Erikshjälpen's external purposes, i.e., helping children and the environment. Secondly, the theme '*Open Ears and Helping Hands*' contains findings about the employee's expression of voice and how it is perceived and acted upon by the management. Thirdly, the theme 'A*n Organization Full of Support*' provides an insight into the role of the caring management in the purpose-driven context at Erikshjälpen. The two latter themes have been identified to be closely linked to Erikshjälpen's internal purpose, i.e., helping employees.

4.1. Dedicated Employees

In general, our findings indicated that many employees felt a connection to the workplace in many ways and were particularly dedicated to doing their jobs. All the interviewees claimed that they were satisfied with their job and when asked if they would take an offer of a similar, slightly better paid job, they all answered they would not, except if it was absolutely necessary due to other circumstances. Among their most frequently mentioned explanations were the importance of their own physical and mental well-being, as well as their relationships with their colleagues at Erikshjälpen, which were prioritized over the increase of salary they would hypothetically receive at another organization.

Moreover, when asked a question about how they feel after a working day, numerous interviewees answered that they were tired, but added that it was "a good kind of tired", such as Sarah: "I feel tired, but I guess I'm happy, I'm happy to work, I'm happy to do something nice."; Elli: "Tired. But it feels good."; Max: "Exhausted, (*laughs*) but in a good way!"; or

Karla: "I feel pretty good. Sometimes tired because it's still work. But it's good and nice to know that you're a part of something that helps others."

The level of engagement was also evident through various incidents that were brought to our attention, regarding employees doing additional work that was not expected of them. For instance, Elli told us that she would regularly take home objects from the store, in order to sort them or research prices in her spare time. Jesper also recounted an observation he made, of a colleague who voluntarily wrote reports for the store at home in her free time, which was subsequently questioned by him: "I asked her: 'Why should you do that?', and she said to me: 'I love what I'm doing, I love my job.'"

Jesper himself also displayed great appreciation for his work through a poem he wrote for his colleagues, which can be found in its original form in Appendix 3. An excerpt of the poem (translated from Swedish) reads:

> *"And it feels like my home,*
>
> *So, I do my best to always have a nice home,*
>
> *And when I go home,*
>
> *I long for my home."*

Moreover, during the interview with Matilda, it was evident that it was of great importance to her to represent Erikshjälpen well and make us, the researchers, fully understand the concept and purposes of the organization. Therefore, when she was asked what Erikshjälpen does to engage their employees, she pulled out a printed graphic she had created when she heard that interviews were going to be conducted at the store. The illustration, which can be seen in figure 2, shows Matilda's perspective on the relationship between first, the children, who benefit from the stores' profits; second, the 'givers' and 'buyers' of the second-hand store, together with the environment; and third the workers at Erikshjälpen. These three corner stones are held together through compassion and values, and the leadership. This graph can be seen as an especially interesting piece of information, as it did not only provide detailed information about Matilda's understanding of the organization, but it also provided evidence for the level of connection and dedication Matilda herself displayed by voluntarily taking the time to create this illustration.

The children,
youngsters,
their families

Awareness for
the need

The gifts gives the vision for aid work

The gifts generate financial resources for aid work.

Compassion
Values

The
leadership

To be a good role model
To help others into work
To follow policies and routines

Grate gratitude

The gifts makes the reason for aid work.

The employees,
volunteers,
trainees etc.
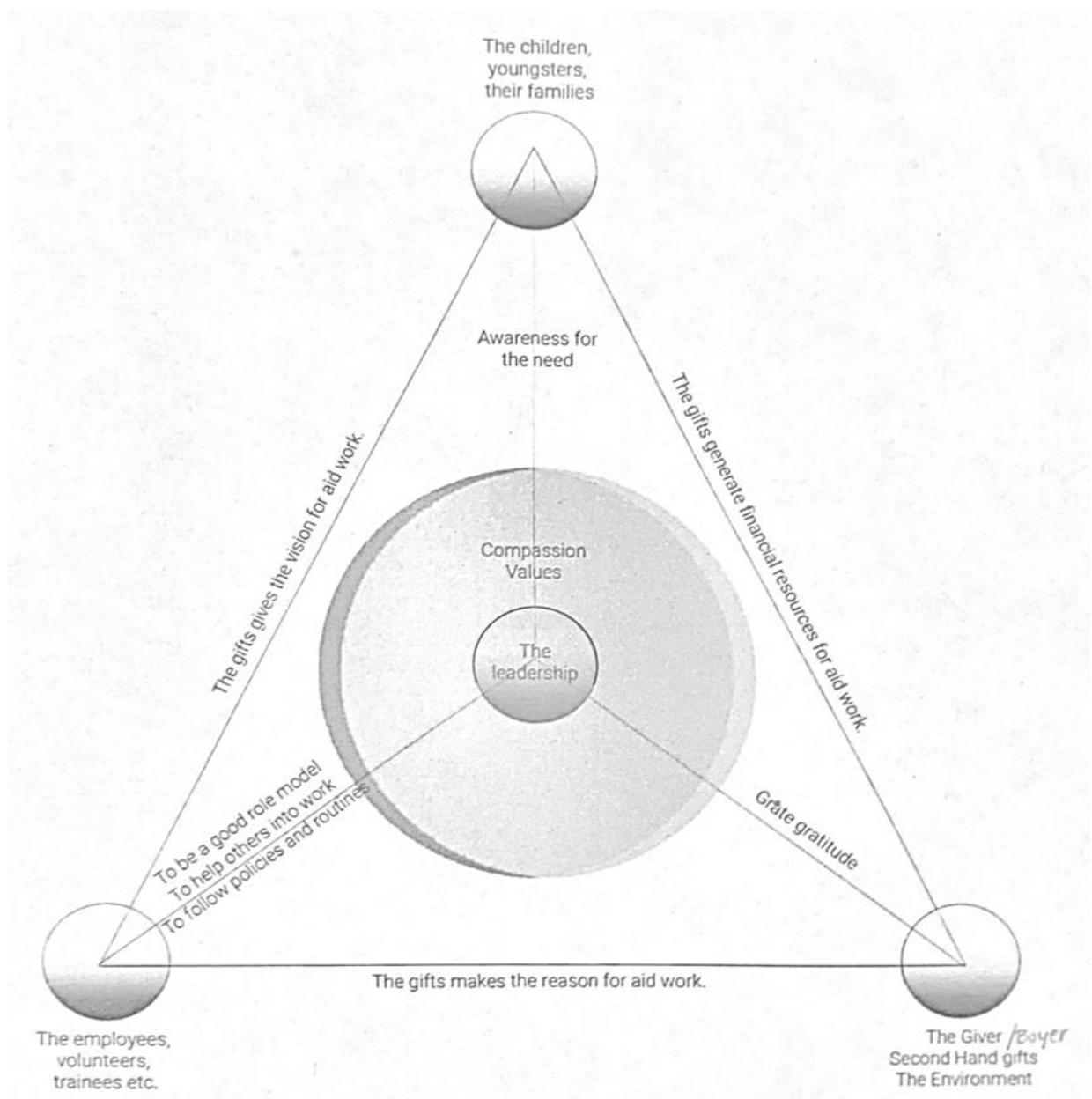
The Giver /Buyer
Second Hand gifts
The Environment

Figure 2: Matilda's Graphic of Erikshjälpen's Concept and Purposes

4.2. Believe It or Not

At Erikshjälpen, the findings highlighted certain values that were connected with spiritual beliefs. First, we found religious (Christian) beliefs held by employees, which were also deeply rooted in the parent organization; and second, we also found instances of non-religious beliefs, hereafter referred to as 'moral beliefs', for reasons of clarity. These personal beliefs have often been mentioned as a motivator for serving the organization's purposes. The theme has been identified through the finding of various strong metaphors and analogies linked to religion and spirituality. The expression of belief as a motivator for pursuing Erikshjälpen's mission has been predominantly focused on the organization's external purpose, i.e., helping children and being an environmentally friendly organization, and to a lesser extent also the internal purpose of supporting the employees. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the organization's external purposes, while the two subsequent Chapters 4.3. and 4.4. predominantly deal with the internal purpose.

Throughout the interviews, the workers at Erikshjälpen have been asked how they got to their position at Erikshjälpen and what they liked / disliked about their work. Moreover, they have been asked to explain the organization's concept in their own words, and in what ways this concept was important to them on a personal level. The findings, starting off with an illustrative story, exhibit the variety of answers regarding their religious and moral beliefs, and how this engaged them to pursue Erikshjälpen's purposes of helping children and the environment.

4.2.1. "It's not Money, Money, Money"

Before Kristina started working at Erikshjälpen, she had a well-paid job, a nice apartment in an expensive region of the country, and the prospect of a significant pension. But she told us that she had not been happy: "I was just empty, made a lot of money, but I didn't feel well. I drank kind of a lot too. I was about 115 kilos. So, I didn't feel good." One day when she was working, she went to the bathroom, got down on her knees and prayed: "Oh God, I want to be somewhere where I can help somebody.", and her prayer was answered: "One thing led to another, and I decided to apply for a job at Erikshjälpen." Although she had never been interested in second-hand before, and accepted a pay cut of about a third of her salary, she admitted that she never regretted her decision: "It has been a blessing. So, I'm really thankful to be here." Kristina's religious motivation is far from unique at the organization. Another employee, Felix, told us about a religious revelation and that he "received Jesus" on a trip to South America. He considered his job at the time as good work, but said that he suddenly felt like "I wanted to do something for me more meaningful." After praying for a new job and talking about this desire in his church group, a member of the group connected him with a leader at Erikshjälpen: "It

was an answer to my prayers." Another employee, Anne, also believed that her work at Erikshjälpen has been led through faith: "[The leaders] have been praying for a new supervisor, and I walked in." She felt comforted through the collective praying on Monday mornings, and the shared faith within the organization: "[We can] live out everything to Christianity, like helping people here and also in different countries."

