

**WHAT MATTERS AND HOW TO FIND IT?**  
**Career stories of finding meaningful work and how it is  
experienced by different individuals**

Anne Sirkiä

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Department of Teacher Education  
Guidance and Counselling  
University of Jyväskylä



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

## ABSTRACT

Author Anne Inkeri Sirkiä	
Title WHAT MATTERS AND HOW TO FIND IT? Career stories of finding meaningful work and how it is experienced by different individuals	
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Abstract <p>The purpose of this thesis is to interpret and illustrate how people find meaningful work and what is it like as an experience. Meaningful work has been studied in industrial /organizational psychology and there are multiple theories about career decision making. Combining these two is an unexplored subject and more research is needed in order to understand the phenomenon in question. The loss of traditions and religion as influencing factors has had a massive impact on career decision making. As people are not guided nor forced to do anything, working becomes a question of will. Finding meaning is essential to human existence and it can be discovered through work. Meaningful work is in many ways related to wellbeing and thus the reason worth pursuing. This study is conducted using narrative methods. Based on the narrations the individual choice is restricted by environment, but the biggest barrier in achieving meaningful work arises from individual itself. Pursuing meaningful work is value-based decision making in present moment which poses challenges but also brings opportunities. Family, significant others and society are the most important external influencers for finding meaningful work. Authenticity, courage and openness, self-knowledge, actions and the presence of other people is needed in order to attain meaningful work. In addition, random happenings might lead to meaningful work. The results show evidence that the creation and maintenance of meaningful work is based on agency and communion. Work is experienced as meaningful when one can exist as his /her true self, succeed in work, feel communion through helping others and have the freedom to develop and implement oneself. The importance of a fit between personal traits and work was particularly emphasized in finding meaningful work.</p>	
Asiasanat Meaningful work, career choice, narrative research	
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## TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tiivistelmä <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tulkita ja kuvata miten ihmiset ovat päätyneet merkitykselliseen työhön ja millaiseksi merkityksellinen työ koetaan. Merkityksellistä työtä on tutkittu työ- ja organisaatiopsykologian parissa ja myös uranvalinnasta löytyy useita eri teorioita. Merkitykselliseen työhön johtavia uranvalintoja ei ole juurikaan tutkittu, joten lisätutkimus auttaisi ymmärtämään ilmiötä paremmin. Perinteet tai uskonto eivät nykyään ohjaa ihmistä valinnoissaan, millä on suuri vaikutus uranvalintaa koskeviin päätöksiin. Työn tekemisestä on tullut tahto-kysymys. Ihminen tarvitsee elämäänsä tarkoituksen ja voi saavuttaa sen työn kautta. Merkityksellinen työ on monin tavoin yhteydessä hyvinvointiin ja siksi tavoittelemisen arvoista. Tämä tutkimus toteutettiin narratiivisen menetelmän avulla. Narratiivien mukaan yksilön valintoja rajoittaa ympäristö, mutta suurimmat esteet merkityksellisen työn tavoittamiselle asettaa ihminen itse. Merkityksellistä uraa koskevien valintojen tekeminen on arvopohdintaa vallitsevan hetken kontekstissa, joka asettaa haasteita sekä tarjoaa mahdollisuuksia päätösten tekemiselle. Tärkeimmät merkityksellisen uran valintaan vaikuttavat ulkoiset tekijät ovat perhe, muut ihmiset ja yhteiskunta. Merkitykselliseen työhön pääseminen vaatii autenttisuutta, rohkeaa ja avointa asennetta, itsetuntemusta, käytännön tekoja sekä muiden ihmisten läsnäoloa. Näiden lisäksi sattumat voivat johtaa merkitykselliseen työhön. Tulosten mukaan merkityksellisyyden kokemus rakentuu suhteessa omaan toimijuuteen ja yhteenkuuluvuuteen. Työ koetaan merkitykselliseksi kun siihen sisältyy hyvänolon tunne, kokemus omana itsenä olemisesta sekä onnistumisista, yhteenkuuluvuutta yhdessä tekemisen ja auttamisen kautta sekä vapautta toteuttaa että kehittää itseään. Työn merkityksellisyyden kokemuksessa korostuivat ihmisen ominaisuuksien ja työn vastaavuuden tärkeys.</p>	
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KIITOS

MARKO  
*rakkaudesta*

JESSE  
*viisaudesta  
väittelyistä*

EMMA  
*valosta  
omaperäisyydestä*

VANESSA  
*herätyksistä  
sammakkohypyistä*

TIMO, SANNIS, ANNA, HENNA, KATI, TERHI, KATJA JA HARPREET  
*vuorien siirtämisestä*

HIPPU  
*kuonosta näppäimistöllä*

*“Everything becomes a little different as soon as it is spoken out loud”*

*- Herman Hesse*

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ABSTRACT

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 What's this?

First of all I would like to share a story with you. My story. As this will get personal I hope you are ready. It was a lovely winter's day. I had just picked up my two adorable children from day-care after work and was about to prepare dinner in our newly built house. I was breathing in happiness and feeling mesmerized by the scenario I felt privileged to be living in. As if the moment had been conjured from a dream. Life was good. Unfortunately there was a dark cloud looming outside. During the years I had received many letters, but postponed opening them. It was better just to pile them up and leave unopened. I had sensed what the content is about and was afraid what could happen as much as what could not happen if I were to open them. The questions were running through my mind. What if I fail? To know and then fail must hurt like hell. The idea of being openly aware of my state of mind made me terrified and paralyzed. Alternatively I chose not to face myself, since it had been relatively easy to hide in the happy part of my life: family-life.

But the day had come; the cupboards came crushing down because they would not hold the letters anymore. Letters that were pouring all over me. Letters written by me for me to read and finally wake up. There I was, almost drowned, forced to have my eyes open as I allowed myself to receive the message. Letter by letter, piece by piece, one by one. Realizing that I have committed the worst possible crime against myself: I have allowed myself to exist only part time. My ideal self was not congruent with my actual behaviour. No more excuses to that. I'm not living the life I'm supposed to. In order to achieve the highest level of human-beingness I need an environment that allows me to be in my full potential. For a real existence I need a different job and for that a completely new education. One can imagine how big of a change I was about to confront. Not me alone, but my whole family. I was standing in front of a request for re-organizing everything from house mortgage to family affairs and everything in between. Looking back, I was able to make it only because of being married to the most supportive, true-loving and amazing husband.

My personal experiences of working in wrong places, sensations of meaninglessness, doing the tasks that are not fulfilling, trying to exist in some other way than being the real me, feeling strongly that I should be in a different place, ignoring the whispers of my calling.. I had been desperate. Actually it was a feeling of intense desperation that forced me to take action. I became determined to change my circumstances. There is something better out there and I will never find it unless I admit that I have to find it. It took me a long time, many hours of work, to be able to answer the questions needed when choosing a meaningful career or work. One can imagine how rewarding it was to finally find a meaningful sphere; first studies in education and later working in counselling. For me, the essence of all human existence is finding a purpose. When it comes to working, it's the same: if there is no meaning in your work, what is the point of continuing? This is what inspires me. The journey to meaningfulness. With all the things we may have done in a needlessly complicated way or some things that seem to just have happened by themselves, with all the experiences. I wanted to ask from the lucky ones, who have found meaningful work about their journey.

## 1.2 The purpose of the study

The impression that life has a course and the self has a purpose seem to be written in human nature. According to the famous existentialist and the developer of logotherapy, Viktor Frankl (1959), finding meaning is the essential to all forms of human existence. Being a Holocaust survivor he discovered meaning as a primary motivation for all living and acting. (Frankl 1959.) The pursuit of meaning of life can actualize through learning to be. This point of view acknowledges humans as active beings who create their own lives. It is about learning to accept that being is achieved through one's consciousness. One is to become aware that she /he is the one to create an entity herself /himself. This entity allows such things as experiences, feelings, values and purpose exist as they are for the human being in question. It is of essence to create an entity where one can be his /her true self. Among other things, through work one can become something that throws light in the world. (Deurzen 2015.)

Work is constantly reshaping. Rapid urbanization, globalization and increased automation has led to significant disruptions to the workforce and work as we know it in recent memory (e.g. Tunkel 2018). Many jobs are at high risk of potential automation and for example a rising population of aging people will create new demand for occupations. As companies adopt new ways of production and technological opportunities rise the skills that employers seek are changing. Workers are required to be better at least in complex problem solving and able to adapt. (World Bank 2019.) Workers are forced to seek new ways to fulfil their potential and find possibilities to develop in these changing circumstances. The unsteady and discontinuous nature of work in contemporary life prompts an intensified search for meaning (Hartung 2013, 35). On the other hand the increasingly globalized world provides opportunities for greater



wealth which does not necessarily contribute to greater happiness. This highlights the importance of meaningful work. (Michaelson 2011.) Work is increasingly prominent domain of life and it requires a considerable amount of time of our lives. Also unemployment and social exclusion are complex issues that among other things can be encouraged by individuals' sensation of meaningless. For these reasons the request for meaningful work is not insignificant. There might be but meaningless in one's life, still by the best people can discover meaning for example by creating a work (Frankl 1959). Research on the meaning of work has been conducted since 1970's across many disciplines. It has focused on following questions: where employees find meaningfulness in their work, how meanings are made, how it has changed over time and holding beliefs about the meaning of work. (Rosso et al. 2010.)

Meaningful work is in many ways related to well-being (e.g. Allan, Autin & Duffy 2016). As a provider of purpose in life it is positively correlated with biological well-being in terms of neuroendocrine, cardiovascular, immune measures and sleep quality (Han 2015). Finding meaningful work is not crucial only to human existence but for societies too. For example, meaningful work can be defined as work that is personally meaningful, aids personal growth and contributes to the common good (Steger, Dik & Duffy 2012). Edmund Phelps (2013) argues that experienced meaningfulness of work combined with possibilities to self-realization and personal growth led to sustain growth and mass prosperity of the West in the 19th century. Various things such as phone, train and radio were invented during that era. The flow of innovations originated from working people in all kinds of jobs in an economy that provided the innovative environment. Later on the aim shifted towards making profit and the influence of corporatist values made jobs less satisfying and harmed dynamism. (Phelps 2013.)

It is not unimportant to find a meaningful work. The purpose of this study is to understand how people have succeeded in their career choice. What does it take to find meaningful work and what are the factors behind experiencing work as meaningful.

The research question is:

1. *How have people ended up in a work /career they experience as meaningful?*

The additional research question is linked in the concept of meaningfulness as a personal experience:

2. *What is meaningful work like according to the participants' experiences?*

A qualitative study of meaningful career choice is needed, because it's important to understand what kinds of factors promote or prevent people from finding their ways in a meaningful work. As mentioned before, people working in meaningful jobs creates a win-win situation, not only for the employees and the employers, but it is beneficial to the whole society. In the Finnish government action plan there is a statement about accelerated transition to working

life (Finnish government 2018). In a nutshell: more labour is needed and education is expensive so the solution seems to be pushing students faster to work life. That's one of the reasons why it is essential to understand the ways in which people can find their ways to meaningful jobs. The kind of work they can engage themselves without a need of changing careers and from the governmental point of view participate in society by paying taxes. And last but not least work that support individual's well-being.

## 2 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

### 2.1 Qualitative research

This study has been carried out by using qualitative methods. Qualitative study is identified as experiential, interpretive, personalistic and situational. In qualitative research there is no true meaning of an event but only an event experienced or interpreted by people. (Stake 2010). People live their lives in certain surroundings; the social and physical environment is of certain kind and all the knowledge one has is based on the connections in their environment (Heikinen 2010). This study rests on the basis of phenomenology; study of phenomena as it is experienced. Phenomenological approach is concerned with all kinds of awareness and humans as intentional. (Deurzen 2016.) Humans are always in relation to their world and experiences take place in these relations. Being intentional creatures, everything has a meaning. (Laine 2010.)

We perceive our reality inevitably from our own point of view based on our current aspiration, interests and beliefs. (Laine 2010.) In a phenomenological study the researcher attempts to put aside preconceptions and empathically enter the life world of the participants. In other words the objective is to understand meanings (e.g. Deurzen 2016 & Smith 2003) and examine the data in a detailed manner as opposed to verifying existing theories (Hirsjärvi et al. 2010, 164). The importance of certain factors leading to meaningful work can be understood and evaluated fully only by the one who has experience of working in a meaningful job. In order to gain a profound understanding of how people have found meaningful work and the ways in which they experience meaningful work it is appropriate to use qualitative methods in this study.

My approach in this study is to concentrate on the individual and subjective experiences concerning finding meaningful work and experiencing work as meaningful. Consequently I won't consider neither organizational nor societal aspects of the matter. Knowledge results from human construction such that "it is only what we have made that we can truly know". This view frames the social constructionist perspective on reality designed rather than discovered.

(Hartung 2013, 39.) Meaningful work and career choice are examined assuming that individuals construct realities concerning careers and choices.

## 2.2 Narrative approach

We are influenced by millions of things that happen around us simultaneously all the time in various ways. It is impossible to know how one is to experience things or what are the feelings or motives behind ones actions. Being so, it is not possible to ask the right questions from individuals about their realities. That is one of the reasons I chose to use narrative approach in my study. Narrative research is a design of inquiry which the researcher studies the lives of people and asks them to provide stories about their lives (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Human life lives in story. Everyone has a story to tell and most of us want to share it. Story surrounds us as we tell our own stories and construct them. Stories we relate to ourselves grow as we grow and during time emerges the ability and drive to think of our lives as integrative narratives of the self. (Hartung 2013, 33.) With narrative people strive to configure space and time, reveal identity of actors and relatedness of actions (Bamberg 2004). Narrators make sense of themselves, social situations and history in doing so (Bamberg 2004) and come to learn more about theirselves (Reid & West 2015). They may become more aware of turning points or epiphanies in lives where change is essential and new stories have to be articulated which question what has constituted our reality before (Reid & West 2015).

The narrative approach is not concerned with the concepts "objective", "true", "valid" or "real" because they cannot be justified in their conventional usage (Gergen 1999). All in all there is no certainty or simple truth to be uncovered by narrative methods, which is not to say that the work is invalid. (Reid & West 2015). More important than the concepts in the story being true is that the listener is able to believe in the story and identify with it (Heikkinen 2010) and understand the situated consequences (Gergen 1999). Additionally narratives illuminate diverse and complex cultural and psychosocial contexts and narrative research is driven by an ethical desire to witness and represent lives in life-like, aesthetically convincing ways (Reid & West 2015).

In this study I wanted to give the interviewees as much freedom as possible to express themselves of factors leading to meaningful work and how they experience meaningful work. Narratives help us to understand what the interviewees think happened and why within the circumstances they were experiencing, what meaning did it have for them and also, what can be learned from this to take forward our understanding of the lives of others (Reid & West 2015). In my research set-up there was a certain theme under discussion, but otherwise the questions are not structured. This can be seen as a flexible way of communicating, as it resembles a normal conversation. (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, Hirsjärvi et al. 2010.) Narratives presented in many theories have a beginning, middle and end, but according to many researchers, for example Hänninen (2010) and Ruusuvuori (2010) stories might not be structured in that way. Sto-

ries lacking certain kind of structure are still narratives (e.g. Hänninen 2010, Ruusuvuori 2010). Although Bamberg (2004) states that a narrative serves as a structure that enables the self to locate oneself in a “narrative whole” with a beginning, middle and an end. The interviewer and the interviewee are seen as two equal participants in a dialogue that constructs meaning and create narrative together (Riesmann 2008) during the interviews I saw myself more as a helper, who aids the story to be told as the interviewee sees it.

The data was collected through individual interviews during 2017 August - 2019 January in Finland. The participants were randomly selected Finnish people who said to be currently working in a meaningful job. They were working in different occupations and sectors. The possibility to participate was published in social media, send via e-mail to the staff of few Finnish organizations and the researcher would ask from people she met in random circumstances if they would be interested in participating. In the end, there were five participants: One male and four females, which of one is a friend of the researcher. Their age varied between 20 to 57 years. Their educational levels ranged from vocational qualification to master’s degree. Some of them had a spouse and small children or children who had already moved out on their own. Some of them didn’t have any children. The interviews were taped and lasted on average about an hour.

As an interviewer I had to prepare myself to do my best to achieve a normal everyday talk kind of a situation. I would arrange the meetings in a peaceful café or in my home, trying to create an inviting and friendly atmosphere for the meeting. Additionally before meeting the interviewee I would review my mental readiness and remind myself not to restrain myself with any existing impressions of the person. (Peavy 1998.) In my counselling studies and later on from my work experience I have learned that the most important thing in interacting is to create a climate that allows storytelling to happen. It is important that the interviewee feels comfortable in the situation and is willing to share stories of his /her life. For this to happen, the interviewer should for example give up control (e.g. Riesmann 2008) and accept the other as a partner in joint communication where neither is to take a dominating stance (Peavy 1998).

What comes to career counselling, it denotes an interpersonal process of helping people comprehend their life stories and design their life careers. The central goal is narratability to reflect on and retell our own stories to foster meaning. It is about construing the themes that pattern our lives and give meaning to our life-careers. Career counselling may best serve us when we need to construe our lives holistically and comprehend how we can use work to be ourselves more completely. (Hartung 2013, 47.) The goal being helping, counselling might include for example highlighting positive interpretations or aiding making new meanings (Onnismaa 2011). When interviewing I kept it clear in my mind that I am doing research. In a role of an interviewer I wouldn’t interfere in the stories much.