Like many other employees, Max also explained his motivation for working at Erikshjälpen as being non-financial: "If I compare it with other places where they don't have [the faith], here it's the human being, the people, their well-being and everything around that's important, you see? You care about people and really help. It's not money, money, money." However, while the organization Erikshjälpen is deeply rooted in Christian faith and the store in Lund collaborates with a local church, faith is not a prerequisite to be employed there, as store manager Thomas asserted: "You can believe whatever it is, we're just glad for everybody here, and that we can help them out." This claim was substantiated by the interviewees who considered themselves atheistic or members of a different religion. They all affirmed that they do not feel excluded or disadvantaged due to their faith, or lack thereof. Some felt that, especially at the beginning, "it was a bit awkward because I'm not as religious" (Karla), and "at first, it was a bit weird to me. But it's actually quite nice." (Caroline), but no one expressed any opinions more negative than this. In fact, they even emphasized that "it's not something they push on us" (Elli).

Interestingly, while many of the Christian employees claimed to be mainly driven through their faith, the importance of these religious beliefs did not seem to be acknowledged to the same extent by all employees, such as James, who explained: "I'm not one of the people who believe in God. But [the faith] doesn't matter here because we are all working for the same thing." This also illustrated another motivator for working at Erikshjälpen and pursue a common goal: personal morals and the view that you can make yourself happy through helping others. As Thomas explained: "A lot of people that come here… it's not going to be for big salaries or something like that. You have to have the heart in the right place, to be willing to help people." For instance, Max had a well-paid job prior to suffering a tragic loss within his family. Afterwards, he started working at Erikshjälpen and explained that: "The only thing that I could do to feel better was working like this, helping other kids and the environment (…) So this gave me some meaning of life, to do something that matters." Karla, a young volunteer, who considered herself atheistic, also explained that her personal morals were a significant factor in choosing where to work: "I think it's important that your own thoughts and beliefs are pretty

aligned with whatever you're working with." and Sarah expressed her motivation through a deep connection to specific causes due to personal experiences. As she grew up in a war-ridden country herself, she pointed out that she was highly supportive of Erikshjälpen's most recent initiative to support Ukraine[2] with financial and material donations: "Because I know, I know from my heart what the war is, and how much effect on children [it can have]. So, when they said that we can have this kind of program, I'm glad!"

The religious and moral beliefs were mostly expressed in regard to Erikshjälpen's external purposes – children's aid and the environment. The most frequently mentioned and also publicly communicated purpose of Erikshjälpen is the globally acting children's aid. Virtually all interviewees have mentioned this matter in some form. For instance, Max explained that seeing proof of his organization's impact on children's aid project is what engaged him at work: "That it matters. That it makes a difference. That we have that purpose and that goal. We get some information and photos from different projects, and we can see what our work here generates. And so that really feels good." Receiving happiness by helping children was also a notion Elli mentioned: "It feels good. It feels like knowing that what you do helps so many people in other countries. It helps the kids. It's just… It's a good feeling." and James specified his motivation as: "Helping the most vulnerable in society. So, it feels really good to do this. Because you know that you are doing something good, and all the money goes to children that really need it. And that is the best feeling ever to know that you do good every day."

The environmental benefits of a second-hand store in regard to sustainability and circular economy were a less frequently explicitly mentioned factor, but still an important aspect for some interviewees, such as Karla: "(…) and also, it's second-hand. So, it's not as much consumption than what it would have been if it was newly produced.", and Jesper: "I like the idea to help children and other people, and I like the circle – that others throw out stuff, leave it here, and we can go through it, categorize it and sell it again. And so, the circle goes on all the time."

In addition to the environmental benefits, Matilda mentioned another potential of the concept of a second-hand store: to decrease the financial inequality gap within the Swedish society. She argued that through the Erikshjälpen stores, more people could afford what they regularly would not be able to, such as expensive brands: "So, if we could get these people to come here, the gap will be smaller in the society. And that will impact the society, because then we get less

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[2] Note: The research at Erikshjälpen was conducted between the 1st of March and the 6th of April 2022. The Russian invasion of Ukraine started on the 24th of February 2022. Therefore, this was a highly recent and present topic throughout the interviews.

people that have a lot of loans and debts (…) And also, when the gap gets smaller, there is no 'they' or 'we'. We are all in it together."

However, while all employees were informed about the purposes of Erikshjälpen, their individual levels of connection to the social projects varied. Some saw it as their main, omnipresent motivator, like Matilda: "Because we always talk about it, we remind ourselves then what we are here for. So, this is the main reason, to help other people.", or James: "Yeah, I do [think about the social causes]. Almost all the time. I think about it, because it's a big part of my motivation, that we're doing something that's really helping people that really need it. So that's a really good motivator.", or Elli: "It's hard to explain, but everyone does a bit extra. You know, everyone wants to do the work, because we know the money goes to good causes. So, people usually put in a little more energy to get things done." Whereas others admitted to being less informed about the specific projects that were supported by their organization's profits. However, they still expressed their trust in the righteousness of Erikshjälpen's charity work, as Caroline explained: "Personally, I'm not super educated in the specific projects that we do. But I do know that what I do goes to some of these projects that I know for certain are good, right? So, I'm not necessarily that I know like, 'alright, right now we're focusing on building this school in Ghana', or something like that. (…) So, it's on my mind, but it's not what I think of every day.", and Markus shared this view: "I believe Erikshjälpen, I believe the organization. So, I don't put questions, but of course, I want to know where the money goes, to which projects, how many people they can help, and how effective the help is. But maybe I was lazy, lazy about information, but I know a little bit."

4.2.2.   Spirituality at Erikshjälpen Through the Lens of SI

By analyzing the previous story about Kristina and the mentioned statements through the lens of SI, the relationship between religious and moral beliefs on engagement in a purpose-driven organization can be elucidated. Figure 3 shows the findings on the relationship between Erikshjälpen's external purpose, and the employee's religious and moral beliefs, combined under the term workplace spirituality.
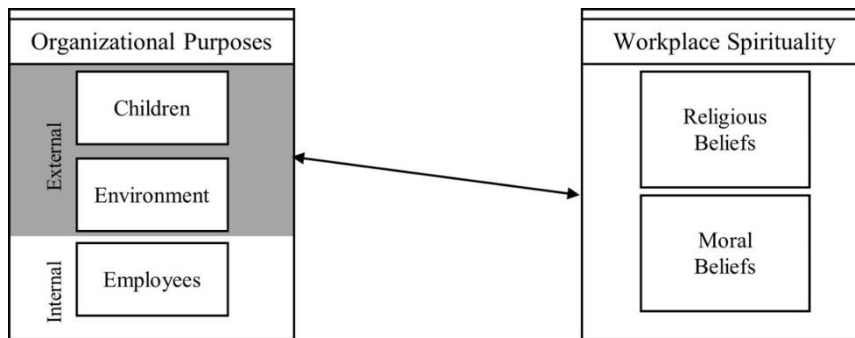
Figure 3: Organizational Purposes and Workplace Spirituality

The first tenet within the SI tradition indicates that people *act based on the meaning they have assigned to something*. For example, by analyzing Felix' action of looking for a new job that was 'more meaningful' through this SI lens, it can be concluded that his engagement was built on fulfilling the external purpose as much as possible. His religious beliefs and the meaning behind it have led to the action of working in a purpose-driven organization. For Sarah, however, it was the non-religious moral beliefs that appeared to strengthen her engagement to work towards fulfilling the external purpose. By having witnessed war and knowing how much children suffer through it, her moral beliefs reinforced her commitment to the external purpose.

When the story is analyzed through the second tenet which implies that *different people ascribe different meanings to objects*, it becomes apparent that the degree of attachment and the type of belief had an influence on the engagement with regard to external purposes. For example, James said that the faith did not matter at Erikshjälpen, whilst Anne claimed to feel comforted through the collective praying. These meanings, on which the engagement was composed, are based on previous social interactions. Despite the fact that the meanings are different, it can still be seen within the organization that, even if to a varying degree, all members were engaged in pursuing the external purpose, through either moral or religious beliefs. This can be seen, for example, in Thomas' statement "You can believe whatever it is, we're just glad for everybody here" or James, who said that "We are all working for the same thing".

The third tenet states that the *meaning given to something is not permanent and can change* due to everyday life. Kristina, in her life before she worked at Erikshjälpen, claimed to have felt empty and unhappy as she did not live according to Christian values and thus experienced a lack of meaning in her life. However, she explained that she had changed her mind one day and decided to follow these values, which made her end up at Erikshjälpen. The change in the meaning of faith had an impact on her life. Instead of feeling empty, she pointed out that she became motivated and experienced a deeper meaning for herself that engaged her at work.

4.3. Open Ears and Helping Hands

In the process of sorting the findings, another theme was particularly evident: The ways in which employees could express their voice and were listened to by management also seemed to have strengthened their engagement. This can be mainly traced back to the organization's internal purpose: creating a caring and supportive working environment for their employees. This theme, similarly to the previous one, has been identified through the frequent mentioning of matters related to employee voice, as well as rich metaphors and analogies that the participants utilized during the interviews. The following story, which contains such metaphors, will illustrate the managers' open ears for the organizational members' voices and the subsequent actions taken.