All the participants were native Finnish speakers and the interviews were naturally implemented in Finnish language. In this study I have translated the quotes in English which can of course cause some distortion of the data (Riessman 2008, 42) but I am presenting also the original Finnish quotes in or-

der to minimize the bias. What comes to language it is also of important to use appropriate language to other's social location. To use language which points to the concrete rather than the abstract. (Peavy 1998, 80.) My interviewees came from different social locations so I always tried my best to fit myself into their worlds.

### 2.3 Narrative analysis

The data consisted of life-stories so it seemed natural to analyze it by using narrative analysis of interview text. Narrative analysis is applicable in this research, because the focus of the analysis is on stories concerning individual experiences (Esin 2011). There are many different approaches to narrative analysis (Heikkinen 2010) furthermore narrative analysis approach takes stories as the unit of analysis (Esin 2011). The analysis of personal narratives can illuminate individual action and meanings as well as the processes by which social life and human relationships are made and changed (Riessman 2003). I would like to present Bruner's (1986) ways of knowing to help us understand narrative as ways of constructing reality and bringing sense to the unknown. He presents two modes: paradigmatic cognition and narrative cognition. Paradigmatic mode attempts to fulfil the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation and leads to good theory, logical proof and tight analysis. The narrative mode leads instead to good stories and believable accounts (though not necessarily "true") by presenting themes and being consistent. (Bruner 1986, 11-14.) In this study all content is relevant, but the focus is on the content alone. The structure nor the context in which the stories are generated are in the focus of the analysis. The key is to identify elements across research participants. (Riessman 2008, 53-54, 73, 74.)

A favoured typology of four principal narrative types includes the romance, the comedy, the tragedy and the satire. In the "romance" a hero faces a series of challenges en route to her goal and eventual victory, and the essence of the journey is the struggle itself. The goal of "comedy" is the restoration of social order, and the hero must have the requisite social skills to overcome the hazards that threaten that order. In "tragedy" the hero is defeated by the forces of evil and ostracized from society. Finally, the "satire" provides a cynical perspective on social hegemony. (Tuval-Mashiach 1998.) All in all a common way to study narratives is to focus on the plot. This means focusing to the happenings, characters and meaningful factors in the story. It might in turn include happiness, misfortune, triumphs and adversity. (Hänninen 2010.) Additionally narratives have a certain structure. Gergen & Gergen (1984) identify three primary structures: the progressive means that the movement happens towards a goal, the regressive is in which the reverse occurs and the stable in which there is a little change. These three basic formats can be combined to construct more complex plots. (Gergen & Gergen 1984.)

After the interviews I transcribed all of them in as much detail as possible on paper. I wrote down everything, including non-verbal signals, such as

laughter, stuttering and response / non-response tokens (e.g. mm, erm, etc.) and non-verbal vocalizations such as hand gestures because they can change the tenor of conversations and meaning. (Oliver, Serovich, Mason 2005.) I wanted to be precise so I transcribed interruptions too, if they were to happen. Transcribing is time consuming, but beneficial for many reasons. According to Sacks (1984) one of the advantages of detailed transcripts is the fact that the researcher can work better with actual occurrences of talk. By that he means the important things that the interviewee expresses but not by answering directly to some questions. (Sacks 1984.) Furthermore the close observation that transcribing entails can lead to noticing unanticipated phenomena (Bailey 2008).

I started the analysing process by listening the interviews. Listening the original recorded data brings data alive through appreciating the way that things have been said and makes it possible to hear what has been said (Bailey 2008). Then I read the texts. After reading and re-reading the interviews I had gained a general understanding of what the participants are talking about. I proceeded by making notes about the themes that occurred in the interviews. After that it was time for an individual in-depth analysis. As Ruusuvuori, Nikander & Hyvärinen (2010) point out; analytical process is about looking at the material from new and different angles and to discover new aspects and ways of questioning the data. Altogether analysis should go beyond the descriptive level and help to generate theory about the data. (Schreier 2012.)

My main goal was to understand how people have ended up in meaningful jobs. So this question in mind I looked at the data repeatedly from different angles and wrote down the themes I interpreted to have led to meaningful work. My secondary research question was about meaningful work as an experience. After studying the primary question I looked into the secondary question and went through the data again in a detail manner. In the process I used different colours and post-it notes to help me organize and interpret the narratives. All in all I read the transcripts carefully and questioned my conclusions many times to make sure that my interpretations are correct. From the narratives I was able to define typologies and plots about factors leading to meaningful work and the experience of meaningful work. Furthermore I created graphs to illustrate the individual career paths to meaningful work and another types of graphs to summarize the findings concerning finding meaningful work and the experience of meaningful work.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 How to find meaningful work?

The value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in context of a specific site (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Next I would like to present the journeys leading to meaningful work. All in all the aim is to illuminate your understandings concerning the question in the title. After each story you will find a graph to illustrate factors leading to meaningful work. The names of the interviewees have been changed to maintain anonymity.

#### 3.1.1 Everyday people /it's all about attitude

Elli's story

Childhood in a farm environment created framework for understanding work. There was work to do all the time and parents would set an example themselves when working around the farm and home environment. She was strongly influenced by the idea that working is an all-important issue.

I don't know if it is my home upbringing --- Perhaps there hasn't been any examples from home, because they just used to work in home environment.

En tiiä, onks se sit kasvatuksesta --- ei oo ollu ehkä ees esimerkkejä niinku kotona, koska sillo oltii vaan kotona töissä.

In Elli's story work that is experienced as meaningful started at a very young age. She narrated how she felt her first work as meaningful. She ended up working as a trainee in an environment where she told to have had possibilities to do a variety of tasks. Feelings of meaningfulness arose from self-actualization and possibilities for personal growth.



It was my first job and I did almost like everything in there --- then I started to study alongside work. It was that when I could study it was really nice, but on the other hand it was fun to be working.

Se oli mun ensimmäine duunipaikka ja määhän tein siellä niinku melkein kaikkee --- sit mä aloin opiskella samalla. Se oli se että ku sai opiskella ni se oli tosi mukavaa, mut sit toisaalta oli kiva olla töissä.

After the employer started employee co-operation negotiations the feelings of meaningfulness decreased. Elli criticized the employer for conducting the process poorly. The personnel were given no hope, as the employer would lay off staff one by one. She highlighted a major disadvantage for experiencing her job meaningful being that the before so good collective spirit came crashing down and the employees started to turn against each other.

..But I was to see that, when you have been working together for a long time and they start to kick people out, then I had a moment, I told at home too, that I want out. I didn't have the strength to, they broke it, you know, when people start to like, it was the worst employee co-operation negotiation ever. It was like people started to eat each other alive.

..Mut näin sit niinku senkin, että ku ollaan niinku niinkin kauan oltu yhdessä ja sieltä ruvetaan niinku viilaan pois, nii sillen mulle tuli niinku se hetki, et mää sanoin kotonaki, et mää haluan niinku pois sieltä. Mää en niinku jaksanu sitä, siellä se meni niinku rikki tiätkö, että ku ihmiset alkaa sitte et se oli huonosti hoidettu yt-neuvottelu ever. Et siellä ihmiset alko syömään niinku toisiaan.

She felt relieved when the inevitable happened. She found that contradiction between holding on to her workplace and trying to maintain good relationships had been too hard on her.

And then. It was godsend when it happened --- it like tears all apart when everyone has their own concern. I must have a work place.

Ja sit. Oli niinku Luojan lykky, että sitte kävi näin --- se niinku hajottaa sen kun sit kaikilla on intressi. Mullon pakko olla työpaikka.

Elli had studied a bachelor of applied science degree when working in the workplace mentioned previously and after the layoffs she was employed to a position that corresponded to her degree. However combining work and family life became impossible for her as she had to work in night shift only.

I like worked for 2-years and then realised that I can't continue since it was just nightshift and nightshifts all the time.

Olin niinku duunissa 2-vuotta ja sitte totesin, että mää en pysty sitä tekeen kun se oli pelkkää yövuoroo.

She started new studies in vocational school, graduated and was hired for a job that was totally daytime shift. The work itself turned out to be against her true nature and offered nothing but a constraining environment, where she could not be her true self nor fulfil her full potential.

Honestly I can tell you that it was not my thing. No. One of my friends I've known for many years asked me again and again; how can you do a job like that? You are totally different from that kind of work. And as you can very well see, I really am something else <waves her hands around rapidly and laughs>.

Voin nyt tässä ihan kyllä rehellisesti kertoa, että ei ollu mun juttu. Ei. Yks mun ystävä vuosien takaa kysy sit kun se kuuli et mitä mä teen, nii kysy että miten, että miten sää voit tehdä sellasta työtä et säähän oot aivan erilainen. Ja kuten voit hyvin todeta ni olen <heiluttelee käsiä vilkkaasti edestakaisin ja naurattaa>.

At that point she was able to combine work and family life, but the work itself was distressing. Despite the fact, she still continued working there. Working itself seemed to be of great value and the right approach she chose was to give it an effort anyway. This time downsizing was warmly welcomed as positive news. Moreover she described it to be a great relief for her and suspected that being the case for the employer as well.

Not once have I stormed off nor left broken windows behind. One should always begin and end things with mutual understanding. No matter what, even if one feels like shit, still. So it wasn't my, it was mercy <laughing> on us both. Probably both of us thought that it's good that we can get rid of each other <laughing>.

Et ikinä en oo lähteny mistään sillei että ovet paukkuu ja ikkunat särkyyy. Et aina pitää niinku hyvässä yhteisymmärryksessä niinku alottaa ja lopettaa kaikki. Et on se sitte mitä vaa, vaikka ois vaa paska fiiliski nii kyllä vaa niinku sitte. Että enhän mä sitä niinku ei se sitte, se on se armon hetki sitte <nauraa> itselle ja toiselle. Molemmat oli varmaan sitä mieltä, että hyvä ku pääsee eroon <nauraa>.

After the ill-suited job the interviewee saw an interesting job announcement. She decided to apply for the job after having a hunch that the job description would match her interests and personality. She told that it was her first job she was hired based on application. All the previous employment contracts had continued after her training periods when studying a degree. She believes that being prepared, but also luck helped her to succeed.

I have always sort of started working right after training periods. But then here, this is like the first job I have actually applied for. I guess I wrote a good application and was on time when the interview took place. And my clothes were not covered in dog hair <laughing>.

Mää oon aina menny niinku työharjottelujen kautta duunipaikkoihin. Mut sit tänne on sit niinku ensimmäinen paikka mihin mä oon niinku hakemalla hakenu. Kai mä kirjoitin hyvän hakemuksen ja olin ajoissa haastattelussa. Eikä vaatteet ollu koiran karvoissa <nauraa>.

Elli described her work being a calling for her, but wanted to emphasize that money is always a significant factor when it comes to working. As she explained it, for her working is not just about having fun.

Every now and then I mention about money being a cause. I'm not hanging out here just for fun. Show me a person who is working because of pure joy without getting paid at all. Even in a calling profession, money plays an important role.

Kyllähän mä sanon aina välillä et niinkö kyllähän raha on ponneasia. Enhän mä täällä niinku huvikseni oo. Näytä mulle yks ihminen joka tekee silkasta ilosta ilman palkkaa töitä. Et vaikkon kutsumusammatti, niin kyllä se rahakin on aika tärkeä asia.

In Elli's story there was only one work experience that she narrated as meaningless. Furthermore this deepened her understanding about meaningful work. After the meaningless experience she had been able to compare the two work experiences. She described the difference in the interview. According to her, external rewards won't do the trick. All in all meaningfulness is an inner feeling.

You know it feels nice <intensive laughing>! It's as simple as that! Very, just exciting when compared to what I used to do, I don't feel rewarded but much like being distressed. When on the other hand in this work, the work itself is rewarding.

Kuule kun se tuntuu kivalta <nauraa kovasti>! Niin yksinkertaista se on! Hirvittävän niinku et se on niinku jännä et ku vertaa siihen mitä teki, niin se ei tunnu palkitsevalta vaan se niinku enemmän et se oli niinku se et ahdistus tuli. Mut sitte niinku tässä duunissa, et tavallaan niinku palkitsee se työ.

Having strong work ethics made her continue in that position despite the fact that she found it to be meaningless and causing distress. A huge impact in her whole career can be seen coming from her attitude. Many times during her story, she emphasized attitude. She had realized it is up to herself how she defines her own experiences.

Then you just have to work for it yourself, perhaps it's the attitude that matters the most. Because, you can ruin your day. You can ruin your colleagues day as well: Oh no, this is this and that is that and you are a piece of.. There it goes, today, this week, this month, the whole year -waiting for the vacation <laughing>. Life is too short for that, valuable time that we just don't have enough. No one has too much time.

Mut sit ite pitää tehdä töitä sen eteen, että, niinku että se on ehkä se asenne, joka on ehkä tärkein. Koska kyllä sää päiväs saat pilalle. Mut saat sää kyllä työkaveriksi päivän pilalle: Voi voi, ja nääki on näin ja tuoki on tuollei ja sinä kanssa.. Siitä se lähtee heti se päivä, ja viikko, ja kuukausi, ja vuosi -lomaa odotellessa <nauraa>. Elämä on liian lyhyt siihen, ei kellään oo sitä aikaa. Sitä aikaa ei oo kellään liikaa.

She told to have a flexible attitude towards her colleagues. She had learned that she can't change other people's behaviour. The only thing she can do, is to change her own.

..Have you ever come across to a person who makes you think, if you see her /him, that <laughs> she /he is most certainly to be avoided, going to turn in a different direction <laughing>. But you can't choose your colleagues. That's why you need to give it a break, because, the thing is that you can't change others but you can make changes in your own behaviour. You have to manage your life around others. They will notice if you are yourself.

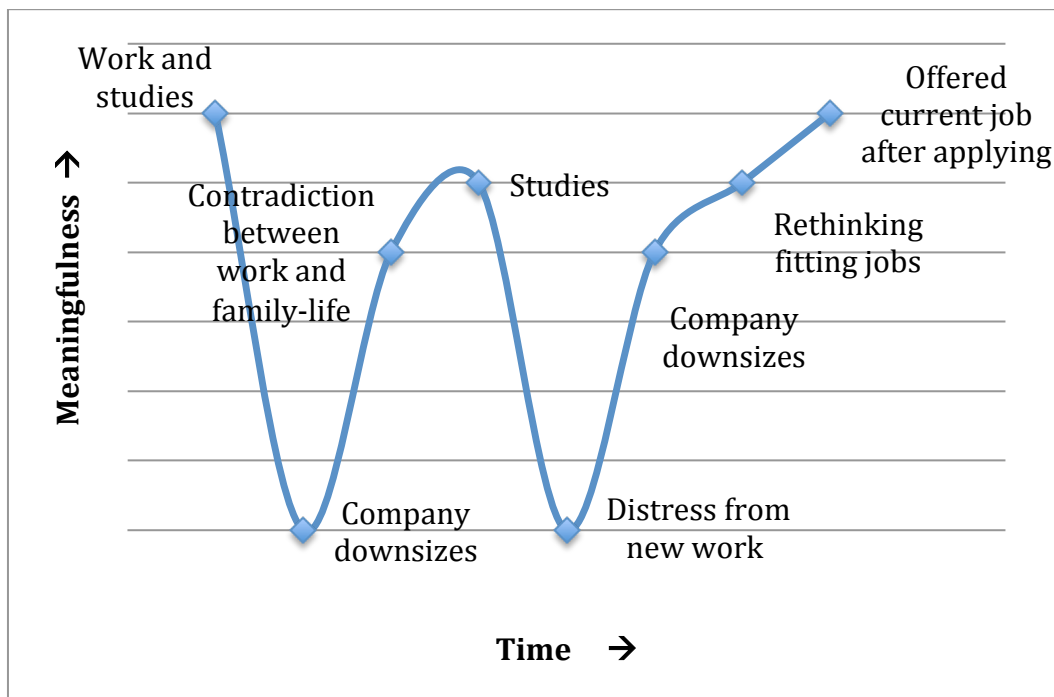
..Mut ootko törmännyt ihmiseen josta sää aattelet, että jos sää näät nii sää aattelet, että <naurahtaa> ton mä kierrän kyllä niin kaukaa, lähen niinku tohon suuntaan <nauraa>. Mut työkavereita ei sit voi valita nii sitte pitää aina antaa vähän joustoa, koska se on taas se,

että ite, sää et voi muuttaa toisia mut sä voit muuttaa sitä omaa juttua, et kaikkien kanssa on pärjättävä. Kyllä toiset sen niinku huomaa jos sää oot ite.

Overall Elli's attitude towards life is about taking action. She thinks that taking action is of an essence in order to live a fulfilling life. Further on she understands that it is a matter of choice: one can choose to do things that make you miserable or one can choose the opposite.

It's really up to you. No one will do it for you. In a way it's you who defines it and you define your own life pretty far. No one else does it --- You can dig a hole and risk falling into it <waving hands for direction>. You shouldn't, you should never give up.

Kun se on itsestä kiinni. Kukaan muu ei tee sitä sun puolesta. Vaan sää niinku ite määrittelet niinku sen ja kyllä sää omanki elämäs määrittelet aika pitkälle. Kukaan muu ei sitä määrittele --- Voihan sitä mennä tonne ja kaivaa kuoppaa ja mennä tonne noin <viittilöi käsillensä kuvitteellista suuntaa>. Et ei piä, ei piä antaa periks.



GRAPH 1 Career path as Mastering Changes (adapted from progressive satire narrative by Gergen & Gergen 1984)

Progressive satire narrative describes a narrative of a rapid downfall from a higher position and a turn towards a desired outcome (Gergen & Gergen 1986). In Elli's story this happened twice. The first time she distanced from the experience of meaningfulness was when she faced employee co-operation negotiations. The second downfall happened when she felt distressed in tasks that were against her true self. The graph about Elli's career describes hard events, but finally happiness is restored (Gergen & Gergen 1986).

Lack of any long-term plans is a predominant theme concerning Elli's career. It has been more about responding to occurring demands and going with

the flow. The only plan that is fixed about her career, is the idea of working being an all-important issue. This has partly resulted from her upbringing but also from noticing the security that working provides moneywise. Another predominant theme concerns her attitude. Combination of these two has led her to seek for work whenever her current work has been about to end. Her career has been about doing her job well and with a smiling face. She has chosen to be positive and spread good vibes wherever she is to work.

She ended up working at a very young age and continued it for over a decade until she was laid off. The previously meaningful work environment evolved into a horror scene after the work community became hostile. Albeit feelings of irreconcilable differences in the situation, she would continue working there and not resigning herself. Later on she repeated the slightly absurd procedure, when discovered to be working in a job to be against her true nature. Despite the discovery, she still continued working there. A turning point in both of these employments was downsizing. A solution was given to her from outside. She was willing to adapt for the cause of working. Staying in one place originates from the idea about working. It was not intended to be amusing, but she would tolerate the pain because working was the thing she gained. Being persistent, taking responsibility of her actions and being the kind of type who would not give up has been important to Elli, even if it has happened on her own expense.

Still, no matter how important work is for her, it is not everything. There is one thing that goes beyond ensuring coherence in experienced personality and the ethos of work. The only time Elli has placed work second is when she was unable to combine night-shift and family life. Valuing family over work and her own tendencies is clear for her.

### Olga's story

Olga began her story by sharing me her thoughts about experiencing her current work meaningful. Working in general is something that needs to be done – even at all costs. She hesitated when putting her words together about valuing work over family. The way of speech reveals that she doesn't agree, placing work over family has never been right in her opinion. Moreover she has found the contrastive thought to originate from her upbringing and every now and then has questioned its justification. Thinking back she wouldn't act career wise in the same manner how she has acted. She sees her past now differently and makes decisions that are her own. In time her relationships with others have clearly changed which has given her more freedom to act.

.. From my upbringing it was emphasized that the work should always come first, maybe it still goes that way, I think about how I was raised and sort of the work that has sometimes and occasionally been placed first over family. Work is to be done, that that today I wouldn't anymore, if I was younger, wouldn't make the decisions I have done before.

.. Sielä kotikasvatuksessa jo lähteny se työ, et se niinku menee aina niinku eellä, että ehkä mulla menee vielä justiin aina sillei, että mä mietin sitä niinku mitenkä mut on kasvatettu niin se työ on pistettyki tavallaan niinku välillä aina joskus perheenkin edelle. Se työ

pitää suorittaa, et et, tänä päivänä en enää, jos olisin nuorempi ni lähtis tekemään ihan sillä lailla kun oon tehny.

The idea to value work may origin from Olga's upbringing, but it is also an inner feeling for her, because she believes it to be true.

By working you sort of... <silence> it is in the same way when you are studying, there is no progress unless you don't --- Of course when you value work and have learned to work --- I think that it is, a quite an important issue.

Niinku tavallaan että työtä tekemällä niinku sähän <hiljaisuus> sehän ihan samalla tavalla että kun sää opiskelet, et sää mee mihinkään eteenpäin, jos et tee sullei --- Sit totta kai ku työtä arvostaa ja on oppinu sitä tekemään, että.. --- se on mun mielestä se, aika tärkeeki asia.

Olga's career started by accident, because the decision wasn't hers to make. In the beginning of her career, Olga could not make the decisions herself concerning her life. She obeyed her mother and studied the degree her mother had chosen for her. Even optional subjects as a school girl were selected by her mother. She had to let things to happen. This has been heavy on her.

But my situation was a bit like, I'm kind of bitter, I am sort of bitter about it, because my mother <silence> chose <silence> even when I started at middle school, that we had optional studies which of my mother chose based on what she herself would have wanted, without asking me anything. The same happened when I started vocational school. It was she who chose the school for me.

Mutta ku mulla oli vähä niinku se, tavallaan niinku oon katkeraki siitä, koska mun äiti <hiljaista> valitsi <hiljaista> jopa sillon ku mä läksin ylä-asteelle, niin se, meill oli niitä valinnaisia niin hän valitsi sellaiset, mitkä hän olisi halunnut, kysymättä minulta mitään. Aivan sama oli sit ku mä läksin ammattikouluun nii hän sen valitsi.

She would study, graduate and work. But didn't experience her work meaningful in the beginning. She was living someone else's dream: fulfilling the expectations and living the idea of work being something that needs to be done. Furthermore Olga describes money being the only reason for working those days.

It was not really 'meaningful work' after vocational school. Seriously no! <Laughing> It was only for the money I did it and so.

Se ei ollu niinku 'merkitykselliseksi koettu työ' ammattikoulun jälkee. Ei todellakaa <nauraa>! Se oli vaa alussa että ku mä saan rahaa tästä nii mä teen, ja tällei näi.

The experience of hardship can be seen as a catalyst for the development of personal resources and growth. Sometime after the first work experience she started to think about work and after a while found a job she experienced meaningful. Moreover she narrated how finding a meaningful work happened. The key was herself: she did the thinking, committed herself to the work in question and was aware of that.

When I found a work I liked and fell into it, that is where it origins.

Sitte ku löyty sellanen työ mistä tykkäs ja niinku lähti siihen mukaa ni sieltä se lähti tulemaa sitte.

Olga started to get a hang of it, what kind of work is meaningful. She depicted to have later on made her decisions based on those ideas and worked on different branches. She would change workplaces only when the companies went out of business.

It was a lovely work, the workplace was just lovely. Then a big American company stepped into the picture and bought them so that our firm didn't exist anymore 'in Finland'.

Se oli sellanen työ että oli aivan ihanaa, se työpaikka oli aivan ihana. Sitte tuli suuri amerikkalaine firma joka osti sen ja sit sitä ei enää ollutkaan sitte olemassa 'Suomessa'.

Every layoff was a kind of a stop that made her think what she really wanted. A lifeline seemed to be other people. In other words she explained that she wants to work around people.

First thing that came to my mind was that there needs to be interaction with people included.

Mää sanon että ensimmäinen mikä tuli oli että ihmisten kanssa pitää saaha olla tekemisissä.

During her career, Olga struggled in some extend to make peace with contradicting outer expectations given from her childhood family and her own thoughts concerning truth. Achieving balance between work life and family has been important and she has made decisions placing family first.

..But not nursing nor catering anymore, because the shifts are pretty horrible, night-time especially and it doesn't go well with family-life.

..Mutta ei hoitotyö, eikä ravintola-ala enää, koska ne työvuorot on aika hirveitä että yöllä ja eikä se sovi perhe-elämän kanssa yksin.

Just like Elli, Olga has paid attention to her attitude. On some level she has decided to like her work and defines it meaningful. Despite the fact that she narrated about her work being undervalued by others. All in all she doesn't care about other peoples' opinion, but rather keeps her own.

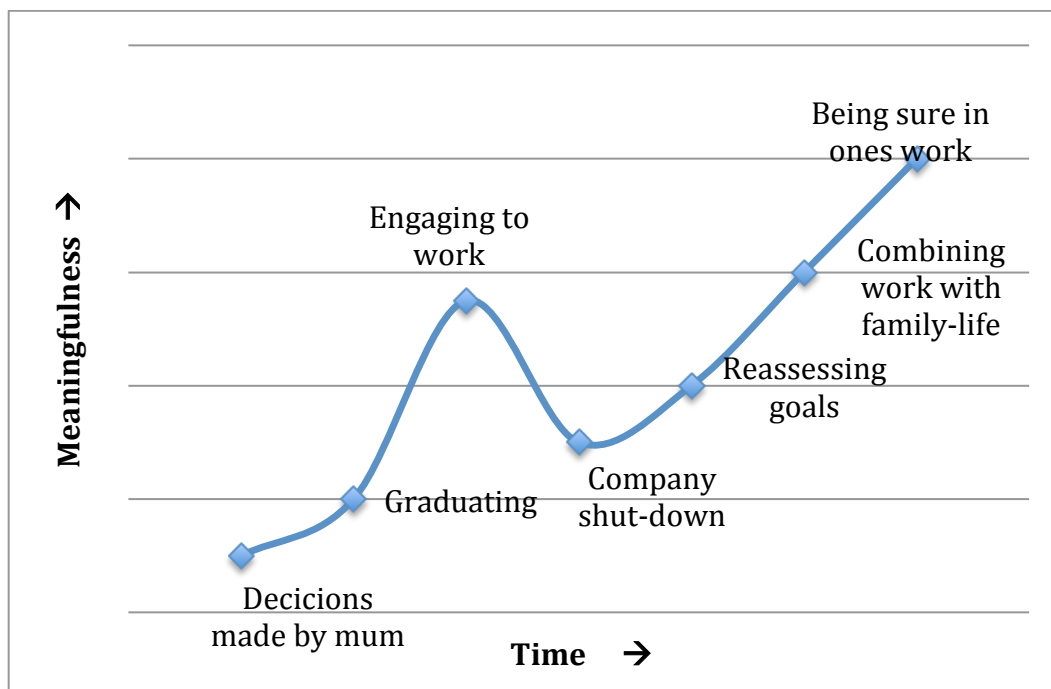
I do like this. And this has to be liked in a way. If you don't like this it gets heavy. I feel this work here extremely meaningful. It's in other places too, but much undervalued. In spite of that, still I feel that way <silence>.

Kyllä mä tykkään tästä. Ja täst on melkein tykättävä. Jos et sä tykkää tästä ni tää on aika tervanjuontia tää työ. Kyl mä koen kovastiki, että tämä työ täällä on hyvinki merkityksellistä. Tosin se on muuallaki, mutta kovin aliarvostettua. Että siitä huolimatta <hiljaisuus>.

Olga explains to have begun her current work after applying for the position. She depicted that she did it on her own when applying, she didn't have any existing contacts or relations to her employer.

..I was working in my current job when I applied here, since they were recruiting then --- but I just like applied, relations don't mean anything. I came in from totally outside.

..Mulla oli työpaikka kanssa silloin, mut mä hain tänne silloin ku tänne haettiin --- mutta ihan niinku tulin ihan hakemaan, että ei suhteilla oo mitään merkitystä. Että ihan tulin tuolta täysin ulkopuolisesta maailmasta.



GRAPH 2 Career path as Triumph over Adversity (adapted from progressive tragedy narrative by Gergen & Gergen 1984)

The forces of evil are just about to destroy the actor in progressive tragedy narrative, but with heroic acts she is able to free herself. After that she is progressing towards the preferred goal. (Gergen & Gergen 1984.) In Olga's story she was under the power of her mother and after she was able to break free from her authority she started to progress towards a valued state.

Living under the power of someone else has framed growth and career decision making for Olga. Decisions concerning her career were made by her mother. Being totally ignored in her interests she has had to learn to value herself and her opinions later in her life. Like Elli's career, Olga has learned to go with the flow. Finding work has been relatively easy, but finding meaningful work has taken time. All her life, she has struggled with the contradicting outer expectations and her inner search for truth. From course selection in elementary school to choosing vocational school and all the way up to her first workplace she would implement her life, because she was ordered to follow the given in-



structions. All in all forced to be a good girl, obeying rules and respecting authority has been her reality in the past.

A turning-point towards a meaningful career was when she was liberated from her mother's authority. This happened when she moved out of the house. After this she was able to think what she, herself, really wanted. This has had a huge impact on her career towards meaningfulness. Being empowered after her realization, she has started to make her career decisions based on her own evaluation. Still in her adulthood the orders from her past are casting a shadow over her. There has been a lot of hesitation and uncertainty with questions running through her mind: is it right to act in the way she has herself chosen? As if she would need a permission to act based on her own aspirations. Albeit the presence of her past she has made decisions according to her own understandings. Questioning herself has only deepened her understandings about meaningful work.

Similarly to Elli's career, Olga has valued work as such. In the beginning of her career she had bought the idea to value work. She would look for work only for the money. After thinking things through, she found valuing work to be an inner feeling as well. She has found many of her jobs meaningful and changed jobs only as a result of downsizings. Attitude has had a part in this; she has acknowledged that she is the one constructing meaning and affecting her experiences. In other words there is no need to leave when one can make it pleasant. Every layoff has made her think even more thoroughly of what it is that she wants and guided her when searching for meaningful work. Furthermore this has directed her attention to places that would best suit her interests. All in all finding meaning in helping others has guided her to seek work around people.

In both of these, Elli's and Olga's stories, working was highly valued simply as a thing to be done by the narrators. The ethos of working has been put in the first place in life despite the occurred facts that it causes trouble or negative feelings. A huge impact to the ethos of work origins from childhood family. Their families have indoctrinated the two narrators to certain kind of values and lifestyles. Furthermore this has had a huge influence in their career decisions.

### **3.1.2 A calling is calling**

Nella's story

Nella has had many jobs that she has felt meaningful. She has worked in the same branch her whole life. The degree how intense the feelings of meaningfulness have been, has varied. As a child Nella had a dream of becoming a teacher. As years passed she had the occupation in her mind every now and then more or less. In high-school when it was time to decide, Nella had no idea what to do.

It really wasn't clear that this 'is the certain occupation' what I'm going to study and so on, it was more like me hanging out here, there <laughing> and someplace else.

Eikä todellakaan ollu sellanen selkee, et mä lähen opiskelemaan tähän 'johonkin tiettyyn' ammattiin ja sillei, et mä olin enemmän olin semmonen että mä haahuilin siellä täällä <nauraa> ja tuolla.

She then realized that she wanted to leave her hometown and move to the nearest big city. For that she needed something to do in her future hometown. Nella started to look for internships and day-care was her target. She couldn't quite explain where the idea to work in day-care originated.

Erm, well it was day-care, but I don't exactly know where I got the idea, I guess I just figured, that it would be nice to work with children and that would be nice, the thought came somewhere, I don't have any idea where.

No öö, siis kyllä se oli se päiväkoti, mut mä en tarkalleen tiä et mistä se päiväkoti on tullu, kai mä vaan jotenki aattelin, että lasten kans ois kiva työskennellä ja ois kiva olla, mä olin jostain saanu sen ajatuksen en tiedä yhtään mistä.

Being a trainee in a day-care environment made her plan kindergarten teacher studies. Anyhow other things in life got more of her attention and she missed the application period to university, but was able to apply to a vocational school and later on she would complete children's instructors' degree.

At that point I was more into <laughing> I focused on everything else than the fundamentals, so I missed the application period <laughing> to the kindergarten teacher. But the applying period to children's instructors' education was still on, so I had time to apply there.

Olin siinä vaiheessa elämää vähän semmone <nauraa> keskityin kaikkeen muuhun ku mihinkää olennaiseen, ni määhä missasin sen hakuajan <nauraa> sen lastentarhanopettajan. Mut mä kuitenkin kerkesin hakee lastenohjaajakoulutukseen.

That time she didn't take her career planning seriously at all, there were other things in life to be explored. As if she would have trusted the future to hold something else for her. She would work temporarily, substituting children's instructors' and when doing so she became aware of her desire to achieve something more.

N: but all the time I felt like this is not the job I want to keep on doing, I want something more.

I: Yes.

N: I wanted to study further on.

N: mut sit siinä oli koko ajan semmonen olo, et tää ei oo se työ mitä määhä niinku haluan tehdä, et mä haluan jotain enemmän.

I: joo.

N: Mää haluan niinku pidemmälle opiskella.

Nella took the initiative to get closer to her goals: she started to study education at Open University. The childhood dream of becoming a class teacher resurfaced.

I started to study it `educational sciences` and the next year I had the idea of becoming a class teacher, that I want to become a class teacher. Along with the studies resurfaced my old childhood dream, that it would be what I really wanted to do.

Aloin lukee sitä `kasvatustiedettä` ja sitte seuraavana vuonna nii siinä vaiheessa mulla oli se luokanopettaja-ajatus, että mä haluan luokanopettajaksi. Siellä koulussa tuli niinku se vanha lapsuuden haave, että se ois niinku se mitä mä haluaisin oikeesti tehdä.

Nella has relatives who work as teachers. This made her postpone admitting herself that she really wanted to be one too. For long she found herself suppressing an ambivalent attitude she had generated towards teacher studies and university. In other words Nella needed some time to hesitate, be rebellious and feel that her acts are not based on others or outer expectations. All in all she would not let others influence her, but she would make her own decisions. She wanted to live her own life without following the same path her predecessors went. She would never allow that be the reason behind her acts.

Despite my rebelling against the university <laughing> for a relatively long period of time. I strongly held the idea that I wouldn't go to university.

Vaikka mä olin kapinoinu sitä yliopistoa vastaan <nauraa> jotenki hirveen pitkään. Et mulla oli se ajatus, että mä en haluu yliopistoon.

Nella's aim was to become a class teacher. Knowing the level of competition followed by many applicants to the preferred faculty she simultaneously enrolled at education studies. She was accepted to the latter. The plan was to enrol class teacher studies again next year and make use of the education studies. Contrary to what she planned happened. Studies at education turned out to be a turning point for her.