4.3.1. "They *Always* Listen"

When Eva joined the organization as an employee, store manager Thomas claimed that he immediately knew that she had the potential to add great value to Erikshjälpen's in-store Café. As he explained that she had previously owned a restaurant herself and had the experience, the motivation, and the visions to whip the Café into shape. Thomas encouraged Eva to embrace her ideas, which she promptly did through a continuously increasing menu. However, he recounted that he soon noticed that her co-workers were not able to keep up with the progressively complex offerings, which led to stress and frustrations among them. Matilda, a supervisor, recalled the situation using a ladder-metaphor, describing that Eva was high up on the ladder due to her professional background. However, Thomas explained to her that she needed to take a few steps down in order to meet her co-workers' needs: "If I just go [up the ladder] myself that is not helping anyone. (…) She had to take those hands and lift them." Consequently, the Café's menu was reduced again. According to Matilda, Eva's reaction was understanding and a change of mindset: "And she started to listen to them: 'Oh, I can help!' Then she sees it and she's thriving in another way. Because you can thrive, but you can also lift other people." Thomas acknowledged that a more sophisticated menu would presumably have increased the customers' interest and willingness to pay and therefore the reduction of the Café's menu had likely come at the expense of some of its profits. However, this only further illustrated Erikshjälpen's characterization as a purpose-driven, not-for-profit organization, or as Thomas put it: "We always have to be in a place that puts the right emphasis on the right thing.", and that 'right thing' is hardly ever profits.

Another situation explained to us, that created frustration among various employees, was caused by the accumulating material donations, which led to an increasing lack of space to store and display all the received items. Elli disclosed: "I think something that annoys all of us at the moment is the lack of space. It's just frustrating, very much." Jesper agreed: "We throw a lot of good stuff. But we [need to] throw it, because if we don't throw everything, it will not be enough space for us.", and James added: "I would think that frustration comes when it's too much to do and too little staff. Or maybe because of the house, the whole place is really getting too small. (…) There are not enough lockers to keep the stuff. There is like two or three bathrooms for over 100 people." According to the employees, this problem of lack of space had been an ongoing conversation in the store and Thomas had listened to the organizational members' concerns and subsequently taken measures to improve the situation: "They are really working on getting this done as soon as possible (…) So, now we are going to expand in the next building, so it's going to be much better!", James said enthusiastically. Caroline also referred to this situation when reflecting on what makes Erikshjälpen special compared to other workplaces: "This is the first place where my boss comes to me and asks me what I need, so we can get better. So that's very different from: 'Why aren't you doing this? Why didn't we reach that goal? (…)' Here it's more like 'Do you need more staff? Do you need more space? What can we do to help you?' (…) And that's one of the main things for me that really makes a difference."

All the interviewees described the communication at Erikshjälpen as very good. Besides the less frequently used internal Facebook group and annual employee feedback surveys, the joint breakfast every morning was named as the biggest channel for information, where all employees were informed daily about matters relating to the store, sales, and social projects. While these meetings were described as usually more of a form of one-way communication, from the management to the subordinates, the employees asserted that an ongoing two-way communication was always possible and encouraged by the leaders. Listening played an important role in leadership, as Matilda explained: "So for us in leadership, it is important to also listen to people: hear, be present, and see what the need is.", and Felix expressed: "Yes, we always listen to them, and we take a step back if we need. And then we come back again." The workers confirmed that they felt heard, and their opinions were valued, for instance Max: "[The leaders] are always open for if you have any ideas (…) They're always open and listen. Always listen, and always help.", or Sarah: "They always hear, they always listen to you. They *always* do that." Even the short-term volunteers, like Karla, felt listened to: "Decisions are made collectively. We discuss with each other; we take it to the manager. We suggest things [to them],

they suggest things to us. We discuss it out." Of course, not every idea expressed by an organizational member could be implemented. But the interviewees also showed understanding for their leaders in these situations, such as Caroline: "I always feel like they're listening to me at least. Doesn't necessarily mean that I get what I want, but, you know, at least they listen. If it doesn't work out, I can always say 'I told you so!'"

In addition, interviewees at Erikshjälpen were also asked if they are members of a union, their reasons for or against it, and if they had ever forwarded any complaints to a union. "No, I'm not part of a union. But if I do have something I want to say, then I tell my colleagues or the manager.", Karla explained. In fact, only some of the employees confirmed that they were members of a union, but either simply due to their previous jobs, or as a measure of safety in case of unemployment. Others stated that they were not part of a union, because they did not consider it necessary, and a few employees were not even aware of what a union was for[3]. Overall, no employee had claimed to have forwarded a complaint to a union, nor have they heard of any present or previous colleagues, where this was the case. There was a clear consensus that there was no need for involving a union in any potential issues at their workplace, as Felix agreed: "I believe I don't need it. Because I think I have it in the store managers."

4.3.2. Listening to the Employees' Voice Through the Lens of SI

As within the first part of the findings section, the story of this section will now also be analyzed and discussed utilizing the three central ideas of symbolic interactionism from the different narratives. Moreover, the findings are illustrated in Figure 4, which shows the relationship between the organization's purposes and the management's reactions to the employees' voices – listening and taking action.
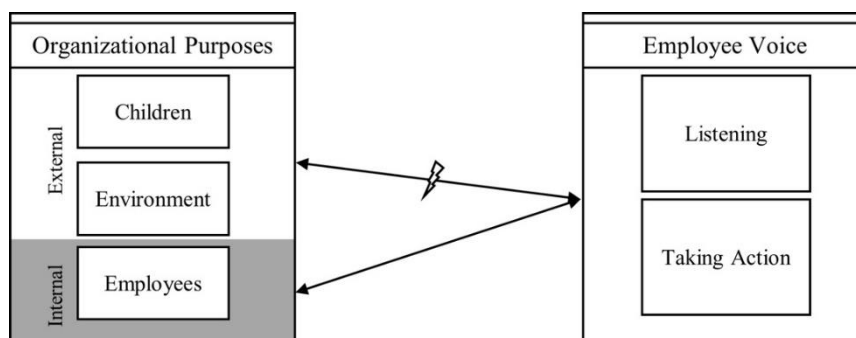

Figure 4: Organizational Purposes and Employee Voice

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[3] The Swedish term for union was then explained in these situations, to ensure that this unawareness was not due to a language barrier.

First, it is said that humans *act based on the meaning* they have given something. Initially, Thomas appeared to create meaning from his perception of Eva's high motivation and capabilities. He seemed to recognize her potential and encouraged her to live out her visions for the Café, in order to provide her with the opportunity for professional growth and foster her engagement. In this case, his action was also based on the importance he claimed to ascribe to the internal purpose. Because he wanted to help Eva to pursue her passion, he agreed to expand the menu. Another situation this tenet can be applied to in this story is regarding the usage of unions. Since none of the organizational members considered the expression of voice via a union to be necessary, it had not been utilized for this purpose.

The second tenet indicates that individuals give meaning to things based on our social interactions. The same thing can have a *different meaning for different people*. While Thomas' and Eva's positive perceptions of the benefits of an extended menu seemed to be aligned in the beginning, Eva's co-workers *assigned a different meaning* to the increasingly complicated menu as they claimed that they perceive it as stressful and frustrating. Thus, after Thomas stressed the importance and meaning of Erikshjälpen's internal purpose, he listened and responded quickly to the expression of voice in the form of frustration by his employees. As it appeared that the employees felt that their voice was taken seriously, they seemed to feel heard and appreciated. This was further shown in James' statements, where he claimed that the Erikshjälpen store was a special place in regard to engaging employees because "they always listen".

The third tenet claims that the meaning given to something is not permanent and can change due to everyday life. Consequently, when Thomas noticed this discrepancy in perceptions, it seemed that his own perceived *meaning of the situation changed*, as he recognized the potentially detrimental impact of overstraining his employees. However, although Thomas' perception and hence approach to the situation changed, his actions were consistently led by an attempt to maximize engagement among employees. This was evident in his initial action to encourage Eva to realize her potential, and his subsequent change in approach to sustain the engagement among the other employees, who were seemingly on the verge of disengagement due to the excessive demands. The necessity of showing consideration for her team members was thus also communicated to Eva, who pointed to the importance of showing understanding and hence reduced the menu again.

4.4.   An Organization Full of Support

The third and last identified theme that was significantly mentioned in almost all the interviews was the supportive and caring work environment as we found, in line with our abductive approach, through looking at wordlists and applying the KWIC technique. The observations conducted during the attended breakfast meeting and before and after the interviews strengthened this finding. Most of the organizational members appreciated the caring atmosphere created by the leaders to fulfil the internal purpose of helping the employees, and often even seemed to reciprocate this care towards their colleagues. However, some appeared to feel that the caring aspect clashed with the external purpose of making profits for the children-aid projects, whilst others claimed to have felt even more engaged to gain a lot of money for the external purposes through the appreciation and care they received from the management.

The subsequent story about two employees at Erikshjälpen portrays how they perceived the caring leadership style and how it affected their engagement in relation to the internal and external purposes. The first main character Elli is a young head of department, who suffered from severe mental and physical health issues before she came to Erikshjälpen. She started as a work trainee who was sent by the employment agency and eventually received a permanent position. The second main character within this story is Sarah, a lawyer who grew up in the Middle East and claimed to have come to Europe in the hope for a better life. She started as a volunteer and then later became an employee at Erikshjälpen. The story is supported by statements and narratives from the management team and other organizational members.

4.4.1. "We Don't Judge, We Support"

Anne leaned back and reflected on what really motivated her becoming a supervisor at Erikshjälpen: "I think it is mostly when I can help the people here and when they want to speak to me about how they feel or if I feel like I can be a support for them. I think that's very important for me to also *see* the people here." She smiled while she talked about the development of Elli that she had observed over the last few months: "When Elli came here, she did not have a real job for maybe 10 years and the work training she undertook before also did not go well."

Elli also recalled the situation: "I tried a bunch of different places to work, and nothing really worked. And I just got sick again, all the time until I came here. Before, I could hardly work a whole week without staying home with depression and anxiety. And I was at a point a lot where I wanted end my life. And now I've been here. For one and a half years, I've had *one* day home."

Anne added: "Here, she wants to come every day. And if she has a bad day, she just wants to come here because she knows it makes her feel better. She was also daring to do more things".

What was it about Erikshjälpen that made Elli not want to work anywhere else? "There is something special about this place", Elli said, "I feel like I can be myself here. If I have a bad day, that's totally okay. My coworkers will come check up on me as the day goes by, like, 'Are you okay?', 'I'm here if you need to talk'. And everyone is just so kind, [and] helpful. Everyone cares. And I love that part – making everyone feel welcome." In fact, this caring environment had strengthened her engagement to the point where she even took work home with her: "I usually take stuff home and work in my spare time. (…) I also like to look up prices and stuff like that. So sometimes I have told myself 'Nope, no more. Don't bring anything' (…) Because I love my work!", she laughed.

Elli knew that the leadership team was always there to care, listen and help and that they were not afraid "to dig in". As an example, she mentioned: "One time I was trying to put the shelf up. So, I was sitting on floor and trying myself to raise it up. And it just didn't work. (…) And Thomas came by. And he just sat down on the floor and fixed the shelf. They're not afraid to help us wherever it's needed. They're not the kind of leaders that sit in their office all day."

Thomas knew that the leadership at the Erikshjälpen store needed to be different from other workplaces, as he emphasized: "We work with a lot of people that need a lot of help in a lot of different ways. So, we try to see when we employ somebody in leadership, we try to look into the heart and we try to explain to him/her that this is tough work, if you're going to do it, you work with a lot of people that need a lot of help and need our time and help in a lot of different ways. (…) So, we help them and coach them so that they feel safe. We don't judge them (…), we just try to support them."

Elli described that she recently found herself in a "funny situation", where she was not so much in need of being cared for anymore. For instance, when a department achieved a record in sales, the management team organized a 'hotel-breakfast' on Friday mornings, which consisted of a sumptuous buffet. Since Elli was so engaged and thriving in her work, her department among others had sales records that resulted in many 'hotel-breakfast Fridays' recently. "And the part that's funny is that some of us think that the hotel-breakfast takes too much time, or we don't have time to have breakfast for that long because we have so much to do. So, some people, me included, tried to get them to skip the hotel-breakfast. One colleague asked if we could tone it down a bit because it takes too much time from work. I've never heard of that before, where the

staff is like 'No, we don't have time to have breakfast. We want to work' Yeah, that's kind of funny.", she proudly said.

However, store manager Thomas had rejected the request to stop the hotel-breakfast, as he said: "We need to maintain our integrity. And that is our employees. You can't push them that hard. They have to be able to feel well in the work that they do. On Fridays it is more relaxed as we redo the whole store, they really like to be here. And we have a fest or a party or something if we have sales records. So even as we grow, we're putting more focus on the employees to take care of them."

This caring atmosphere also received confirmation from other employees, as Max, another head of department, put it: "I think it's a good balance. I don't feel like we *have* to sell. I mean, it's good for... the more we sell, the more kids we can help. But they don't press us. It's fun to make good figures, it is! And if you're a little bit filled with competition, it's nice, but you know all the time that it's not the important thing. It is important but it's... *the human comes first, and that we feel*. Some people maybe, they are talking too much about money."

Sarah was such a young and motivated employee, who would have liked to see more emphasis on raising money for the external causes. She said: "I know some people they just watch the clock and then watch it and watch it and waiting for the time to go by and they run away. So, it's not working for us. We should be motivated, happy, and energetic, but these people obviously stop us in so many ways... I have some personal experience. Last week, I tried so hard, and we sold a lot in the department. And one of the persons said to me 'You make us look lazy. We don't want to work hard.' And I said, 'Okay, we can do it faster *together*', but they were not happy with me".

She explained the "laziness" of some employees as follows: "The people that are here, most of them are not hired by Thomas, so they are forced to work here[4] and they are not happy, we are not happy. But it is the organization that's supposed to help people and we should deal with that." Another situation she recalled was when the head of her department was on vacation: "The sales numbers fell down (…), when she's not here, our team is not motivated. They have physical and mental problems, I know that, but it is so hard. And they make us slower. For me, as a fast person, it is torture, it is completely torture."

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[4] Referring to work trainees that are sent by the employment agency Arbetsförmedlingen to continue receiving benefits from the state, and the people completing court-ordered community service.

Sarah was not the only one who had experienced the dichotomy of raising as much money as possible for the children's projects, but also being a support for the organizational members. For example, Elli also acknowledged: "Sometimes people can just disappear. You don't know where they are. That's a bit frustrating at times, but you just have to deal with it."

Sarah claimed that if she was a leader at the store, she would do it differently: "If I can, I reconsider all of the employees here. Then promote someone that deserves more and fire some (…) If I can do that, I definitely start with that point." She would look for employees that are, as she described: "Happier, nicer, and more engaged in the work and that really appreciate the work. Not just, you know, take time, get paid and then leave sooner, so not that."

Even though Sarah, among other employees, was bothered by the composure and understanding that was shown to the slower working colleagues, she also appreciated their caring leadership style herself in some situations: "For example, Anne… Do you know her? She has a golden heart. She's so nice. And most of the time she speaks personally. She says 'Is it Okay? Are you happy?' She is so, so nice. And everybody loves her, everybody. Because she's smiling all the time and does not push so hard. She is a supervisor, but she does not say 'do that, do that!', instead she always says, 'if you have time, please can you help there?' It feels good, I appreciate that."

4.4.2. The Caring Leadership Style Through the Lens of SI

The previous story illustrated the different perceptions of the caring leadership approach. With its central characters Sarah and Elli, the story demonstrated how caring affects their engagement regarding the internal and external purposes. Now, through the lens of SI, the different conceptions within the story will be analyzed. Figure 5 depicts the findings on the relationship between the organizational purposes and the caring leadership style at Erikshjälpen.
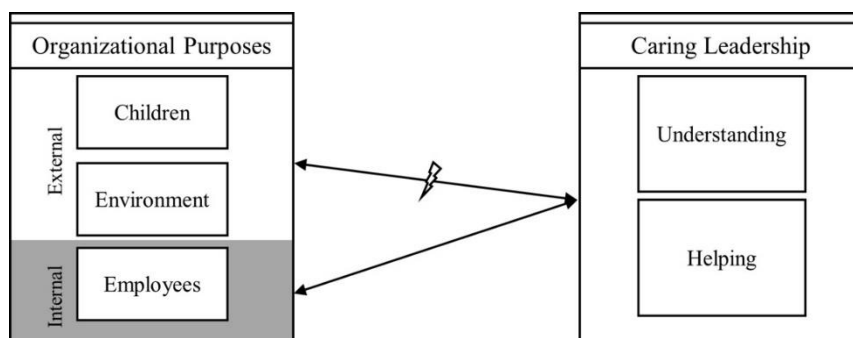

Figure 5: Organizational Purposes and Caring Leadership

By viewing the story through the second principle of the SI tradition, namely that *different people assign different meanings to objects,* it becomes clear that Elli and Sarah both perceived the caring differently because it had a different meaning for them, which in turn affected their engagement. Whilst Elli claimed that the caring and understanding was a source of engagement that got her back into life, for Sarah the patience for the 'slower people' was rather a source of disengagement that discouraged and 'stopped her'.

This, in turn, analyzed through the first tenet of the SI tradition, which suggests that *action depends on meaning,* can be explained as followed: While Elli started at Erikshjälpen because she was sent by the work training agency, as she had difficulties working elsewhere due to her health conditions, the internal purpose appeared to mean more for her than for Sarah. Sarah, as mentioned in the story 'It's not money, money, money' in Chapter 4.2.1., based her meaning to work at Erikshjälpen more on the external purpose, because she had experienced the war in the Middle East herself and claimed to know how it harms the children. Therefore, she wanted to earn as much money as possible and was thereby motivated.

The third principle of the SI tradition, which says that *meanings are not predetermined but constantly changing through individual interpretations*, can also be applied as a lens to analyze the employees' engagement. Elli had found her way back into life through the caring and supportive atmosphere at Erikshjälpen. Nevertheless, she admitted that the consideration for colleagues who 'just disappear' could also be frustrating. In fact, she was even at a point where she could focus her engagement more on the external purpose and working in the store to raise as much money as possible for the children's aid projects. This explains why she said she wanted to skip the hotel-breakfasts and takes additional work home. Due to the changing meaning of caring leadership, Elli's perception of engagement had changed: For her, the external purpose then appeared to come before the internal one. The story also illustrated that Sarah's meaning was not predetermined but constantly changed through interpretations. Even though she pointed out that she was frustrated when the caring leadership concerned her colleagues, that therefore work slower, she appreciated the caring when it affected herself.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, the above presented findings will be discussed in regard to employee engagement and not-for-profit organizations literature, in order to answer the research question:

How is employee engagement related to a purpose-driven organizational mode?