N: Then somehow it popped into my mind, that --- then I didn't want to enrol anymore `class teacher studies` but I had somehow found that I might want to instruct adults.

I: mm

N: That I totally over there that the children would be for me that I would with them, but then I had found it, this is it. This could be more of my thing, that my future would be somewhere around adult education.

N: Sithän mä jotenki niinku hoksasin, että --- sit mä en halunnu enää hakee `luokanopettajakoulutukseen`, vaan sit mä olin jotenki löytäny niinku sen että mä haluaisinkii ehkä ohjata aikuisia.

I: mm

N: Että mä kokonaan niinku sieltä, että ne olis ne lapset mulla niinku semmonen että mä niitä, mutta sit mä olinkin löytäny sen, että tää. Se vois olla enemmän se mun juttu, et mä oisin jossain aikuiskoulutuksen puolella.

When I asked her to think about the possible reasons leading to this, she answered gaining more knowledge. School had provided her information about various occupational possibilities that could follow after mastering the degree.

N: Probably it was there when I studied different courses and perhaps the spark came from those --- when I gained more information or I can't really say <silent>

I: <silent> so it was more about some information, had there already been internships or something else maybe outside university?

N: It was more the studies, no internship, but it must have been the excess information then that what's the use of the degree after mastering, it was a real eye opener for me, and there would be so many things I could do.

N: Varmaan se tuli sit siellä, kun mää siellä opinnoissa kävin sit niitä erilaisia kurseja ja varmaan se tuli sieltä se kipinä --- ku sai niitä lisätietoa tai en mää osaa sanoa oikein <hiljaista>

I: <hiljaista> Eli se oli enemmän jotain tietoa, oliko ehtiny olla harjottelua tai muuta tai opiskelun ulkopuolelta?

N: Se oli sitä opiskelua, ei ollu harjottelua, mut se oli varmaan sitä kun paljon tuli sitä lisätietoa sitte, että mitä sillä omalla koulutuksellaan vaikka vois tehdä valmistuttuaan, et sit niinku aukes ne silmät että tässäähä vois tehdä vaikka mitä.

Albeit she named only gaining knowledge to be important, there were also feelings involved. She describes wholeheartedly feeling the certainty of being in the right place.

Not once did I want to pursue to `class teacher` studies anymore.

Ei mulla vaan tullu enää ikinä sitä oloa, että mää sinne puolelle `luokanopettaja` lähtisin.

Transition to work life made her feel even more sure about making the right decision.

I: So then you entered to work among adults, how was that for you?

N: Well really, it felt just right. I felt I belonged there. --- There `in work life` I had clearly found that adult education is the thing for me --- it just somehow followed alongside with the experience. --- But most of all, for me it's all about adults.

I: No sitte sää menit työelämään aikuispuolelle, miltä se sitte tuntu?

N: No siis, tosi niinku oikeelta. Että tuntu siltä, että mä kuulun sinne. --- olin siellä `työelämässä` selvästi löytäny sen, että se aikuispuoli on se mun juttu --- se vaan jotenki niinku tuli sen kokemuksen kautta. ---Mutta eniten se kolahtaa niinku se aikuispuoli.

Nella has reflected her career during the years for different reasons. She narrated to have found a meaningful sphere that arises partly from doing the things you are good at.

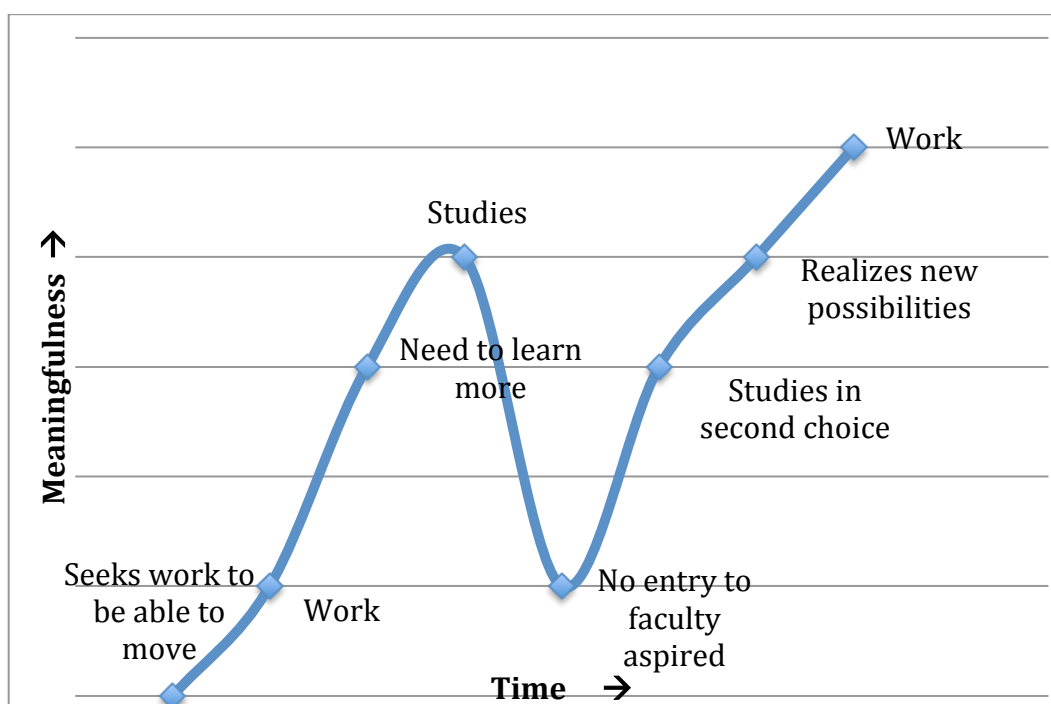
It hasn't changed. And now that I have lately been thinking it over <gave a laugh> for some obvious reasons, of all the things I could do. Somehow it's just, more and more, in the back of my head screaming that it's the adults. That, it's my thing and I should just hang on to that, I shouldn't change the thing what I'm good at. Or how I feel it, that it is it. Not that I know about me being good, but where I'm at my strongest.

Ei se oo muuttunu. Ja nyt ku mä oon tässä viime aikoina pyöritelly <naurahtaa> satuneista syistä, että mitä kaikkee sitä vois tehdä. Nii jotenki se vaa on, entistä enemmän täällä takaraivossa se huutaa et on se ne aikuiset. Et se on se mun juttu ja mun pitäisi vaan pitäytyä siinä, et ei pitäis lähtee vaihtaan semmosta missä mä oon hyvä. Tai miten mä koen, et se on se. Emmä nyt tiedä hyvä, mut missä mun vahvuudet on parhaimmillaan.

Nella thinks that the main influence that has affected her career decision making, and is inevitably a great part of her growth process, has come from her childhood environment. She has accepted certain models from home and she stresses out again how she couldn't buy the idea of meaningful sphere without her own reflection.

But your question being, what has led me into this. Then it's all the things like --- my mother has always worked in nursing and things like that --- could it be that there comes to desire to work in a branch like that --- and then being a strong teacher family --- I believe they play a role in this and I was against the idea at one point.

Mut siis, sitä jos sä kysyt, et mikä se on nyt sit johtanu siihen. Ni toisaalta sit kaikki tämmöset --- et mejän äiti on aina ollu hoivatyössä ja niinku semmosessa --- onks se sit jotenki et halua työskennellä sit jossain ton tyypisessä --- ja sitte vahvasti taas meillä on ollu opettajasuku --- kai niilläki oma vaikutuksensa on sitte ja sitä niinku tiettyssä vaiheessa niinku vastustiki sitä ajatusta.



GRAPH 3 Career path as Life Happens (adapted from progressive romantic narrative by Gergen & Gergen 1984)

Progressive romantic saga is recognized as a series of progressive and regressive phases. It represents a story where one battle is followed by another. (Gergen & Gergen 1986.) Nella's journey started as progressive. Soon she would

face her first battle because she wasn't satisfied with her current position and desired to achieve more. Second time she would overcome obstacles was in the faculty she was accepted to, which was not the faculty she had pursued. Ups and downs would carry her towards her destiny.

Almost as surrounded by mystical powers that would have led Nella in her career path. In Nella's story there was a certain calling that could be heard from the very beginning. She had been resisting to hear it and focused on other things in life than career planning. In other words she wanted to hide herself from confronting the obvious truth and take as much time as required to explore herself and options, before devoting to her destiny. She needed time to realize that the branch she is interested in is fulfilling because she herself has determined it. Despite the feelings of being lost and not knowing what to do in her life have been present, she has presupposed that everything will be fine. Furthermore the idea that there is a certain place especially for her is present in the story and one cannot avoid the inevitable to happen.

Nella has let life happen. The lack of planning has led to positive happenings concerning a meaningful career. She made a decision based on her intuition to seek work from a day-care environment and found it to be meaningful. The experience of meaningful work in turn led her to seek for further education of the branch. Another incidence happened, when she was accepted to the faculty she had thought of second alternative. What she had not expected was that the studies turned out to be the best possible option for her. The need for continuously developing her competence and making progress in her career has directed her career decision-making and made her move forward.

Nella has always been able to work around her interests, in the same meaningful branch: work that is humane and advances good causes. Moreover all her career, she seems to have had an inner devotion to guide those in need and provide solutions. This roots from childhood environment where has been shown dedication to work for something good or of greater value. Even though she refused to believe the obvious and struggled to some extend in order to make peace with the idea; that she already knew what would be meaningful work sphere for her. It just happens to be the same as her predecessors. All things considered she felt inevitable to discover meaningful work herself even though it had always been right in front of her.

### 3.1.3 I've got this!

Siiri's story

Sometimes finding a meaningful career can result from childhood playing. This is what happened to Siiri.

I: Can you name some things that have led you to this work?

S: Erm.. Hard to say my work being such, that I am taking care of others and teaching and stuff like that, what I used to play as a child. It has been similar to that. That I have been interested in nursing and teaching like always.

I: Osaatko sanoa, mitkä seikat on johtaneet tähän työhön?

S: Hm.. Vaikea sanoa kun työ on niinku sellaista, että pitää muista huolta ja niinku opettaa ja tällasta nii ne, mitä on pienempänä aina leikkiny nii ne on ollu niinku sen suuntasia. Että se mielenkiinnon kohde on ollu siihe hoivaamiseen ja opettamiseen niinku aina.

She gained more experience when she grew up. As an adult, Siiri took care of her small cousins and became aware of how much she enjoyed it.

From the other side of my family I had only younger cousins. So naturally hanging around with them and playing and, so taking care of them has given me the experience that it was fun stuff and something I liked.

Toiselta suvulta, puolelta mulla on vaan nuorempia serkkuja. Nii sit tietenki kun niitten kanssa on ollu tekemisissä ja leikkiny ja, nii niitäki ku on päässy hoitamaa nii siinä on myös kokenu että se oli sellasta kivaa ja sellasta mistä tykkäs.

She discovered her personality being a perfect match for taking care of others and found that to be the key feature pushing her towards the direction in question.

I feel that my own character supports that, like being empathic and like, I have been driven toward peaceful and people-centered work.

Tai niinku oma luonneki on niinku semmone, että on niinku semmone empaattine ja sel-lane, että on ajautunut sellaseen ns. rauhallisempaan ja tämmöseen ihmisläheiseen työhön.

When I asked of how she became aware of her personality, she replied clearly that she has learned from experiences with others. Altogether she has reflected her being around others.

I: How did you notice, that you are empathic or how did you become aware that you are..

S: It was in practice that since being with friends and all of these children I have been a bit like a mum <laughing> present, who takes care of the atmosphere so that everyone feels good.

I: Kuinka sää huomasit, että sää oot empaattinen tai kuinka sää oot huomannu, että..

S: Iha käytännössä että iha kavereista lähtien ja kaikista näistä, lapsista että oon ollu, vähä niinku se äiti <nauraa> siinä aina, kuka huolehtii että kaikilla on hyvä olla.

Feedback from others has also helped her to recognize her tendencies concerning others. She has been able to come to the conclusion that she is trustworthy and approachable from children's behaviour.

..And then there were training periods when I was with children and got feedback from them so called immediately. How they react, do they come close and if they dare to ask for help, I have become aware of my nature.

...Ja sitte niitä harjotteluita ku niitten lasten kanssa on ollu niin sitte heiltäki kun saa sen palautteen ns. heti nii sitte miten he reagoi, tulevatko sitte siihe lähelle ja pyytävätkö apua nii siinäki huomannu sen oman luonteen.

After secondary school, she immediately had a plan. She decided to apply to vocational school over highschool. Her dream was to study in health sector and everything else was placed second.

I applied to the studies for I have always been interested in nursing and caretaking... Highschool was on second place if I would not have been accepted to health sector.

Sitä opiskelupaikkaaki sitte hain ku aina on kiinnostanu niinku tää hoitaminen ja hoi-vaaminen... Että lukio oli kakkosvaihtoehto, jos ei olis päässy siis sosiaali- ja terveystalalle.

She speaks about having doubted during training periods, if she is in the right place. She reflected about the work contents carefully. Afterwards she was very well aware of her opinions concerning different work environments.

I have had doubts about if the branch I'm in is really the one when training, so I have noticed that this is something I'm interested in more or this is something I dislike when doing the matter.

Olen epäillyt, että onko se kuitenkin se oma niitä, kun on niitä harjotteluja ollu, nii siten on huomannu että tämä toinen asia kiinnostaakin mua enemmän tai että tästä asiasta minä en tykkää tässä.

After graduating she would apply for work, was hired and when working found it to be as she had pictured it.

Now that I've been working, I'm even more certain that this really is my thing what I'm doing.

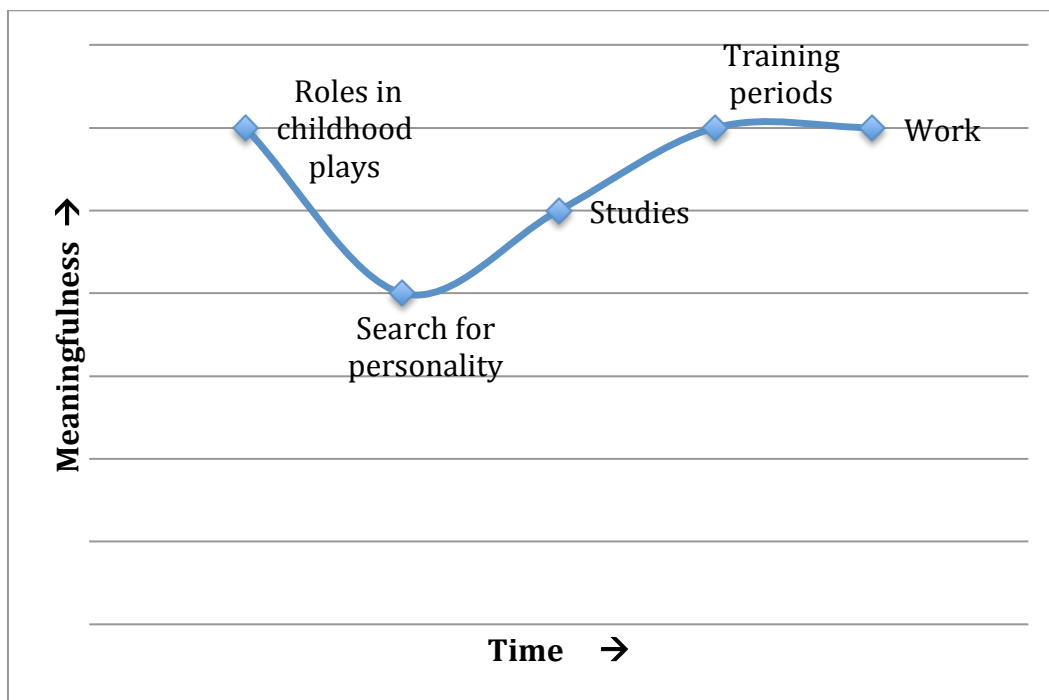
Nyt ku on sitte töissä ollu, nii kyllä se on sitte vahvistunu että se on kyllä se oma juttu mitä tekee.

Her future plans include continuity. At some point she would like to study, but at the moment she is satisfied with her situation.

I see myself continuing in the same sector. For me this is the most preferable thing now.

Samalla alalla ja samalla työnkuvalla haluaisin jatkaa eteenpäin. Että on ihan se mieluisin juttu nyt.





GRAPH 4 Career path as One-way Ticket to Dreams (adapted from stabile satire narrative by Gergen & Gergen 1984)

In stabile satire narrative one remains mostly unchanged regarding the valued state of being. Things keep getting better till they finally reach the ultimate goal of happiness. (Gergen & Gergen 1984.) Siiri was able to reach her goal steadily as she got to know herself. She had imagined the work to be certain kind and as she started working she soon realized her imaginations being real.

Siiri's career path to meaningful work is like reading a manual and can be described by pure success. There were neither false steps nor meaningless experiences in her career. She has got to know herself already from childhood, which has not given her only the direction but causes as well. From an early age she has been lucky to possess a goal of which she has become more certain the closer she has approached it. An eye-opener for her has been self-knowledge. After getting to know herself she has been able to draw a map which has led her in the territory towards meaningful work. Already from childhood interaction with other people has made her become aware her interests and abilities. In other words she has learned from her own behaviour in interaction with other people, but also received feedback of her doings which has given her valuable information. Knowing herself has made her more confident about what meaningful career would be like for her.