Following an abductive approach, we analyzed our findings without being too influenced by the existing literature. Most surprising was the significant role of beliefs in employee engagement, as well as the influence of the caring environment, which gave the employees the space to engage at work at their own pace. The particularly caring behavior of the management team also had a great impact on the well-being of the employees, who consequently also stated that this contributed to their strengthened engagement.

The findings suggest that Erikshjälpens' purpose-drive, comprised of its internal and external purposes, provides the space for employees to live out their moral and religious beliefs at their workplace, to raise their voices on organizational and personal matters, and to be heard and cared for by their leaders.

Therefore, our findings will now be discussed with literature on employee engagement, which Kahn (1990) defines as *"the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances"* (p. 694). However, research on this concept is lacking findings in the purpose-driven context. The few existing studies have found that NFP employees can be highly engaged through factors such as attachment to mission and belief in their organization's purpose and values (Word & Norton, 2011), as well as work-life balance and work design (Nguyen & Pham, 2020). In this discussion, we will address these findings from the existing literature from the NFP-context but also include employee engagement literature from outside the purpose-driven context. For instance, Kahn's (1990) identified three psychological conditions correlating positively with an individual's level of engagement - psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability – will be taken into account, when discussing how and to what extend our identified findings are related to employee engagement.

5.1. Finding Personal Purpose in the Organizational Purpose

Rey, Bastons & Sotok (2019, p. 4) argue that "*The fulfillment of personal purpose within organizational purpose is the essence of truly purpose-driven organizations.*" In accordance with this statement, the findings show that organizational members frequently refer to their moral and religious beliefs in the organization's purposes as an explanation of what made them consider their work as meaningful and how this consequently engaged them. This establishes a connection to the concept of workplace spirituality, which Kinjerski & Skrypnek (2004) define as: "the experience of employees who are passionate about and energized by their work, find meaning and purpose in their work, feel that they can express their complete selves at work, and feel connected to those with whom they work" (p. 27). In an attempt to establish a link between employee engagement and these different types of beliefs, referred to as workplace spirituality, Saks (2011) describes psychological meaningfulness to be "at the heart of workplace spirituality and employee engagement." (p. 328). The findings on workplace spirituality and employee engagement at Erikshjälpen will subsequently be discussed in relation to Saks' (2011) model, consisting of three dimensions, *transcendence*, *community*, and *spiritual values*. Moreover, a link will be established between the employees' beliefs and the condition of psychological meaningfulness. As mentioned in the literature review, Kahn's (1990) first condition of employee engagement, psychological meaningfulness*,* is experienced by employees when they feel "worthwhile, useful, and valuable – as though they made a difference and were not taken for granted." (p. 704). Through the interviews, a multitude of implications were identified that indicate links between the religious and moral beliefs and this condition, as will be elaborated in the subsequent sections.

Transcendence: Working Towards Something Greater

The interviewees at Erikshjälpen have frequently named a feeling of working towards a common goal or 'something greater' as a reason for their engagement at work. It was especially evident, that the strongest connection with the employees' personal beliefs could be seen in regard to Erikshjälpen's external purpose: supporting various children's aid projects around the world, through the profits of the second-hand store. Many of the interviewees referred to these projects as their motivator to apply at the organization in the first place. Some even reported having had well-paid jobs before but choosing to apply at Erikshjälpen due to the desire of wanting to be part of 'something greater'. Therefore, similar to the purpose-driven organization itself, many of Erikshjälpen's members claim to be driven by a purpose, rather than money.

Among the individuals who are working at Erikshjälpen due to orders from the unemployment service or completing court-ordered community service, spirituality cannot be seen as a motivator to apply at the organization in the first place, as they received these positions on an involuntary basis. However, various of these organizational members still claimed that the organization's purpose is a significant source of meaningfulness and thus engagement within their daily work. Some interviewees had even started their career at the organization through such an involuntary period and were subsequently offered permanent employment at Erikshjälpen due to their high engagement as perceived by the management.

These findings relate to Saks' (2011) first dimension of workplace spirituality: *Transcendence*, which "involves feeling a connection to something greater than oneself." (Saks, 2011, p. 330). Moreover, the workplace spirituality and its relation to employee engagement at Erikshjälpen are also in line with Ashmos & Duchon (2000), who argue that "spirituality at work has appeared in part because people want to feel connected to work that is important, and they want to feel connected to each other at work." (p. 137). Through the application of the first tenet within the SI tradition, it can be seen that many employees based their level of engagement at work on their personal evaluation of their religious and moral beliefs and therefore considered the work at the organization as meaningful and worthwhile.

Sense of Community: The Role of Shared Beliefs

In addition to the role of personal beliefs, many interviewees at Erikshjälpen also claimed to be happy and engaged at work due to their good relationships with their colleagues and the fact that they are all working together towards the same goal. Moreover, at least for the Christian employees, the shared faith and collective praying cultivated the sense of community even further. Feeling connected to each other at work also relates to Saks' (2011) second dimension of workplace spirituality, a *sense of community*, which is "a deep connection with others at work" (p. 330). In addition, the working environment at Erikshjälpen has been described as caring and supportive by various interviewees, referring to the organization's internal purpose of caring for the employees. Correspondingly, Saks (2011) argues that the likeliness of experiencing meaningful work is enhanced by "a caring and supportive community and when their organization is driven by spiritual values that influence the way employees are treated and their well-being" (p. 331). Moreover, Erikshjälpen can clearly be seen as being 'driven by spiritual values', as it is strongly connected to the church and deeply rooted in Christian beliefs, which guide the organization to fulfill the external purposes of caring for children and the environment. In addition, Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson (2003) argue that "the essence of

community is that it involves a deeper sense of connection among people, including support, freedom of expression, and genuine caring" (p. 429). This further connects the concept of workplace spirituality with the two subsequently described factors, employee voice and caring leadership at Erikshjälpen.

In the interviews, the participants were also presented with a hypothetical situation of being offered a better paid job by a different employer. The interviewees frequently rejected this offer with the argument of having an inimitable community at their current workplace. This is consistent with Anitha (2014), who found that the factors 'working environment' and 'team and co-worker relationship' had a major impact on employee engagement. Moreover, an explanation can be found by Ashmos & Duchon (2000), who argue that the bureaucratic and scientific management models, which can still be found in many traditional for-profit organizations in the form of work specialization, "led to a sense of isolation and alienation among workers" (p. 136), and the importance of community is just now being rediscovered in certain organizations. An example of this can be seen through the account of Kristina's experiences before she came to Erikshjälpen, as we have analyzed through the third tenet of the SI tradition: In her previous work she felt empty and isolated, and consequently disengaged, as she did not live out her faith. Within the purpose-driven organization Erikshjälpen, the sense of community and shared values are lived out, fostering her engagement.

Spiritual Values: Alignment

As mentioned above, many of Erikshjälpen's organizational members referred to their Christian faith as significant source of motivation and engagement. However, also non-Christian employees recurrently referred to their personal moral beliefs in explanations of their engagement at work. This relates to the third of Saks' (2011) dimensions of workplace spirituality, which is *spiritual values*, whereby he references Jurkiewicz & Giacalone's (2004) "values framework of workplace spirituality", which includes values such as benevolence, integrity, respect, trust, etc. Although it is emphasized in workplace spirituality literature, that the concept is not about religion, researchers acknowledge that religious beliefs at work may play an important role for some people (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). At Erikshjälpen, it seems that although some members draw their engagement from their Christian faith, while others feel more connected due to their moral beliefs, the fundamental values are still widely shared and aligned among them. According to Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson (2003), "a strong sense of alignment between their personal values and their organization's mission and purpose" (pp. 429-430) is crucial for employee engagement. They also argue that this alignment includes the

trust in the appropriateness of the managers' and colleagues' personal values. In addition, Saks (2011) argues that through strong alignment between one's personal and the organizational values, a "more complete and holistic form of engagement" can be achieved (p. 327).

In conclusion, while Erikshjälpen's values are deeply and historically rooted in Christian faith, most non-Christian members also displayed great levels of alignment with these values, as was identified through applying the lens of the second tenet of the SI tradition on the findings. Even though different individuals assign different meanings to the role of religious beliefs, they are aligned in their perception that they are all working towards the same goal and exhibit corresponding levels of engagement.

5.2. Listening to the Employees' Voice

Our findings indicate that creating a safe environment at Erikshjälpen, where employees felt comfortable and encouraged to express themselves and voice their opinions, was a significant factor in fulfilling the organization's internal purpose and affecting employee engagement. This, in turn, also contributed to the organization's external purpose, as the engaged employees were encouraged to voice their ideas and opinions on store-related topics, which frequently led to the implementation of their sales promoting ideas and other suggestions for improvement. Ruck, Welch & Menara (2017), who found that employee voice is significantly related to employee engagement, identified two relevant dimensions of employee voice, i.e., *upward employee communication* and *senior management receptiveness*. Similarly, Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004) argue that employee engagement may be highly dependent on "the extent to which employees feel able to voice their ideas, and managers listen to these views and value employee's contributions." (p. 11). Here, the first part of employees feeling able to voice ideas, can be seen as referring to upward employee communication, while the latter part of managers listening and valuing the contributions can be linked to the extent of management receptiveness. Therefore, these two factors will subsequently be discussed in regard to Erikshjälpen's internal communication. Furthermore, we take up on Kahn's (1990) second identified condition of employee engagement *psychological safety*, that describes, the "sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career" and is achieved in situations that are "trustworthy, secure, predictable, and clear in terms of behavioral consequences" (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). In line with Kahn (1990), Ruck, Welch & Menara (2017) argue that in situations where the expected response from management to critical employee voice is uncertain or negative, "exercising upward critical voice can involve employees placing their feelings of psychological safety at risk" (p. 907). Thus, we also discuss the relationship

between employee voice and its relation to the condition of psychological safety in regard to employee engagement in a purpose-driven context.

Upward Employee Communication: The Meaning of Informal Employee Voice

According to Ruck, Welch & Menara (2017), *upward employee communication* refers to opportunities provided to the employees to exchange views about issues with superiors, upward problem-solving and feedback on certain matters. In line with this, Dromey (2014) argues that a factor that seems to be especially important for giving employees a sense of voice is the contact between members of all levels of the organizational hierarchy, for instance between senior managers and frontline employees. Throughout the interviews at Erikshjälpen, it was clear that this personal contact on all level played a significant role for the organizational members. All interviewees, regardless of their position or form of employment, claimed to be convinced that they can always voice their opinions on any potential ideas or issues to any of their superiors, including the store manager on the highest organizational level. Various communication channels were named, such as the daily breakfast meetings, an internal Facebook group and annual employee feedback surveys. However, the most significant communication channel identified at Erikshjälpen is simply the employees' constant possibility to talk to any superior at any given time, which can be seen as an informal form of voice as described by Marchington et al. (2016).

Interestingly, while unions play a significant and historical role in academic literature on employee voice (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017), they did not seem to be of relevance at Erikshjälpen. As argued by many organizational members, they did not see their need to indirectly express their voices through a union, but rather feel comfortable expressing themselves directly to their colleagues and managers. Thus, no interviewee claimed to have ever forwarded a complaint about the organization to a union, nor does anyone have knowledge about any previous or present colleagues involving a union in work-related issues. This indicates that the work atmosphere created at Erikshjälpen impacts the employees' perception of their psychological safety to the extent that they do not consider it necessary to receive support and raise their voices through a third party.

Senior Management Receptiveness: Feeling Heard by the Managers

Referring to the second dimension of employee voice, Ruck, Welch & Menara (2017) argue that simply providing opportunities for employees to raise their voice is not enough for achieving engagement. In fact, if management "turns a deaf-ear" to employee voices, it could even result in disengagement (Ruck, Welch & Menara, 2017, p. 907). Therefore, *senior*

management receptiveness is a crucial component of effective employee voice encouraging engagement (Ruck, Welch & Menara, 2017). Similarly, in their definition of employee voice as a key enabler of employee engagement, Marchington et al. (2016) also emphasize the importance of not only listening to employees, but also actively encouraging their expressions and subsequently also acting on their voiced opinions: "Voice, whereby employee views are sought out, listened to and make a difference." (p. 320). At Erikshjälpen, many of the interviewees seemed confident that their leaders do not only provide open ears for them at any given time, but they would also act on the ideas and concerns, to the extent the leaders considered reasonable and feasible. The employees also displayed great respect and understanding for the decisions of the leaders, even when it was decided not to act on certain matters that were brought to their attention.

One distinctive feature of a purpose-driven context, in comparison to profit-driven organizations, is that the organization's internal purpose requires the leaders to be receptive to all employees' voices. This sometimes leads to situations where the internal purpose is even prioritized over the external purpose. For instance, when efforts to increase the organization's profits are countered or completely prevented by employees expressing their doubts or discomfort about these measures. In other words, the strong focus on the employee well-being sometimes comes at the expense of the organization's profits, which is the means to the end of supporting children's aid projects.

5.3. The Caring Leaders' Role in Engaging Employees

Our findings highlight that the organizational members often pointed to the caring atmosphere the management had created, as an explanation for their engagement at work. This provides a link to the concept of caring leadership. According to Brandt (1994), Caldwell & Dixon (2010), as well as Kroth & Keeler (2009), the role of a caring leader is characterized by respect, helpfulness, and genuine commitment to the well-being of others, which includes favorable expected outcomes such as improved performance and trusting relationships. It is important to note that leadership is criticized to be generally too often romanticized (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017), and the concept of caring leadership specifically is criticized for being highly time-consuming, problematic and potentially even an illusory fantasy (Levay & Andersson Bäck, 2021). This criticism will be taken into account when addressing the caring leadership style identified at Erikshjälpen. In addition, Gabriel (2015) stated that caring leadership has received disproportionately little attention in the leadership literature, although, according to him, this leadership style is of similar significance as the archetype of the heroic leader. Thus, we argue that this discussion can contribute to a clearer picture of the role of caring leadership within employee engagement, and its relationship to a purpose-driven organizational mode.

Moreover, our research provides a new insight into the relationship between caring leadership and the psychological availability aspect of employee engagement, which in turn helps to discuss the relationship between a purpose-driven organizational mode and employee engagement. As stated in the literature review, Kahn's (1990) third condition of employee engagement, *psychological availability,* describes the employees' "sense of having the physical, emotional, or psychological resources to personally engage at a particular moment" (p. 714). We further refer to alignments and misfits in the leadership construction (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017), as we already have analyzed through the second tenet of SI, that different organizational members perceive the leadership style differently. Hereby, it will also be discussed how caring leadership affects the four types of distractions influencing psychological availability (i.e., depletion of physical energy, depletion of emotional energy, individual insecurity, and outside lives), identified by Kahn (1990).

Alignment about Caring Leadership: Resource for Psychological Availability
Overall, it appears that the psychological availability aspect can be met through the caring leadership style, since there is, as found through the first tenet of the SI tradition, a high degree of alignment in perceptions regarding the leadership style between managers and most of the

staff at Erikshjälpen. Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson (2017) describe this alignment about the meaning of the leadership style as the "shared understanding of what goes on" (p. 148). Psychological availability is about whether and to what extent employees have the necessary physical, psychological and emotional resources to be engaged (Kahn, 1990).

At Erikshjälpen, the leadership helped to provide these resources as they recognized that especially people with difficult backgrounds needed extensive resources, such as attention and support from leadership, to feel engaged. Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson (2017) note that in some contexts, especially in knowledge intensive organizations with highly experienced and educated employees, the leadership does not work well, which often leads to a misfit instead of an alignment in the perception. However, as Erikshjälpen works within a purpose-driven context with employees that are often neither highly educated, nor able to work independently for various reasons, the caring leadership is highly appreciated by most of the staff. Gabriel (2015) and Ciulla (2009) likewise note that workers have deeply rooted expectations that a leader should care. As leaders within Erikshjälpen align their style with these expectations, they ensure psychological availability.

Accordingly, as these expectations are met, the alignment ensures that Kahn's (1990) identified distractions of psychological availability, caused by depletion of physical energy, depletion of emotional energy, individual insecurity, and outside lives, are counteracted. For example, the leadership prevented the exhaustion by physical energy as they stressed that all organizational members could work in their own pace. In addition, they gave the employees a sympathetic ear in every matter. Not only is listening and support generally considered an important driver in regard to employee engagement (e.g., Anitha, 2014; Beardwell & Thompson, 2017; Towers Perrin, 2008), but it also counteracts the depletion of emotional energy and the stress caused by insecurity and outside lives (Kahn, 1990).

Another through the lens of SI identified reason that the high alignment contributes to increased psychological availability is that the management demonstrated consistency regarding the expression of the caring leadership style. In the managerial contexts, especially middle-managers sometimes face the problem of subordination, where they stand between the interests of their own employees and those of their superiors (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016), which means that they have to please the expectations of shareholders as well. Through the not-for-profit driven organizational mode, Erikshjälpen instead had a "legal mandate to pursue only social benefit" (Hinton, 2020, p. 236). This allowed the management to focus entirely on the purpose-drive in its leadership style as well. Thus, at Erikshjälpen, a strong integrity to the

internal purpose was evident. Instead of jumping back and forth between leadership ideals such as 'grand leadership', which means being a visionary leader who addresses key issues such as strategy and culture change, and the 'understander of human nature leadership', that entails characteristics as being coaching and considerate (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016), a caring leadership style is consistently applied. Outside a purpose-driven context, however, especially middle-managers experienced that both ideals clashed with their actual work situation, which also affected the perception of the employees (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). The consistency in the expression of the caring leadership style and the resulting alignment in perception contributes to the psychological availability condition to the extent that emotional and psychological resources are not compromised by uncertainty about the leadership style (Kahn, 1990).

As shown by the example of the hotel-breakfast incident, the consistency and integrity of the caring leadership was also applied in situations where some employees demand less caring despite the high level of alignment. This lets employees know that they can always count on the caring leaders, but it also frustrates some who would rather focus on the external purpose, as will be explained more detailed in the following chapter.