Helping others gives her gratification and she is ready to walk the extra mile for the benefit of someone in need. Making sure that everyone around her is feeling good is of an essence to her. As it happens, following her heart has been of primary importance when making career decisions. She has a need to realize her values and could not think herself in a work that does not involve people. At the end of the day, being sure, having a plan right after secondary

school and feeling her first work meaningful has been a straight road from knowing herself to meaningful work.

### 3.1.4 Being real

Having a hobby can lead to meaningful work. Tero experienced it as he started a new hobby.

In the beginning it was just my hobby and I noticed how good of an influence it had on me. And I got so excited and then all the others noticed it too.

Aluksihan se niinku lähti vaan omasta harrastuksesta ja mää huomasin, että miten hyvää se teki mulle. Ja mää innostuin siitä niin kovasti ja sitte muutki huomas sen.

He narrates his meaningful workplace to have happened by accident when he was asked to work as a substitute.

Initially I was asked to substitute and then people liked it, I have just somehow continued then and, somehow along with happenings, I have had more of them `jobs´ and then the positive feedback I have received.

Ja sitä kautta mua sitte pyydettiin, niinku aluks tuuraamaan ja sitte ku ihmiset piti siitä, ne on vaa jotenki jääny mulle sitte ja, jotenki vaa niinku sattumusten kautta ni, niiton `töitä´ tullu ja se että miten paljon mää oon saanu positiivista palautetta siitä.

Receiving good feedback from customers made him see his work as meaningful. Furthermore the feeling would grow and he experienced himself meaningful.

.. `Many people´ have wanted to tell me, that this is good and this has been really good and improved their quality of life. This is just one example that ok, I am doing something that is beneficial to others. It feels really good that somehow I am meaningful.

.. `Monet on´ halunnu kertoa, et tää on hyvä juttu ja tää on ollu älyttömän hyvä hänelle aj parantanu elämänlaatua. Tää on just semmonen yks esimerkki, että okei mää teen jotain mistä on hyötyä niinku muilleki. Tuleehan siitä kauheen hyvä fiilis sitte, että on jotenki merkitykselline.

In addition, feedback from colleagues made him feel competent and gave him more confidence.

Through the word-of-mouth the message was passed on, that Tero is great ask him, so that matter has given me confidence that I am good at what I do.

Puskaradioki on toiminu, että Tero on hyvä tässä kysykää sitä, ni sekin on antanut mulle hirveesti itseluottamusta siihe et mä oon hyvä tässä mun hommassa.

On the other hand, not being noticed at work has decreased feelings of meaningfulness. Tero used to work in an environment, where he felt of unimportant and that he was doing a job that was not valued by anyone. This in turn had made him question the point of working there and wonder about other possible working environments.

T: In my previous job <laughing> I won't name it now, but once I was two hours late.

I: Yes..?

T: And no-one noticed <laughing>

I: <laughing> okay

T: Afterwards I wouldn't tell them <laughing>

I: <laughing> Yes, yes

T: but then I and long time before I had felt that, I had wondered if there is any meaning to my work at all. Is it appreciated at all? Well, every now and then I could hear that 'it was', but not often. But then I began to wonder more that maybe I should be doing something else.

T: Edellisessä työpaikassa <nauraa> en nyt sano mikä se on, mutta kerran myöhästyin sieltä kaks tuntia.

I: Nii..?

T: Ja kukaan ei huomannu mitään <nauraa>

I: <nauraa> okei

T: Enkä kertonu jälkeenkäpäi mitään <nauraa>

I: niin niin <nauraa>

T: mutta sillon mä ja sitä ennen oli jo pitkään alkanu tuntumaan, että onko mun työllä mitään merkitystä. Arvostaako sitä kukaan? Noo, kyllä sitä, välillä kuuli niitä, mutta ne oli hyvin harvassa sitte. Mutta sillo mä aloin mieltii enemmän, että mun pitäisi ehkä tehdä jotakin muuta.

Before seeking to a new hobby that later turned out to be a work relationship, Tero speculated to have experienced age crisis.

I: So, tell me how did you end up having a new hobby?

T: Well I guess it all started... Something.. Perhaps crisis in my thirties <silence> or something that made me feel a bit sad often.

I: mm

T: And I wasn't feeling exactly healthy.

I: Niin, miten sää päädyit harrastamaan?

T: No kaikki alko varmaan.. Semmost.. Oisko ollu joku kolmenkymppin kriisi <hiljaista> tai joku tämmöne et oli vähä allapäin usein.

I: mm

T: Ja tuntu ettei oo kauheen terve.

Living through a transition made him reflect his life and act based on his new understandings of life in a whole new way.

..And well, I thought that now is the time to do something and that something should be a thing that I haven't done before and I thought that I have to challenge myself in a new way and then I thought that, well I have to start exercising --- it was first impetus to that direction.

..Ja no, mä ajattelin et nyt pitäs varmaan ehkä tehdä jotain ja jotain sellasta mitä mä en oo ennen tehny ja mä aattelin, että pitää ruveta haastamaan itseensä jotenkin uudella tavalla ja sitte mä aattelin, että no mun pitää ruveta liikkumaan --- se oli semmone ensimmäinen sysäys siihe.

In addition there was another thing that made him start a new hobby. It was a friend who suggested and encouraged him to start when he would hesitate.

..And then a friend asked me if I weightlifted or did something else and I went all like no, not at all anything like that. Then he said: you should try, it is actually pretty nice. And I still doubted if it really is.

..Ja sitte yks kaveri sano, että no mites, harrastatsä voimailua tai jotain muuta ja mä että en, en semmosta ollenkaan että. Sit se että: no kantsii kokeilla, et se on ihan mukavaa. Ja mä että no onkohain noin.

He wouldn't see himself doing the sport in question nor that it could be something that would suit him at all. After thinking it through, he describes to have conquered himself which he afterwards found to be rewarding.

I um, thought that I wouldn't lose anything if I try. Then I started exploring different things and noticed that it makes me feel really good. And, conquering oneself and it was, it felt good to do new and different things. Succeeding in something, where I had never succeeded before.

Mää että, aattelin että ei siinä mitään menetä, jos kokeilee. Sitte mää lähin kokeilemaan erilaisia juttuja ja mää huomasin, että tästähän tulee hirveen hyvä fiilis. Ja semmone, itsensä voittamine ja se oli, se tuntu hyvältä että teki joitan uutta ja erilaista. Onnistu jossain missä ei oo ennen onnistunu.

On the other hand, other people have not always known what is good for Tero. Before leaving past behind and entering new, significant others would try to restrain him. Altogether he had to ignore his friends' opinions and mothers advise when it came to resigning from a permanent job.

I was told by some of my friends that they wonder, if there is anything good to be followed from that. That everything is in order in your life and even my dear mum said to me, that you have a permanent job, you shouldn't quit. Sometimes family and friends, they know nothing, when it comes to you <laughing>.

Mulleki sano jotkut kaverit, että no eipä tuosta nyt tiää, et mitähän tuostakin nyt tulee. Että sullon kaikki iha hyvi ja oma äitiki sano, et sullon vakipaikk, ei siitä kannata lähtee. Joskus perhe ja ystävät, ne ei tiää mistään mitään, kun jos on kyse sinusta <nauraa>.

Ultimately Tero trusted his intuition that there would be something better for him in work life. He kept cool and held on to his idea of being the one who knows best what to do, and was willing to risk it.

Everyone has an intuition, a dream, that someone might have called stupid sometime.

Jokaisella on se oma intuitio siitä, joku haave, mitä joku on sanonu ehkä typeräksiki joskus.

He has learned that it is worth a risk when it comes to things that could be enjoyed.

.. I am careful like, to proceed in many ways, it might be fear of the unknown, that what will happen if I do this, but many times I have noticed that it has always been worth to try, so.. If you fail in something you like then it is not bad. When you fail something you dislike it is worse. So one should always try.

.. Mää oon varovainen, niinku etenemään monissa asioissa, onko se joku pelko, siitä että miten käy jos mä teen näin, mutta monesti oon kuitenkin huomannu että aina on kannattanu niinku yrittää, että.. Jos epäonnistuu siinä mistä tykkää niin se ei oo kauheeta. Ku siinä että epäonnistuu jossain, mistä ei pidä, niin se on vielä kamalampaa. Että aina kantsii kokeilla.

When working Tero felt that he has found his thing. Feelings of joy and incredulity would fill his heart.

..It just felt more and more that, well this is my thing and it was nothing like working, that I would instruct and it was. It was fun. And it like... It felt exciting and I figured in my head that: I'm getting paid for this, it's crazy. Life could have turned out to be something else <laughing>.

..Se koko ajan vaan alko tuntumaan entistä enemmän siltä, että, no tää on se mun juttu ja että se ei ees tuntunu työltä, että mää sain ohjata sitä ja se oli. Se oli hauskaa. Ja se niinku. Tuntu jännältä ja mä vielä mielessäni mietin, että: tästä vielä maksetaa, että tää on iha hullua. Että elämä vois olla erilaista <nauraa>

Tero labelled himself as introvert. Despite the need for own space and time, he is inspired of working with many people.

But it is interesting that weekly there are hundreds of participants by the best in my classes and I do a lot with them ---I give my energy in classes and somehow, it feels like people are taking my energy, but then somehow after I get home I recharge myself.

Mutta sepä onki jännää sitte että viikoittain sitä sitte niinku parhaimmillaan käy sata ihmistä ehkä mun tunneilla ja mää oon sitte tekemisissä paljonki niitten kanssa --- mää annan sitä energiaa siellä tunnilla ja jotenki, et se tuntuu että ihmiset vie sitä energiaa minusta, mut sitte jotenki ku pääsen kotiin nii sit mä taas lataudun.

For Tero, meaningfulness arises from being able to do good to other people. He thinks that doing things together enhances wellbeing. All in all it is more important than the results or the activities that are being done.

I also believe that us humans, we need other people, it's not possible to be always alone, and today, living in a world where we are constantly alone --- that is why I believe that this kind of, these classes what we, where people come and which I instruct, it is like a tribe and that is our tribe and we get together every now and then and get, everyone gets what they get, but it is significant that we are doing things together, because these things could get done alone as well, but we still choose to do those in a group.

Mä uskon myös siihen, että ihminen, kyllä me tarvitaan muita ihmisiä, että ei oo sellasta, että voitais aina olla yksin, että ja nykyään ku maailma on sellane että me ollaan kamalan paljon yksin --- siks mää uskon että tämmönen, nämä tunnit mitä me, missä ne ihmiset käy ja mitä mä pidän, ni ne on semmosta heimokulttuuria ja ne, et se on meidän semmone heimo ja me välillä kokoonnutaan yhteen ja saadaan siitä, jokainen saa siitä mitä saa mutta se on tärkeätä että tehään yhdessä asioita, koska niitä juttujahan vois tehdä myös yksinki, mutta me silti valitaan tehdä niitä porukassa.

He narrated a lot about his attitude towards life. Clearly, he has done a lot of soul-searching and attempted to understand life in general. It has paid off for he could easily name things that have been the guiding lights in his path: finding meaning in suffering, living in the moment and being open-minded towards future.

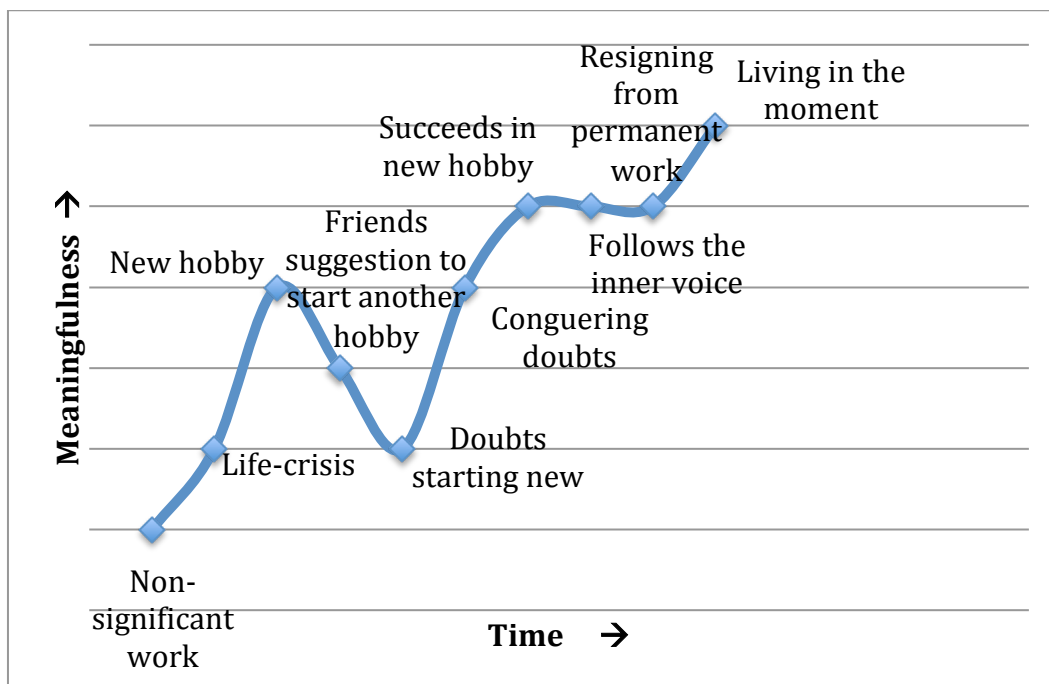
Oh well, life is <laughing> in a way, a bit of a suffering anyway and maybe we should find something, which makes it worth of it all. So, to find purpose. I think it is pretty good. It can well change over time, many times. It seems crazy when some people have only one thing in their life they keep working with. Everything in its time, it can well be, how it will happen in my life, do I have the energy to do this after five or ten years anymore. Who knows? Yet at this point it feels really good.

Noh, elämä on <nauraa> ehkä jollain tapaa pientä kärsimystä kuitenkin ja ehkä meidän pitäisi löytää jotain sellaista elämään, mikä tekis siitä kaikesta sen arvoista. Ettää, nii että löytää elämälleen sen tarkoituksen. Se on mun mielestä aika hyvä. Voihan se muuttua sitte tota elämän aikanaki, monesti, minusta tuntuu hullulta että joku tekee elämän aikana jotain yhtä asiaa. Että aikansa kutakin, voihan se olla, mihin tää itellä menee, että jaksako sitä itekää tehdä viiden tai kymmenen vuoden päästä enää. Who knows? Mutta tällä hetkellä tuntuu tosi hyvältä.

His future plans include anyhow working. Meaningful work seems to be of great importance in Tero's life and beneficial for him.

.. People get depressed as they retire, after leaving work life they experience being unimportant in their community. Somehow, I've been thinking that I might never want to retire, I would like to work for a long time. There are, many advantages in not retiring.

.. Ihmiset masentuu kun ne jää eläkkeelle, että kun sen jälkeen niillä ei oo enää sitä työtä että ja ne kokee että ne ei oo enää mitenkään tärkeitä siinä yhteisössä. Jotenki, että mää oon miettiny, että mää en ehkä halua jäädä eläkkeelle koskaan, mää haluaisin tehdä vaan niin pitkään jotain. Siinä on paljon, et miks ois hyvä et pysyttäis töissä.



GRAPH 5 Career path as Free Spirit (adapted from progressive romantic narrative by Gergen & Gergen 1984)

Series of progressive and regressive phases is described by romantic progressive saga. It represents a story where one battle is followed by another. (Gergen & Gergen 1986.) For Tero, life-crisis was the just the beginning of the battle. He had to conquer himself: having doubted his skills and thoughts of possible failure. In addition he decided to go against other peoples' advice.

For Tero, his career has been an interesting opportunity to learn new things and gain experiences from environments that are challenging him. His journey to meaningful work started almost as secretly as he would start a new hobby after life-crisis. Discovering himself doubting if his current work has any meaning at all but also thinking about the world and his existence, he would feel a demand for change and make a decision to answer to that. This meant not to take the easy road. Being willing to abandon the old and safe and throw himself into the new and unknown has taken courage and self-confidence. A realization about life being always a suffering, has guided him to find meaning from his own reality. He has felt strong intuition towards a certain direction, took it seriously and risked a lot. Acting against other peoples' advices and risking his own source of income he must have felt that he is doing the right thing when starting to pursue his mission. In addition having described himself as an introvert who has to limit the amount of social interaction in order to feel well, working with many people is not something that he would seek naturally. He experienced the work itself meaningful and discarded the limitations placed by himself and others.

Money has been less important feature for Tero when making decisions concerning his career. He feels that the society provides enough financial security for all and people should not work only to get paid. There are more im-

portant things in life and they should not be messed up with money. After taking a leap of faith, he has found it to be worth it. Feelings of being competent and received feedback of being competent has increased his sensation of meaningfulness. Doing good has led to personal satisfaction and feeling passionate and excited about his work. This in turn has inspired people in his workplace to follow his example. Career wise he has been content and continued working in the meaningful sphere. Overall he has gained the experience of doing the right thing.

Most important for Tero has been the ability to self-actualization. Tero cannot imagine himself working in an environment where he would have to perform tasks that are ordered from outside. He needs freedom to design and implement his work by himself. This has made him seek for certain kinds of jobs. Altogether he is more than willing to challenging himself and working hard to reach the top in his own capabilities. Being brave, yet thoughtful and considerate before acting, he finds meaningfulness from implementing work as a personal project. He has a need for development and work should provide challenges and continuing possibilities to learn. Knowing that everything changes he wants to be able to enjoy the moment and not promise permanence or eternity in any of his own actions. In the future, he is prepared for new adventures. All in all he wants to keep his options open and enjoys not knowing what the future holds.