Value Misfit: The Clash of Purposes

As identified through the second tenet of the SI tradition, some employees' expectations regarding the leadership style were different from those of management team, as is often the case (e.g., Blom & Alvesson, 2014; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Especially for some employees the alignment got weaker when they were not that much in need for caring leadership anymore. Instead of focusing on the internal purpose of helping and supporting all organizational members, some would have preferred to focus on the external purposes to help the children and the environment. This characterizes a clash of internal and external purposes, which is reinforced by the caring leadership style and characterizes a distraction of psychological availability. As Gabriel (2015) has noted, caring is associated with dependency, and caring leadership can lead to overdependence. At Erikshjälpen it was shown that the employees who were less dependent on the caring leadership style were frustrated by the overdependency of others.

This was especially evident in a situation described in the findings, when the head of a department was on vacation and the sales figures have dropped. This frustration about the overdependency on the caring leadership style characterizes a value-misfit, which "indicates that the parties have a broadly similar understanding of the leadership conducted but vary in

their assessment of its quality or relevance" (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017, p. 151). This value misfit regarding the caring leadership style results in the depletion of the psychological availability as it especially distracts through individual insecurity. According to Kahn (1990), one dimension of individual insecurity is the organizational members' ambivalence about their belonging to their organization and its purposes. As our findings have shown, some employees felt frustrated by the high value of the internal purpose, which also limited their psychological availability to engage in the organization with regard to this purpose.

In conclusion, the display of a certain extent of frustration with the caring leadership style among some employees can be ascribed to their stronger connection to the organization's external purpose and therefore a more pronounced profit-drive. This individual insecurity, i.e., doubting the organization's internal purpose, may lead to a distraction in psychological availability and thus weakened engagement. However, even if some employees showed frustration with the caring leadership in some moments, it was evident, as analyzed by the third SI-tenet, that even these employees appreciated the leadership style for the most part. This can be traced back to Erikshjälpen's special characteristic as a purpose-driven organization, where misfits in leadership may be largely accepted because they are for the benefit of the employees.

5.4.   Employee Engagement in the Purpose-Driven Context

Through the previous discussion of our findings, we have analyzed how our identified themes – the role of beliefs and the listening and caring management - are embedded in the relation between employee engagement and a purpose-driven organizational mode.

Figure 6 "Employee Engagement in a Purpose-Driven Context" constitutes a combination and extension of the three individual figures of the Findings sections and can thus be seen as an illustrative summary of the discussion. The internal and external purposes provide the context in which employees can act according to their beliefs, freely express their voices and be heard by management, and where the leadership supports their employees through a caring style. Moreover, the identified themes relate to Kahn's (1990) conditions for employee engagement in various ways.

First, workplace spirituality has been predominantly referred to in the context of being driven by personal beliefs to fulfill the organization's external purposes, thereby positively relating to the employees' engagement through the condition of psychological meaningfulness. Secondly, the organization's internal purpose provides a space of psychological safety, where employees are enabled and encouraged to express their voices. However, the employees' possibility to express their voices and being heard has been analyzed as having ambiguous relationships to Kahn's (1990) condition of psychological safety. Lastly, the internal purpose is also strongly connected to the caring leadership style at the organization. However, in regard to the third condition of psychological availability, we identified that the caring leadership style displays both positive and negative impacts to the employees' engagement. The positive relation can be seen when the caring leadership style is aligned with the employees' perceived needs that enable engagement. The negative relation, on the other hand, was expressed in cases where the employees did not see a need for extensive support and the caring leadership style was perceived as a hindrance to the organization's external purpose of raising profits for caritative projects.
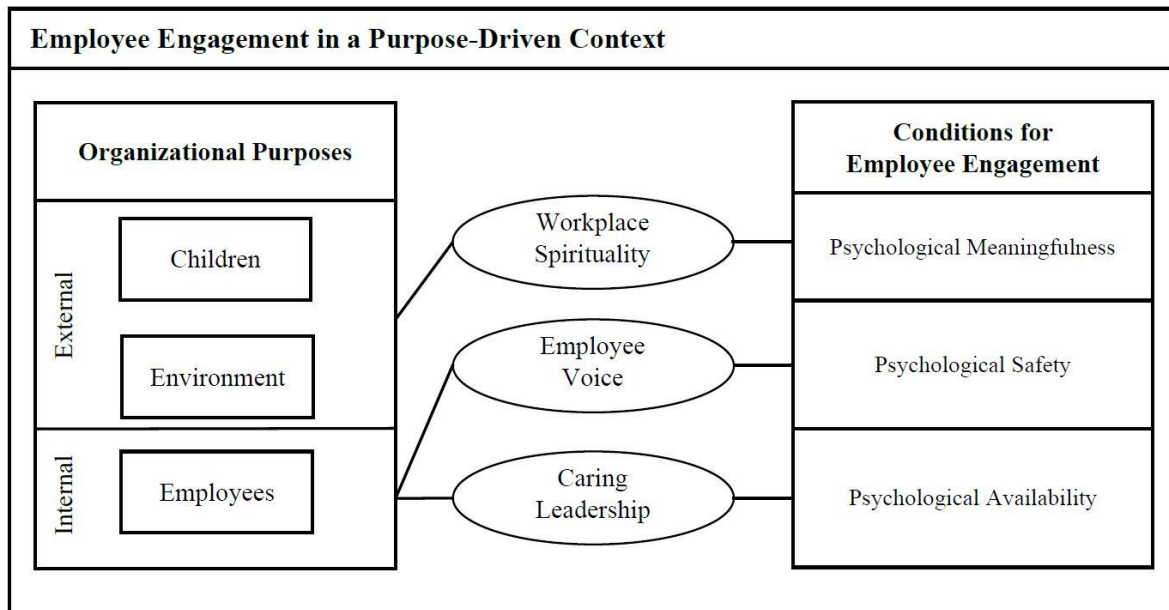
Figure 6: Employee Engagement in a Purpose-Driven Context

Interrelations with Other Conditions

While all three of Kahn's (1990) conditions for employee engagement exhibit interrelations and overlaps, he identified the first condition of psychological meaningfulness as being the least correlated to the two others. Similarly, at Erikshjälpen it can also be seen that the conditions of psychological safety and psychological availability are strongly interrelated, while psychological meaningfulness only displays looser links to these conditions. One of these significant relations, however, is that workplace spirituality at Erikshjälpen can also be seen as an emotional resource contributing to psychological availability, as described in Chapter 2.1.3. Furthermore, while the sense of community has been identified as playing the most significant role for psychological meaningfulness (Kahn, 1990), it is also argued to contribute to psychological safety (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004) and psychological availability (Saks, 2011).

Moreover, according to Rich, LePine & Crawford (2010), psychological safety and therefore employee engagement is fostered through "supportive management and interpersonal relationships" (p. 621) and May, Gilson & Harter, (2004) found that "rewarding co-worker and supportive supervisor relationships were positive predictors of safety" (p. 11). At Erikshjälpen, it can also be seen that the psychological safety condition is not only apparent through employee voice, but also intertwined with the sense of community and caring leadership, which enhance the feeling of safety of being able to express one's voice, without the fear of negative consequences.

Lastly, leadership not only contributes to the psychological availability condition but, as Kahn (1990) notes, leadership also has a great potential to affect the employees' psychological safety by offering a supportive environment in which one feels safe to fully engage in a task. We have already argued that the psychological safety condition is contributed to by the expression of employee voice. We conclude that by having caring leaders accessible, employees feel safe and encouraged to express their voice. This is in line with Rich, LePine & Crawford (2010) who argue that "supportive management and interpersonal relationships foster feelings of psychological safety that increase willingness to engage fully in work roles" (p. 621).

6. Conclusion

In this study we aimed to examine the relationship between employee engagement and a purpose-driven organizational mode. By drawing upon our research aim, the following sub-chapters summarize our empirical findings in accordance with our contributions to the literature. Furthermore, we address the practical implications and some limitations within the study, before we conclude with suggestions for further research.

6.1. Empirical Findings

From the identified themes, as addressed in the findings section we are able to draw the following conclusions:

- A first general conclusion of our work is that most of the employees in the not-for-profit organization Erikshjälpen seem to express a high level of engagement:
  - This was shown in many ways, the most illustrative being taking extra work home or writing poems about the organization.
  - Moreover, we found that the internal and external purposes at Erikshjälpen, i.e., helping the employees, supporting children-aid projects and acting sustainable for the environment, provided a context in which employees were able to fulfil the Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions for engagement to a certain extend.

- Especially through the external purposes, the employees expressed that they were able to connect their personal and religious beliefs to those of the organization:
  - An especially strong connection was observed to the organization's external purpose of supporting children's aid projects. Many employees referred to their religious and moral beliefs as the main motivator to pursue this organizational purpose as if it was their own personal purpose.
  - Their beliefs also contributed to making the employees consider their work as meaningful and consequently enhanced their engagement.

- In addition, the internal purpose appeared to strengthen the employees' feeling of psychological safety:
  - This made the employees comfortable to express ideas and address complaints in a direct and informal manner to the management team.

- The expression of employee voice and the receptiveness of the management seemed to be important elements in the relation between the engagement of the employees and the purpose-driven organizational mode.

- Lastly, we found that the internal purpose also appeared to promote a caring leadership style by the management:
  - This was expressed by the fact that in many situations the leaders put the well-being of the employees above the external purposes.
  - This finding significantly relates to the purpose-driven organizational mode, as compared to profit-driven organizations, as some actions taken by the management had direct negative consequences on the organization's profits.

6.2. Theoretical Contribution

As outlined in the introduction of the thesis, the research on the relation between employee engagement and purpose-driven organizations is still scarce, especially in regard to qualitative studies. We have therefore contributed to reducing this research gap with our study. By identifying the similarities and differences between for-profit organizations that emphasize CSR activities, and fully purpose-driven NFPs, we were able to draw on the literature on employee engagement in for-profit organizations in a differentiated context for our study.