### **3.2 Summary of finding meaningful work**

Every narrative is unique yet there are some similarities in the stories. Every narrator articulated about difficulties to express the factors leading to meaningful work. The phenomenon in question is complex and there is no clear answer to the question in hand. Anyway many factors a like were to be found. The factors leading to meaningful work can be seen all together from the graph below (see graph 6).



Authenticity				
Attitudes	Self-Knowledge	Actions	Others	Happenings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Trust that everything will be okay</li> <li>•Openness that thoughts may change</li> <li>•Risk taking</li> <li>•Living in the moment</li> <li>•Accept suffering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Recognizing preferences</li> <li>•Recognizing personal traits</li> <li>•Childhood dream</li> <li>•Assuming some work would be nice</li> <li>•Increase in self-knowledge</li> <li>•Experience of succeeding in work</li> <li>•Resilience</li> <li>•Work that is disliked</li> <li>•Work that is liked</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Being brave</li> <li>•Learn to achieve more</li> <li>•Abandon the old and safe</li> <li>•Ignoring criticism</li> <li>•Making ones own life</li> <li>•Processing crisis</li> <li>•Conquering oneself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Freeing oneself from other people's decisions</li> <li>•Combining work and family-life</li> <li>•Values from upbringing</li> <li>•Friends suggestion</li> <li>•Knowledge of possibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Willing to move from hometown</li> <li>•Studies in second alternative</li> <li>•Trying a new hobby</li> <li>•Seek for job in order to get money, but found to be working in a meaningful work</li> </ul>

GRAPH 6 Factors leading to meaningful work.

All the presented stories had two things in common: interviewees had work experience from meaningful sphere and they had found their self-knowledge to be improved. Altogether these factors were narrated to have played an important role when it came to finding meaningful work. Based on the discussions, all the interviewees can be seen as personal agencies in their lives. They reflected on what meaningful work is like for them and reached out for the experience of meaningful work by moving towards a certain direction and constructing their realities themselves. Although the intensity of the experience varied depending on the ongoing relationships and environment, each and every one of them took action in order to live a life that is meaningful and not accepted the current state unconditionally. All things considered they cultivated courage to be vulnerable and imperfect for it was the only way to be authentic, staying true to oneself. Let's take a closer look to the findings.

In the heart of finding meaningful work is *authenticity*. The presence of one's true nature, nothing false or copied, just genuine and real. Continuing in a work that seems to be against one's true nature is brutal and decreases meaningfulness. On the contrary a work that is in accordance with oneself increases mean-

ingfulness. Furthermore the truth is to be faced and take as the guiding light for actions.

*Attitude* plays a part when it comes to finding meaningful work. While accepting suffering as an inevitable part of human life and still being able to find meaning of it is one way to succeed, another thing is the connotation that everything is going to be all right. Moreover everything will be fine and life will sort itself out, eventually at least. This is something to remember when difficulties or indecisiveness occurs in searching for meaningful work. Being broad-minded and open towards future helps in the process of finding meaningful work in the current situation where we know to be in constant change.

To increase *self-knowledge* by becoming aware of ones abilities, strengths, and interests along with the thought of one's purpose takes reflection but also interaction with other people. Knowing oneself origins from reflecting ones thoughts but also feedback received from others can be of help in the process. Gaining experience from meaningful work increases self-knowledge. This in turn deepens the experience of meaningful work. It is a positive cycle. There is meaningful work for all kinds of personalities. Furthermore personal traits or tendencies should absolutely be taken into consideration when looking for meaningful work. Recognizing and acting according to them are a starting point of the journey.

It takes *actions* to find meaningful work. First and most important is the decision to act in a brave manner. The courage to listen to oneself and act based on that are of essence in finding meaningful work. If one ignores her feelings or sensations and decides not to act bravely then she will run out of luck. If one is too keen to hold on to the old and safe there will be less possibilities to find meaningfulness - assuming that the old doesn't offer the experience of meaningfulness at present moment. All in all conquering oneself is the most difficult part, but the ones who succeed are rewarded by meaningfulness.

When it comes to finding meaningful work, plenty of good origins from *other people*. On the other hand sometimes it is more helpful to break free from significant others. We are indoctrinated by values and preferable ways of life from the day we are born. Still one needs space to be able to form one's own code of living and act according to that. Ignoring harmful advice that comes from outside is important and being able to make own decisions is crucial when it comes to finding meaningful work. Although other people may suggest a person to try out something new based on their pre-assumptions of the person. Additionally this exploration of new and unfamiliar may lead to finding meaningful work. To summarize this distinguishing between the possible negative effect and positive effect of others interfering lays totally on the seekers shoulders.

Surrounded by all kinds of random *happenings*, some of them lead to meaningful work. There might not even be any target or goal toward meaningful work, yet finding it can happen by accident. The kind of happenings can be whatever

and they all just happen. One might not realize it, but a turning point can be just around the corner.

### 3.3 Theories of finding meaningful work

There are many theories that support the findings of this study. Next I would like to present theories concerning career choice, self-knowledge, authenticity, actions, the significance of other people and attitudes towards world.

#### 3.3.1 Career choice

The reasons behind choosing a career are multidimensional. Career decisions are embedded in relational life and have contextual meaning (Amundson, Borgen, Iaquinta, Butterfield & Koert 2010). All in all real world career choices are shaped by individual and structural factors. Individual factors are such as health, educational qualifications, family responsibilities and social networks. Structural factors include among other things labour market characteristics, socio-economic status, gender and ethnic inequality. (Robertson 2015.) Many people face difficulties in making career decisions (Gati 2013). Moreover some take the question very seriously but to others it doesn't mean as much. Some of the interviewees in this study were able to design their career and follow their plans, but to others their career had happened by accident. Belonging and the potential for meaningful engagement are integral to career decisions (Amundson et al. 2010). Desired career outcomes for individuals might concern for meaningful, prosocial, high-paying or high-prestige careers (Allan et al. 2017). For the interviewees the target was to hit meaningfulness. Moreover prosocial, high-paying or high-prestige career were not linked in meaningfulness among the interviewees.

Many theories have been created to illuminate the intriguing question about career choice at hand. Career research started to develop already in the end of 1800s. Career choice has been studied from an individual's point of view, but also from organizational benefits (Rosso et al. 2010). Additionally from individuals point of view the theories can be divided into career development- and career counselling theories. Career development theories aim to explain vocational behaviours such as career exploration, vocational choice and work adjustment. As an example Holland's theory of personality is a theory of career development. By contrast career counselling theories seek to describe schemes and specify practical interventions for fostering work in people's lives. Among others constructivist thinking falls into this category. (Hartung 2013.)

Since people are to make decisions in many aspects of life simultaneously it is appropriate to look closer into a career counselling theory, which approaches human beings in a holistic manner. According to the inventor of constructivistic career counselling in Canada, Vance Peavy (1998), the individual is not the sole producer of his /her life, but produces it in joint action with others and in relations with the physical environment. It is based on the assumption

that human existence is largely socially constructed. Additionally both, people and the social contexts in which people are embedded are continuously changing. The key features of constructivistic career counselling include for example the recognition that problems do not reside in persons, but relationships, interactions or in the contexts as social-structure features of situations. (Peavy 1998.) This can well be seen in Olga's story for she was under the power of her mother for a long period of her life and in Tero's story as he found to be ignored by his co-workers. Furthermore there is no "one right way" to perceive truth or reality; social life is composed of multiple realities. Constructivistic career counselling approaches the person as a whole being not as a sub-part of for example career- or vocational counselling; the various aspects of one's entire life are implicated in various degrees. It acknowledges that change is always already underway. What is necessary is to invent ways of making the best of change and learn how to join change in ways that help one succeed in moving along the cultural pathways one wishes to travel. (Peavy 1998; 37, 255-256.)

Niles (2011) proposes that all workers encounter various work situations. This can be seen from the stories presented in this study. Life happens and narrators have been doing their best coping with different situations. Niles (2011) describes the encounters of various work situations as a career flow. Like a river with many currents, work presents different demands at different rates to each worker. Additionally workers are coping with career flow challenges with varying degrees of readiness. For effective career self-management worker needs to have the following attitudes and behaviours: hope, self-reflection, self-clarity, visioning, goal setting and implementing /adapting. (Niles 2011.) According to this study many of these attitudes have taken place more permanently when the work has been meaningful. Moreover in less meaningful work or in a work that has caused distress, the interviewees described their attitudes as tolerant.

### 3.3.2 Happenings

We have no way of knowing in advance the destiny of any individual. In this study the narrators pointed out happenings that had accidentally led them straight into or toward meaningful work. For example Nella wanted to move into another town and for that, she needed to find work. By her surprise she found to be working in a meaningful work. It would be interesting to understand factors influencing to these happenings in career choice. There is a theory designed to answer the question at hand, which supports the findings of this study. The happenstance learning theory is an attempt to explain how and why individuals follow their different paths through life. It posits that human behaviour is the product of countless numbers of learning experiences, beginning at birth, made available by both planned and unplanned situations. (Krumboltz 2009.) In this study, the narrators described to have learned from themselves in different situations. Furthermore unplanned events are a normal component of every career. Each person must evaluate whether the potential benefits are worth the potential costs. (Krumboltz 2009.) For example one of the interviewees depicted the contradiction between combining work and family-life to have offered a learning experience that had led her into the conclusion that family is

more valuable than work. Mistakes happen inevitably but provide opportunities for learning (Krumboltz 2009).

Since the future cannot be predicted with any dependable degree of certainty, people should not make any career decisions by declaring their future lifetime occupation. It's better to be undecided, which can be reframed as open-mindedness. The key is moreover to engage in a variety of interesting and beneficial activities, remain alert to alternative opportunities and learning skills for succeeding in each new activity. One should focus on using career assessments to stimulate learning. (Krumboltz 2009.) For some of the interviewees work was seen to hold significant potential to personal development. They have been oriented to find challenges by trying out new things and educating themselves further. People can for example think about ways in which current interests can be applied in a variety of occupations, imagine alternative circumstances in which they could feel comfortable and take actions to achieve satisfying career. (Krumboltz 2009.)

### 3.3.3 Self-Knowledge

To gain an understanding of what one should pursue, people should become aware of themselves. For self-understanding, self-concept, attitudes and self-directed behaviour to grow there are three conditions that must be present. There needs to be an environment that provides genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (being seen with unconditional positive regard) and empathy (sensing accurately and listening). The conditions apply in any situation in which the development of a person is a goal. Besides career counselor and client, for example with parent and child as well as teacher and student. Furthermore as persons are accepted they tend to develop a more caring attitude towards themselves. And as a person is to understand self more, the self becomes more congruent with the experiencings. The person thus becomes more real, more genuine. In the end there is a greater freedom to be true, whole person. (Rogers 1980, 115-117.) In this study these elements were present in the narrators lives, some of them would live in described like conditions later in their adult years.

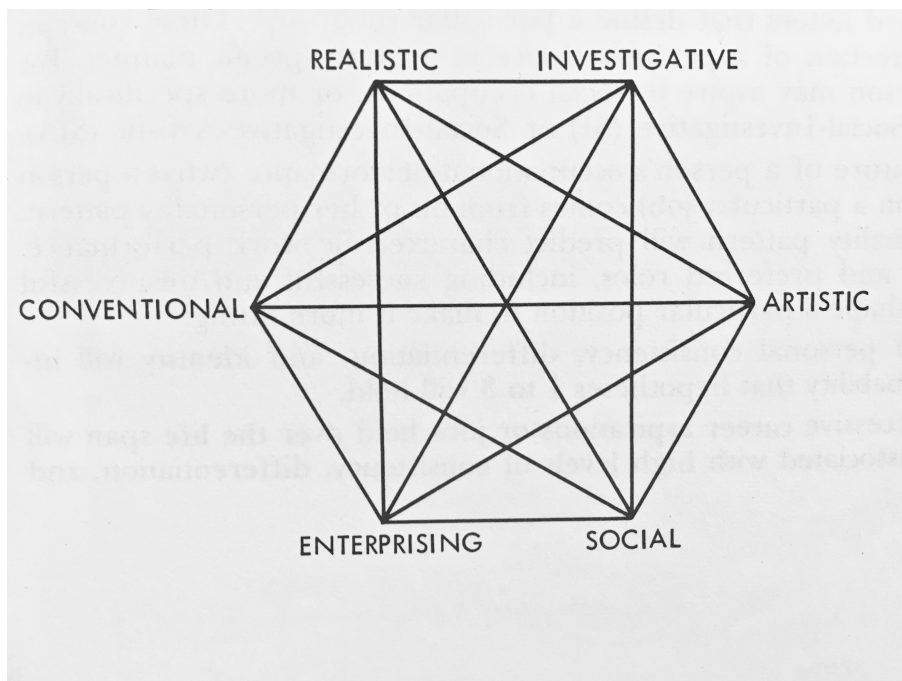
#### Authenticity

Our ability to own and to be the author of our lives in full awareness that it will end and that it is up to us to make something of it is referred to authenticity (Deurzen & Adams 2016, 219). This is something that all the interviewees had recognized. For example Tero sees the idea as a guiding light of his life. Authenticity only arises when we are facing truth and allow this stance of truth seeking inform our actions. As such it is rarely sustainable and we revert back to inauthenticity, which is more usual mode of being. When this in turn becomes intolerable we may once again respond to the call of conscience and own up to our responsibility. (Deurzen & Adams 2016, 219.)

## Personality

The interviewees depicted to have presupposed their personality or personal traits to match the work they were considering as one factor leading to meaningful work. Personality is a pattern of relatively permanent traits and unique characteristics that give consistency and individuality to a person's behaviour. Moreover traits contribute to individual differences in behaviour, consistency of behaviour and stability of behaviour across situations. (Feist & Feist 2009.) Within vocational psychology personality has been studied from diverse perspectives. In addition the concept of personality includes biological factors, needs, motives, objective biography, the role of culture and transactions between these factors. Generally it refers to personal qualities, such as thoughts, attitudes, feelings and behavioural patterns that are relatively enduring. Yet most theorists acknowledge change and development of the personality system throughout the life-span. (Rottinghaus & Miller 2013.)

John Holland has created a broad and inclusive model of interest types. His theory supports the findings from this study. Holland (1985) posits the existence of six personality types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional (hereafter referred to collectively as RIASEC). The model proposes that a person can relate her- /himself having more of some kind of tendencies and less about something else. Furthermore RIASEC types encompassed interests by many personality characteristics. Represented in a hexagon they would indicate relative similarity with the distances between the types (see Graph 7). (Holland 1985; Tracey & Sodano 2013.)



GRAPH 7 Holland's hexagonal model representing the six personality types and their relations (Holland 1985, 29)

In Holland's theory the types are described with many adjectives, but here I will describe them with few words. Experiences of the Realistic person lead to a preference for activities that entail ordered or systematic manipulation of things. Realistic person is materialistic, practical and inflexible. The Investigative person can be described as observational, symbolic and systematic. The Artistic type is ambiguous, free and unsystematized. The social is considered as friendly, helpful and empathic. The Enterprising person is described as self-confident, domineering and extroverted. The Conventional person prefers persistent, conforming and unimaginative activities. (Holland 1985.) For example Elli narrated her personality relating more with Social and less with Investigative. Working as an accountant required mostly the Investigative tendencies from her, which caused her distress in that position.

Holland further proposed that occupations and social environments could also be classified into the same six RIASEC types enabling a relative simple person-environment match (Holland 1985; Tracey & Sodano 2013). The more a person fits or matches an environment, the better the outcomes are (Tracey & Sodano 2013). Additionally devoting wholeheartedly to a job that feels to be a perfect match makes personality identification possible and provides the possibility to know oneself (Frankl 1984). For example Siiri described how working in an environment that matched her personality made her even more aware of her personal tendencies. Moreover being able to find an environment where a person can be himself /herself (Järvillehto 2015) and act based on his /her strengths provide an authentic experience: the real self can be seen and this in turn increases life satisfaction (Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2015). However assessing the fit between the person and the environment is not straightforward: the structure of interest and structures of occupations mirror each other (Tracey & Sodano 2013).

### 3.3.4 Actions

All the interviewees took action to find meaningful work. A sense of how she or he will fit in the world of work can be formulated through exploration, observation and reflection (Rottinghaus & Miller 2013). The interviewees would explore, observe and reflect themselves to gain an understanding how to find and maintain meaningful work. If the process is successfully navigated it can lead to self-actualization in the field of work (Rottinghaus & Miller 2013, 118), which means being able to fulfill one's potential (Rogers 1980). In order to learn and develop oneself, challenges should not be avoided but confronted (Stenberg & Stenberg 2016). For example Tero would challenge himself with the decision to quit his permanent job and abandon financial security for the sake of learning new and unfamiliar things. The person searching for meaningful work needs to obtain information about occupations and possibilities and overcome conflicts involving the influence of significant others (Gati, Krausz & Osipow 1996). Nella experienced this, as she was enlightened with new knowledge after being informed about occupational possibilities. Simultaneously she ignored the exemplarity of her relatives.