Our study contributions to the research field are also in line with Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson, (2003) and Fleming & Asplund (2007), who found that beliefs in the organization's purpose serve as an important factor in the composition of employee engagement. Although our study comes to similar conclusions, we add to the research field by examining this factor in the context of a purpose-driven mode, which distinguishes it from the previous mentioned studies. Furthermore, we also discussed the role of employee voice on employee engagement in a purpose-driven context, which is referred to by Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004) and Beardwell & Thompson (2017), as a frequently identified driver of employee engagement. Again, our study adds new insights as we have taken the NFP context into consideration. Moreover, the impact of informal employee voice on employee engagement has not been sufficiently and thoroughly investigated in neither profit-driven nor purpose-driven contexts (e.g., see Marchington & Suter, 2013). Our findings, which suggest that informal employee voice is the most frequently used means of communication promoting employee engagement, therefore add valuable insights to the research on the relation of employee voice and employee engagement.

In addition to strengthening previous research on the relation of workplace spirituality and employee voice to employee engagement, we also contribute by suggesting a connection between a caring leadership style and the employee's engagement. Carasco-Saul, Kim & Kim (2015) state that the relation between employee engagement and leadership is not yet sufficiently researched. Moreover, as to our knowledge, the link between a caring leadership approach and employee engagement is not investigated in any other study. Thus, our findings contribute to the research in a field that is yet to be established by suggesting that the caring leadership style is mostly strengthening the employee's engagement in a purpose-driven organizational mode.

Lastly, we also contribute to the research field with our consideration of Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions for employee engagement, by embedding his model in a purpose-driven organizational context. Our research question is answered through the discussion of how and to what extent the internal and external purposes are related to our findings on workplace spirituality, employee voice and caring leadership and examining their relation to the psychological conditions for employee engagement.

6.3.   Practical Implications

We justified the significance of our study through the identified research gap on the relationship between employee engagement and a purpose-driven organizational mode, as well as the high contemporary relevance of both concepts. Therefore, we also believe that our findings have practical implications in this context, especially managerial implications, which are particularly relevant in the NFPs organizational context.

Firstly, regarding the findings on the role of beliefs and workplace spirituality in relation to employee engagement, we propose that managers in NFPs should consider what is communicated as the organization's purpose and how it is reflected in the daily work of the employees. As our findings have shown, all employees have felt, to a certain extend, connections to the purposes in their daily work life at Erikshjälpen, which has promoted their engagement. Thus, if organizational values are not adequately communicated or even misaligned with the employees' personal values, this may pose a potential risk of disengagement.

Secondly, our findings on employee voice have suggested that Erikshjälpen's employees highly appreciate the informal and direct communication in regard to forwarding complaints or

suggestions for improvement. We therefore suggest as a practical implication for managers to focus less on the dialogue with employee voice representatives such as unions, but instead invest into resources for directly listening to the voices of employees through informal channels.

Thirdly, our findings about the caring leadership style and its relation to employee engagement suggest that managers should carefully consider the influence their leadership style can have on the engagement of the employees. Whilst we found positive links between the caring aspect and the engagement, we also touched upon the downside of overdependency of some employees, which may cause frustration among other employees. Thus, the intended outcome and alignment with employees' (individual) needs of the leadership style should be carefully considered by the management.

Lastly, we also find that the study provides implications outside the NFP context. Especially managers in profit-driven organizations who claim to follow a purpose, such as illustrated by the examples of Shell, Coca-Cola and Starbucks in the introduction, could profit from our findings to see what it truly means if it's not just "money, money, money", and to critically reflect on the impact of claiming to be driven by purpose.

6.4. Limitations

Before we elaborate on the opportunities for future research, we acknowledge that this study does not come without limitations.

The limitations encountered with regard to the methodological considerations have already been addressed in Chapter 3.7. These relate in particular to the criticism of the validity of qualitative studies in general and the language barrier we faced during the interviews. These limitations were counteracted by taking reflexivity into account.

In addition, a general limitation is the modest amount of literature on the links between employee engagement in a purpose-driven organizational context and the link to the concepts of workplace spirituality, employee voice, and caring leadership. Therefore, there were few sources to which we could refer in the discussion. However, as this constitutes the research gap for this study, it also strengthens the importance of our research and its contribution.

Another particular limitation arises from the focus on the caring leadership style. In line with Carasco-Saul, Kim & Kim (2015), we see a potential limitation in the fact that we focused solely on this expression, even though leadership decisions may require the acceptance of

certain situations which implicate a shift in the leadership style. Even though the analysis through the SI-lens showed that the leadership style seemed to be rather consistently applied, we did not consider ways in which multiple or changing leadership styles may influence employee engagement and its relation to the purpose-driven organizational mode. However, since there are still too few qualitative studies on employee engagement in not-for-profit organizations and in particular on leadership approaches in this relationship, we have referred to this style that we have found through our findings.

6.5. Further Research

As indicated, these limitations of our study point to opportunities for further research as the relationship between a purpose-driven organizational mode and employee engagement constituted a research gap, especially in qualitative studies.

Firstly, an approach for further research in this context relates to the nature of the purpose-driven organizational mode. At Erikshjälpen, there are internal and external purposes as described. Further research possibilities arise, for example, from the currently growing degrowth movement. Many (not-for-profit) organizations within this movement focus on the idea to minimize production and consumption in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the consumption of materials and energy (e.g., Chertkovskaya, Paulsson & Barca, 2019), which therefore constitutes a different purpose-driven context than within Erikshjälpen. Since 2008, more than 100 academic papers on degrowth have been published in international journals, but not even one addresses the relationship to employee engagement (Research and Degrowth, 2022).

The second suggested direction further research could turn towards is to study the relationship between the organizational context in question and concepts related to employee engagement. As indicated in the literature review, employee engagement contains many similarities but also differences to concepts such as organizational commitment and employee involvement. Thus, it would be of interest to further analyze the relationship between related concepts and the purpose-driven organizational mode.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – List of Interviewees

Name	Profession
Thomas	Management
Matilda	Supervisor
Anne	Supervisor
Felix	Head of Department + Supervisor
Caroline	Head of Department
Max	Head of Department
Jesper	Employee (Arbetsförmedlingen)
Elli	Head of Department
Karla	Volunteer
James	Employee (Arbetsförmedlingen)
Sarah	Employee
Markus	Employee (Arbetsförmedlingen)
Kristina*	*Refers to one of the above-mentioned interviewees. The person has been given a second pseudonym due to the sensibility of their story

Appendix 2 – Interview Guide

<u>Personal</u>

Tell us about yourself:

- Educational background
- Where you worked before
- How you got to Erikshjälpen
- What are your professional goals for the future?
    - Can Erikshjälpen help you to reach them?

<u>Job + Erikshjälpen</u>

What is Erikshjälpen's purpose?

- Can you describe Erikshjälpen's concept/mission/values for us?
- In which way is Erikshjälpen's concept important to you?
- Is there anything you don't agree with?

Can you describe your typical workday?

- How do you feel when you go home at the end of a workday?
- How well can you separate your private life from your professional life?

<u>Engagement</u>

What makes you feel happy and engaged about your work?

Are you satisfied with the work you do?

Do you feel like the organization/management cares about your well-being?

- Do you feel respected and valued by your manager?
- By your colleagues?

Do you do extra work for your job that isn't really expected of you?

What does Erikshjälpen do to engage employees?

Do you feel like your colleagues are engaged?

- Why do you think that? How does their engagement show?
- Have you ever experienced disengagement among colleagues?

Do you feel like your colleagues are committed to Erikshjälpen's mission?

- All of them? Any specific people that stick out especially (positively or negatively)?

Do you think you could feel that engaged/more engaged in another organization?

<u>Voice</u>

- Has there been any situation at work in the past couple of weeks where you have been frustrated by something? How did you handle this situation?
- In which cases do you share the interests of the management and when does it differ?
- What does your manager do if someone has a different view on something?
- Can you think of a specific example where that happened?

Can you think of situations where you work as a team with the management?

How would you describe the internal communication? (Downward or upward communication?)

Are you member of a union?

- If so, why? Why not?
- Do you know any complaints that have been forwarded to a union regarding the work at Erikshjälpen?

<u>To conclude</u>

If there is anything that you could change/improve about Erikshjälpen, what would it be?

If you were offered a job, with your education and skill sets, but it would be slightly better paid, would you take it?

If you would become the manager here, what would you do differently?

Appendix 3 – Jesper's Poem (Original)

Till Erikshjälpen Lund

E Du Mexican, eller bara kan…

E Du gentleman, eller Oh du Madam…

Och vi alla här, då klarar inte man…

Det behövs alltid En, som vara med och kan…

Två bättre än en, fast tre säkert de kan…

Så tack ni alla som hjälper här,

Ni duktiga och bara kan.

Så tack tack tacos,

Välsignad vare oss,

Tack för alla åren,

De underbara åren,

De bästa fina åren,

År efter år efter år, Så blev det Fem,

Och det känns som mitt hem,

Så jag gör mitt bästa, att ha alltid ett fint hem,

Och när jag går hem,

Jag längtar efter mitt hem,

Så jag önskar er alla, En annan Fem…

Tillsammans, Med Love, Joy, Peace,

Det blir säkert, En härlig Fem