We are to make decisions that necessarily occur within the flow of activity. Emotions and personality traits - along with idiosyncratic personal histories,

moral codes and predispositions – influence the choices we make. At the end of the day we are guided by our self, the reflective, intuitive aspect of consistency that guides interactions. (Hitlin & Glen 2007.) More importantly the presence of wisdom, which enables a person to consider carefully what they should ultimately pursue in order to be in their full potential, allows purpose to perform optimally, leading to a desired end by providing appropriate behavioral directions (Han 2015).

### 3.3.5 Others

Despite the fact that we need to form a concept of our self and be able to exist as a subject of our actions. The identity of most people still resides in their attachment to others or to institutions such as occupation or social group. In other words the sense of identity rests on the sense of an unquestionable belonging to the crowd (Feist & Feist 2009, 194) and being committed to other people (Fadjukoff 2015). This is perfectly in line with the findings of this study. All in all the interviewees saw themselves belonging into a group and their experience of meaningful work relied to a large extent to being committed to other people.

According to this study, a huge impact to career decisions origins from childhood. Ideas about work and occupations in childhood can be seen as the precursors to adolescent career development and later exploration of the world of work. Children begin framing ideas and making judgements about the suitability of various types of occupations for themselves as early as age 4. (Howard & Walsh 2011.) Additionally the use of life-stories for self-constructing and identity shaping starts also at an early age (Peila-Shuster 2018). This is what happened to Siiri and Nella in their childhood when they framed ideas about educating and taking care of other people in the future. Furthermore childhood relationships, experiences and activities provide a fertile ground for developing future orientation (Peila-Shuhster 2018). Although parental attitudes play a minor and complex role in the development of child's interests, each parental type provides a cluster of environmental opportunities as well as deficits (Holland 1985).

Early environmental factors play a part in finding meaning or purpose in life. Important factors for purpose development are modelling, mentoring, tutoring and inspiring, which are the ways to foster moral virtue. An early intervention is also crucial for purpose development. All in all early environmental and educational factors around children significantly contribute to the formation of purpose. (Han 2015.) Another way to foster meaningfulness in children's lives is through ideals. Ruyter (2007) claims that parents as well as professional educators need to impart ideals to children. The concept "ideals" refers to situations or characteristics of a person that a person believes to be superb, excellent or perfect and that have not yet been realized, at least not in the life of the person who holds the ideal. From this description can be distilled four necessary conditions of ideals: they refer to ideas that a person is excellent, the person must attach high value to these ideas, they are (still) part of the person's imagination or dream and they are not easily achievable and may even be impossible to achieve, for they refer to states of the highest quality. (Ruyter



2007.) For example Nella was imparted by the ideal of dedicating to work for something good or of greater value in her childhood. All in all ideals are important in construing meaning and motivating children to strive for something higher or better. (Ruyter 2007.)

One model to help us understand children's processes of choosing and attaining future work is cognitive development model. It focuses on the ways in which individuals actively construct their understanding of the surrounding world. (Holland 1985). The interviewees thought that they were given certain frames from childhood environment and based on the models they began to wonder different jobs. When children begin to explore their career dreams, their thoughts are characterized by fantasy, imagination and heroism. They base their career dreams to the types of activities that are of interest to them. (Howard & Walsh 2011.) For example Siiri imagined herself nursing already as a child. Small children tend to have a very positive self-image and outer factors, such as skills, accomplishments or success are irrelevant (Hotulainen, Lappalainen, & Sointu 2015).

As children grow, they shift to compare their personal abilities and capacities to those required in various lines of work. The process often includes a consideration of job activities, job characteristics and personal interests and abilities. (Howard & Walsh 2011.) Siiri considered her personal abilities in elementary and later on in vocational school. On becoming aware from ones abilities, child is to benefit from significant other, who recognizes his /her strengths in a particular matter and gives positive regard to him /her (Hotulainen et al. 2011). This can happen in adulthood as well: one narrator became aware of his strengths after receiving positive regard in adulthood from a friend. Positive regard helps the child learn but also increases self-confidence. Becoming aware of one's strengths has a positive impact on career planning and later on work-life. (Hotulainen et al. 2011.)

### 3.3.6 Attitudes

Living with a cause follows the decisions we make concerning our existence and acts. Living a life leads every now and then to the recognition that what we thought we knew about our existence isn't really the case after all, which in turn causes feelings of anxiety (Appignanesi 2008.) It becomes a question of attitude, how to respond to the preconditions of life? A person is free to decide what kind of an attitude toward the world he /she has no matter what kind of an environment he /she is currently living in (Frankl 1984). Among others, Deurzen & Adams (2016) sees anxiety as energy that can very well and should be utilized for a human being to take action in order to achieve his /her full potential. The existential approach supports the findings in this study: realization and the acceptance of suffering to confront life as it is and solved cases of questioning have led to meaningful work. On the other hand Frankl (1984, 156) reminds that living with a cause helps us generate victorious attitude for everyday life, which supports the findings of this study. For example Tero would develop a more positive attitude toward life in general soon after he started to work in a meaningful job. Re-evaluation of current conditions and accepting life

as it is; with no fixed design for human existence (Appignanesi 2008) describes the interviewees' attitudes toward the world.

### **3.3.7 Implications for counselling**

The results of this study and existing theories show that it takes many abilities and skills from the individual to attain meaningful work. It is imperative that counsellors foster positive human development and assist clients in finding fuller meaning in life (Adams 2012). Career counselling can facilitate the consideration of personal meaning in career decisions (Amundson et al. 2010). Ideals being important in construing meaning (Ruyter 2007) finding out the kinds of ideals the client holds can help in the process. Individual's career decisions tend to be relational, emotional and in service of the whole person. Career counsellors can assist individuals to understand interconnections and the role of relativity in career decisions. Moreover knowing these can be affirming to career counselling clients. On a more emotional level, career counsellors can affirm the tensions that constrain career decisions. All in all career counsellors can help clients find meaning in structures that influence career decisions, consider alternatives that help clients meet needs for meaningful work across life roles, and help clients develop the skills and interests needed to connect with other and become engaged in activities. Also career counselors can help the client to find hope followed by difficult career decisions. (Amundson et al. 2010.)

## **3.4 Meaningful work means the world to the interviewees**

What matters to one person may well mean nothing to another. One fits all - scenario is impossible and not even needed when it comes to meaningful work. Each person knows only his /her reality and is able to narrate about that.

Despite of the unique world views, the interviewees in this study have one thing in common concerning meaningful work: They have not taken the question lightly. They have gone beyond glancing meaningful work and actually seen it take place and after that had they thought again. It has had a world changing impact for them.

Meaningful work as a concept is closely related to career decision making. For this reason the factors leading to meaningful work are in some extent repeatedly presented in the following narratives concerning the concept. Here are the realities around meaningful work.

One of the interviewees stated that working should not solely be seen as an all-important issue. There should absolutely be meaningfulness in one's work. He sees current state providing us freedom to choose meaningful work over not to work at all.

They say that all work counts, I honestly think that's not the case. Some, many jobs are all nonsense, but we just should do something, I don't believe that. It would be good to do

something meaningful. That's what I believe in, but to work only for work, the idea feels just silly. (Tero)

Ku sanotaan että kaikki työ on tärkeätä, ni mää oon kyllä sitä mieltä että ei oo. Joku, jotkut hommat on iha höpöhöpö hommia, mutta meidän vaan pitää tehdä jotain, nii en oikein usko siihen. Ois hyvä tehdä jotain, missä on merkitystä. Siihen mä uskon, mutta tehdä työtä vaan työn vuoks, tuntuu hölmöltä minusta. (Tero)

The experience of meaningfulness is subjective. All the interviewees depicted it as a feeling. They described it as feeling good when working. They also felt strongly belonging to their work. Their stories were embedded by a sensation of knowing to have found the one (and only) and feelings of being rewarded.

It felt like, that this is where I belong. (Nella)

Tuntu siltä, että mä kuulun sinne. (Nella)

After finding a work that is liked and aligned with one's values becomes engaging to work possible. Engaging in turn was narrated to have an effect on the experience of meaningfulness.

When I found work that I liked and I sort of went into it, then that is where it origins. (Olga)

Sitte ku löyty sellanen työ mistä tykkäs ja niinku lähti siihen mukaa, ni sieltä se lähti niinku tulemaa sitte. (Olga)

Meaningfulness was described to arise from being able to be oneself. The interviewees felt that they can exist as their real selves without trying to be anyone or anything else. Furthermore they felt no need to hide behind any roles. Meaningfulness was rooted less in trying to impress others and more in terms of trying to impress oneself.

Tero: And I don't have to be in any strict role. I can just be my own person and be seen as I am. Tell my stupid jokes in between <laughing>

Interviewer: <laughing>

Tero: and do some crazy stuff as well. That is, that is nice.

Interviewer: Being real, that's the thing?

Tero: Yes, no-one want's me like, to try to be something that I'm not <laughing> that would just be too dreadful to all.

Tero: Ja mun ei tarvii olla missään tiukassa roolissa. Et voin tuoda sitä omaa persoonaaki siinä esille. Heittää niitä tyhmiä juttujaki siine sekaan <nauraa>

Haastattelija: <nauraa>

Tero: ja vähä hullutellaki. Se o, se o mukavaa.

Haastattelija: se aitous, se on se juttu?

Tero: nii, kukaan ei halua että mää niinku mää niinku koittasin olla joku muu <nauraa> se ois varmaan ihan kamalaa kaikille.

Career decisions favoured meaningfulness over financial security. Only one of the interviewees mentioned money being a cause, but wouldn't describe it as meaningful. The interviewees who had reflected their ideas about meaningful

work would end up working in a meaningful environment already from the beginning of their careers. The ones' who started working before reflecting their motives became aware of this in the early stages of their career, as soon as they started to reflect their thoughts about working.

It was not really 'meaningful work' after vocational school. Seriously no <laughing>! It was all for the money I did it and so on. (Olga)

Se ei ollu niinku 'merkitykselliseksi koettu työ' ammattikoulun jälkee. Ei todellakaa <nauraa>! Se oli vaa alussa että ku mä saan rahaa tästä nii mä teen, ja tällei näi. (Olga)

Self-awareness of strengths and work that correlated with them was an important factor in experiencing work as meaningful. In addition all interviewees depicted to have certain kinds of personal traits or tendencies that matched better with some tasks compared to others.

There are so many things that match my personality. (Nella)

Siinä on niin paljon semmosia juttuja, mitkä sopii mun persoonalle. (Nella)

Being around other people was crucial to all of the interviewees. The role of other people was unimportant as long as there were people close by. Additionally one narrated the presence of other people being a lifeline, when choosing a career.

When I started to really think about what I want. I'll tell you that the first thing that came to me was that there needs to be human interaction. (Olga)

Ku aloin sitte oikeesti miettimään, että mitä mä haluan. Mää sanon että ensimmäinen mikä tuli oli että ihmisten kanssa pitää saaha olla tekemisissä. (Olga)

Many of them felt that meaningfulness arises from doing things together. One of them felt it regardless the fact that he described himself as introvert. He finds meaningfulness from being among other people instead of doing things alone.

I like peace and quiet and I like to do stuff by myself. Already from childhood I have been that way. My mum told me that I have sometimes, I have sent my friends home when I have started to feel like it is enough now, this togetherness <laughing> --- I feel it is important that we do things together, because one could do those things by himself, but still we choose to do them in a group. (Tero)

Tykkään omasta rauhasta ja tykkään touhuilla omia juttuja. Ihan pienestä asti oon ollu sellane. Mun äitiki esimerkiks kerto, että mä oon joskus, lähetin kaveritkin kotiin ku musta alko tuntuu, että nyt riittää yhdessäolo <nauraa> --- on tärkeätä että tehään yhdessä asioita, koska niitä juttujahan vois tehdä myös yksinki, mutta me silti valitaan tehdä niitä porukassa. (Tero)

In the stories the feelings of communion were important. In addition to doing things together it was about being seen as one unit and beneficial to one another, even when people were working with different assignments.

That we are not in different groups, we are as one, despite our different tasks.  
(Elli)

Et ei olla niinku eri sakkia, et ollaan niinku samaa porukkaa vaikka tehdäänki eri duunia.  
(Elli)

A source of meaningfulness was found from helping others. It was depicted to be rewarding and furthermore resulted in engaging to work.

Okay, this is something that's beneficial to others too. (Tero)

Okei mä teen jotain mistä on hyötyä niinku muilleki. (Tero)

Succeeding in ones work or conquering oneself and being able to see the results of working were narrated to add meaningfulness. These led to the idea that the work they were doing is important, beneficial and that they are competent in what they were doing.

Succeeding in something, you have not succeeded before. (Tero)

Onnistu jossain, missä ei oo ennen onnistunu. (Tero)

Interviewer: What do you think, is your work meaningful?

Elli: Yes. I see the results of my work every day you know.

Haastattelija: Mitä ajattelet, koetko että olet merkityksellisessä työssä?

Elli: Joo-o. Mää nään kuule kätteni jäljet, joka päivä.

Employer and working conditions played a role in experiencing work as meaningful. Flexibility and freedom on the job to organize and implement ones work and being in charge were linked in the experience of meaningfulness.

Well, it's that I can do it my own way. My style. I get to decide what happens in the class. I have freedom to do --- my stuff and that's my thing. If someone were to tell me that I should do it in some particular way, I would be like, nooo <laughing> so absolutely freedom to influence on the things I do. (Tero)

No se, että mä saan tehdä sitä mun tavalla. Mun tyylillä. Mää saan päättää, et mitä siellä tunnilla pidetään. Mulle on aika vapaat kädet annettu --- tehdä niitä mun juttuja, että se on mun juttu. Jos joku sanois mulle, että näin sun pitää tehdä, nii mää olisin, että eeeii <nauraa> että ehdottomasti vapaus vaikuttaa siihen, että mitä mä teen. (Tero)

Employees should treat each other as equal and be treated equally by the employer. If someone is working a lot less than another, it makes the situation unequal. The employer holds the key to make things right. Everyone should be informed and have the same rules to play by.

It is of important, that there won't be any accidents during a busy day when you work hard as hell. After your intense input you happen to walk by your colleague who is sitting and enjoying newspapers for forty-five minutes already, wouldn't you become irritated? <Laughing> That's when it will all become about equality --- We all want to be

alike, do equally as much and be seen as equal, when it comes to equality there has to be precise. (Elli)

Se on tärkeätä, ettei käy niinku semmonen vahinko, että on sit se kiirepäivä ja teet ihan apinan raivolla. Ja sit kävelet ja näät että tuollahan se on istunu kolme varttia ja lukenu lehtiä, että etkö ite vetäis hernetä nenään? <nauraa> Siinä tulee se tasapuolisuus --- Kaikki haluaa kuitenkin olla samanlaisia, tehdä saman verran ja olla samanarvoisia, et siinä pitää olla, tasapuolisuudessa pitää olla tarkka. (Elli)

Jobs that offered continual learning and contributed to self-development were perceived as avenues for self-growth. Being able to progress their skills when working and develop their work further on was crucial in experiencing work as meaningful.

All the time I'm interested in progressing myself and developing further on my work and I don't want to get stuck in the past. (Nella)

Koko ajan kiinnostaa kaikki kehittyä ja kehittää sitä työtä ja sillei ettei halua jämähtää paikalleen. (Nella)

Some of them think that valuing their work themselves was a key feature in meaningful experience. Despite of the thoughts that their work was undervalued by other people.

Valuing your work is a must, if you, if you don't value your work <silence> then it will sort of be like who cares, what I'm doing --- this work here is extremely meaningful --- but really undervalued. Even still, regardless of that <silence>. (Olga)

Oman työn arvostus pitää olla, jos ei se, jos ei sitä oo <hiljaista> niin se on tavallaan hällä väliä, että mitä mä teen sille --- tämä työ täällä on hyvinki merkityksellistä --- tosin kovin aliarvostettua. Että siitä huolimatta <hiljaista>. (Olga)

Not being valued by others didn't decrease meaningfulness, but being valued in one's work increased the experience of meaningfulness.

..In addition, when you succeed in something, then it is nice that there are others seeing it happen and saying way to go. (Tero)

..Jo sekin, että kun, onnistuu jossain niin onhan se kiva, että siellä on muita sitten näkemässä ja sanomassa että hyvä sinä. (Tero)

Being needed in ones work gave more confidence and encouraged to extra efforts. These things had a positive effect on future plans. In turn these led to more intense engaging and reinforced the experience of meaningful work.

Well he is good in this, ask him that is a thing that has given me much self-confidence that I'm good in what I do. That it is worth the effort to try and in the future I will most certainly do lots of things. (Tero)

Et hei, hän on hyvä tässä, kysykää sitä, ni sekin on antanu hirveesti itseluottamusta siihe et mä oon hyvä tässä mun hommassa. Että mun kannattaa yrittää että varmasti tuun tekemään paljonkin asioita. (Tero)

Meaningful work was always a creation of the employee. One of the key features seems to be attitude. The interviewees have clearly taken responsibility of their being and what it is that they wanted to make out of their lives. Here is how it was described.

It is only up to you, you know. No-one does it for you. It is up to you to define and pretty far it is you who is to define your own life. (Elli)

Kun se on itsestä kiinni. Kukaan muu ei tee sitä sun puolesta. Vaan sää niinku ite määrittelet niinku sen ja kyllä sää omanki elämäs määrittelet aika pitkälle. (Elli)

Understanding the surrounding conditions of life being a bit of a struggle as it is. Moreover the only one to make meaning is the person itself. It was to happen in all this meaninglessness and because of it. Finding meaning was of essence when experiencing work as meaningful.

..Oh well, life is <laughing> in some way a bit of a suffering anyway and maybe we should find something that makes it worthwhile. So, to find that purpose in life. (Tero)

..Noh, elämä on <nauraa> ehkä jollain tapaa pientä kärsimystä kuitenkin ja ehkä meidän pitäisi löytää jotain sellaista elämään, mikä tekisi siitä kaikesta sen arvoista. Että, nii että löytää elämälleen sen tarkoituksen. (Tero)

### 3.5 Summary of meaningful work as an experience

According to this study the experience of meaningful work takes place in four dimensions. Described as a strong sensation and involvement of higher powers, meaningful work indicates to be a personal process. All in all meaningful work is the creation of the employee, but other people as well as conditions play a significant part in the meaning making. Other people are crucial in the matter: the needed ingredient seems to be communion and helping others but also an environment that provides freedom to work in a way one sees to suit best. I have made a summarizing graph (see figure 8) to illustrate the findings.



GRAPH 8 The ingredients of meaningful work as an experience

Meaningful work is attached to *intuition*. Work is meaningful when the feelings of belonging to one's work are involved. In other words the person feeling that she /he was paired to the work by higher powers. Meaningful work simply feels good.

On the *personal dimension* there is agency. Taking responsibility for one's experiences is needed in order to attain meaningful work. In addition work is meaningful when one is able to be oneself truly and valued as such. The experience of meaningfulness leads to more engagement, which in turn reinforces the sensation of meaningfulness. In other words it is a reinforcing cycle. Valuing one's work but also being valued by others increases meaningfulness. Not doing the work just for work, but to be able to see the results and to notice how good of an impact it has on other people makes the work meaningful.



The need for *communion* is present in the experience of meaningful work. Moreover connecting to others and human interaction is very significant in creating meaningful work. Being aware of not doing things alone, but together is of essence in the experience of meaningfulness. All in all the person is to be significant to others: Being needed and able to help makes the difference. Communion is a key feature in meaningful work even if one is to prefer loneliness overall in life-activities.

What comes to the surrounding *conditions*, the importance of freedom is highlighted. Freedom to organize, implement and develop oneself and one's work provide opportunities for meaningful work.

### 3.6 Theories of meaningfulness

According to the results of this study meaningfulness is experienced and constructed personally. In the following chapters theories concerning the experience of meaningfulness and also meaningful work are presented.

#### 3.6.1 Finding a purpose /something rather than nothing

Being able to experience meaningfulness is a fundamental part of having a life worth living (Camus 1955). According to Frankl (2019) unique humanity lies in being engaged in finding meaning of existence. Unlike animals people are not driven by instincts and without traditions we are not forced to do things. Moreover it becomes a question of will. Without being aware of what one wants to do, one might end up copying the actions of other people. Sometimes not knowing may lead to doing as one is expected. (Frankl 1984). This is simply what happened to Olga as she educated herself and worked only because she was expected to do so. She described her work being meaningless at that time and found meaningful work after becoming aware of her needs.

Values and conscience are to guide one in the process of finding meaningfulness (e.g. Deurzen & Adams 2016; Frankl 1984). Values and beliefs refer to what we give value to and believe to be morally right. All of our actions are based on our beliefs and values. Values are at the root of why we get up in the morning and how well we sleep at night. (Deurzen & Adams 2016.) In this study the interviewees narrated contradictions with their values and outer expectations occurred; the interviewee was not able to live according to her values, but forced to act as expected. For example Elli struggled with continuing to work even when she was forced to compete with people she cared for over a job. Values arise out of our understanding of particular personal and social experiences and then evolve into apparently fixed laws. (Deurzen & Adams 2016.) Although many like to think values as fixed and beyond discussion. Among others Frankl (1986, 82) and Puolimatka (2011) believe that a person is born with values as humanity is made in the image of God. According to this point of view conscience that guides us is actually the will of God (Frankl 1986) and

people are innate to reflect goodness, righteousness and truthfulness (Puolimatka 2011, 30).

Values and beliefs are the basis of personal code of ethics which is about following questions: how I want to live my life, how I want to treat others and be treated by others, how I evaluate my actions and those of others, how I feel about human existence and how I evolve a sense of overall purpose and meaning. (Deurzen & Adams 2016, 89.) These questions have been reflected by all of the narrators in this study, which has been followed by the experience of meaningful work. Sometimes we have to live with values that we did not choose and we may adopt some in different occasions (Deurzen & Adams 2016). Olga's way of life was embedded with adaptation for a long period of time in her life when she was taught to value work over family. A contradiction between her inner belief of the truth and given values occurred, because she felt family to be more important than work. The circumstances of our birth and upbringing are beyond our control, but after we become self-aware we are obligated to make choices. At the end of the day acting in a certain way gives meaning to our lives. With nothing to restrict us, we have to choose to take actions to become who we want to be. (Appignanesi 2006.)

Conscience is of help in the process of being selective and choosing what one feels as the right choice (Frankl 1984). Person is to anticipate truth, oversee its related difficulties, take responsibility for the consequences of their choices and take ownership of their existence (Deurzen & Adams 2016, 105). In this study, for example Olga and Tero experienced meaningfulness after they had faced the meaningless conditions they had found to be in and acted for change based on their conscience. Meaning cannot be given, it has to be found and this can be done only when one is aware that she /he is responsible for finding meaning (Frankl 1984). Additionally meaning-fulfillment is a protective factor in keeping healthy (Frankl 2019) and as Tero described it, by the time he started to wonder what the meaning of his life was, he wasn't feeling very healthy. Furthermore meaningfulness can be experienced for example by engaging in an action, person or by creating a piece of work. Primarily, meaning is about the specific meaning of a personal situation. (Frankl 2019.) Life in general and also careers might not always be sunshine. We are to aim at the center of the target, knowing that we will not hit it every time (Franklin 2019).

### 3.6.2 Meaningful work

Times have changed since the ethos of protestant work ethics emphasizing hard work as all-important issue. Life nor work doesn't have to merely be hard anymore, they can in addition or solely be something else. (Järvilehto 2013.) Altogether working narrated, as all-important issue in this study was not linked in the experience of meaningfulness. On the other hand work doesn't have to provide the experience of pleasure or happiness, referring to hedonia in order to be meaningful. But as a contrast it should provide eudaimonia, which as a subtle concept represents a type of wellbeing encompassing pro-social activity, fulfilling one's true nature and providing opportunities for personal growth more

often than experience of pleasure. (Robertson 2015.) Given the decline in traditional sources of meaning such as religion, work has become, along with family, one of the most important domains from which people derive meaningfulness in their lives (e.g. Martela & Riekkı 2018). In essence, meaningful work is more than just a job to survive but something that contributes to society and is central to a person's life purpose. This is perfectly in line with the narrated stories in this study. Meaningful work is also related to a number of wellbeing variables such as less depression and life satisfaction. People in meaningful work are less likely to suffer, among other things from cognitive disorders or burnouts. All in all meaningful work is moderately linked with overall life meaning (e.g. Allan, Autin & Duffy 2016; Järvillehto 2013.)

It seems that meaningfulness is sought from work all around the world. Purpose is valued over money or status globally (Hurst, Pearce, Erickson, Parish, Vesty & Schnidman 2016) although a shift has been seen at least in one study. Allan, Owens & Duffy (2017) studied American undergraduate college students whom aimed to be very well off financially rather than to develop a meaningful philosophy of life. Working in order to get money was seen as a motive in two stories in this study. On both of them the career had just begun and later on the previous motive was replaced by meaningfulness in both stories. In Allan et al. (2017) found feeling meaningfulness being beneficial to students: the ones who felt meaningful reported having greater vocational clarity, greater career decision self-efficacy and more satisfaction with their course work. Furthermore they tend to experience greater career adaptability, career decidedness and positive career strategies. (Allan et al. 2017.) All in all people wouldn't work if they didn't get paid, but that is not at the core of why people do what they do. There is a demand of meaningfulness that has to be answered. (Schwartz 2015.)

With many advantages, meaningful work is worth pursuing. But what is it? Although definitions of meaning vary professionally, purpose and significance seem to be the essential aspects of meaning. Purpose refers to an individual's sense of striving toward the achievement of various life goals and experiencing a sense of fulfillment (Adams 2012) it is a stable intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self (Han 2015). Whereas significance refers to what one's life represents. Meaning, may be defined as the extent to which people comprehend, make sense of, or see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a mission in life (Adams 2012). Furthermore meaningful work can be defined as the subjective experience of how significant and intrinsically valuable people find their work to be. It is a question of an overall evaluation of work as regards whether it is intrinsically valuable and worth doing. Despite the fact that we might draw satisfaction from many aspects of our job, like whether it is pleasurable, meaningfulness of work is more about whether the work provides something that is in accordance with one's values. (Martela & Riekkı 2018.)

According to Martela and Riekkı's (2018) suggestion there are four psychological satisfactions that substantially influence work meaningfulness across cultures: autonomy (sense of volition), competence (sense of efficacy), related-

ness (sense of caring relationship) and beneficence (sense of making a positive contribution). The suggestion is based on both self-determination theory, which aim is to explain human motivation, and theories about life purpose. Autonomy refers to the persons feeling that the actions emanate from the self and reflect who one really is, instead of being the result of external pressures. Competence is about a sense of mastery or capability in one's actions. Relatedness is reflecting the extent to which a person feels that one is connected to others, has caring relationships and belongs to a community. Beneficence is the sense of having a prosocial impact which means helping other(s). (Martela & Riecki 2018.) The presented theory supports the findings of this study: all four psychological satisfactions are found from the stories.

There are theories of meaningful work developed by scholars in industrial /organizational psychology. More research can be found of calling. However where meaningful work involves currently doing the work, a calling may or may not be lived out. (Allan et al. 2016.) All the interviewees were working in a meaningful work by the time they were interviewed and some of them believed their work to be a calling as well. According to a large literature review of Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) the dominant source of meaning seems to come from helping others or contributing to the common good. This seems to be fully in line with the famous Athenian philosopher Plato's conclusion about happiness springing from doing good and helping others (e.g. Frede 2017). In addition it is fully in line with the thoughts of the interviewees of this study.

Rosso & al. (2010) argues based on their literature review that there are two key dimensions that seem most fundamental to the creation and maintenance of meaningful work and those are agency and communion (See figure 9). They propose agency and communion as two fundamental modalities of human existence. On one hand humans are driven to separate, assert, expand, master and create. That is pursuing their agency. On the other hand humans are driven to contact, attach, connect and unite to pursue communion. They (Rosso et al. 2010) propose that the agency-communion distinction is relevant for understanding different ways people approach their work. The activities driven by the pursuit of agency versus communion may have fundamentally distinct influences on the experience of meaningful work. (Rosso et al. 2010.)

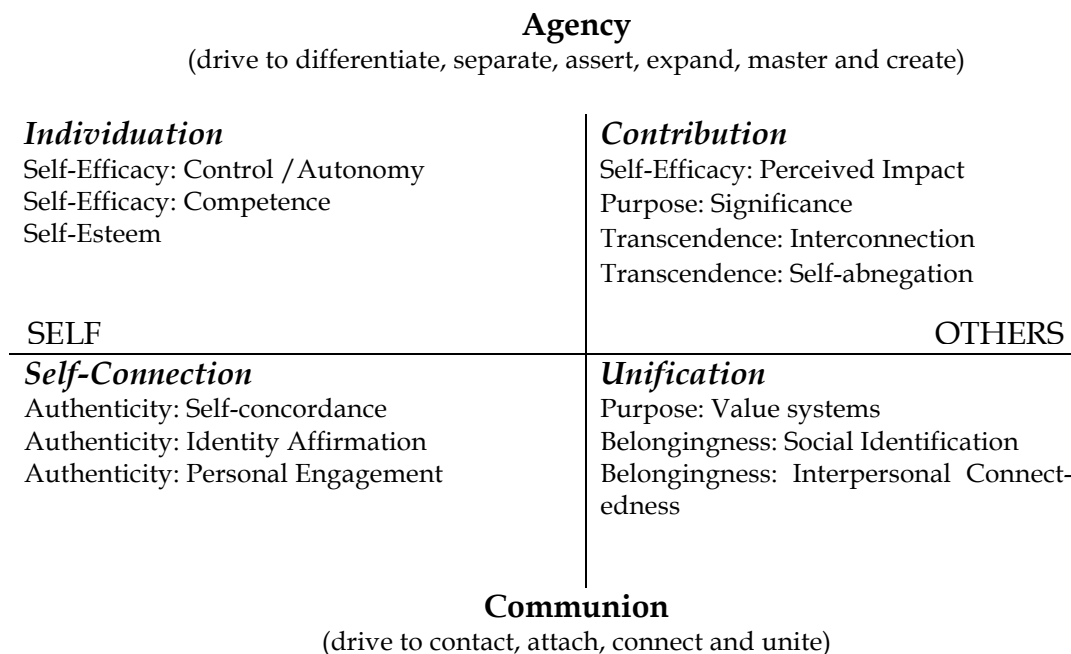


FIGURE 9. Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski's model representing (Rosso et al. 2010) the key dimensions of meaningful work.

Perceptions of the meaningfulness of work can vary based on whether action is directed toward the self or others. Both directions can be experienced as meaningful albeit the processes can seem different. The experience of meaningful work resides at the various intersections of agency-communion and self-others. Mechanisms of meaningfulness seem to differ with respect to the degree to which experiences are perceived as internal or external to the self. (Rosso et al. 2010.) There was action directed toward self and others for example in Tero's experience when he engaged more in his work and perceived the positive impact his work had on others.

Rosso et al. (2010) believe that it is at the various intersections of the presented dimensions (see figure 9) that the experience of meaningful work resides. Individuation (self-agency) reflects the meaningfulness of actions perceived as significant and /or done in service of something greater than the self. Self-connection (self-communion) reflects the meaningfulness of actions that bring individuals closer into alignment with the way they see themselves. Furthermore unification reflects the meaningfulness of actions that bring individuals into harmony with other beings or principles. (Rosso et al. 2010.)

This model (see figure 9) emphasizes the importance of both the self and various others as valuable sources of the meaning of work. It also implies that perceptions of meaningfulness must necessarily travel through the self. All in all individuals are the ultimate arbiters of the meaning of their own work as shaped through the lens of their unique perceptions and experiences. (Rosso et al. 2010.) All the narrators in this study had realized that they are the one's creating and maintaining the meaning in their work through their unique experiences.

### 3.6.3 Existing theories and findings of this study

The presented theories support the findings of this study. Working narrated, as an all-important issue in this study was not linked in the experience of meaningfulness. The interviewees pursued to derive meaningfulness in their lives from their work and it has played a big role in the process of making meaning. Money was unimportant when it came to experiencing work as meaningful. In this study, the interviewees were value-driven and ultimately acted based on their conscience. It was important for the interviewees to act according to their conscience; the efforts to act against it led into doubts and distress. This was the situation for example with Tero as he was advised to continue in his current work and with Olga as she was told to value work over family. Acts based on the interviewees' conscience gave them certainty of doing the right thing, even when they were expected to act otherwise.

The experience of meaningful work resides at the various intersections of agency-communion and self-others (Rosso et al. 2010), which supports the findings of this study. The interviewees were pursuing their agency by mastering and creating. The feelings of competence were linked in the experience of meaningful work. Furthermore the aspiration to communion took place in the need for connecting to other people. Additionally there was a need for being around other people, but also a desire to work together and help other(s). All of the interviewees felt a demand for the work to be in accordance with interviewees' value-system. It was possible to engage to work that was in accordance with employee's values, which in turn increased the experience of meaningfulness.

## 4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Trustworthiness and ethics

In science it is important to know if the study is liable or trustworthy. When it comes to qualitative research it is not possible to attain objectivity in the same manner as in quantitative research. This is due the fact that there is no absolute truth when it comes to qualitative study, there is not an exact amount of finding meaning nor can it be measured in anyway. Knowledge is based on experience that derives from entities and relations to the environment (Murphy 1996, 26-28). Moreover knowledge about is not the most important thing in the human sciences. There is a decided surge of experiential knowing, or knowing at a gut level, which has to do with the human being. It is something that has to do with the whole person, feelings, thoughts and words. (Rogers 1980). Additionally the results are conditional explanations limited into a place and time (Hirsjärvi et al. 2010). Validity of a qualitative research is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers (Creswell & Creswell 2018, 201). For example Heikkinen (2010) explains the concept of verisimilitude. It means that a listener can feel the story to be real regarding the possible facts that might not have happened in real life as it has been told. Vital thing is that the listener believes the story to be true and based on that is able to identify with the story. By these means it is possible for the listener to understand a whole new world. (Heikkinen 2010, 154-155.) The participants of this study came from different social backgrounds, but narrated their stories without unfamiliar dialect, which made the communication understandable. If I felt unsure during the interviews about something they expressed, I would ask them to explain it again to get it right.

My search for truth led me into using questions that are not structured. There was a certain theme discussed, but otherwise I didn't want to restrict the storytelling in any way. Acknowledging that the truth might be hidden for many reasons I would do my best to enable the storytelling. I explained the entire research process to the interviewees and reminded them that they are not obligated to participate. They were informed that they could withdraw their

consent to participate in the study at any time, even in the middle of the interview. I would emphasize that our conversations are confidential, the collected data is protected at all times and the interviewees are kept anonymous throughout the research. I was successful, as the interviewees would share their stories with me, even if there were painful or distressful happenings along the way. Especially when the interviewee was processing hardship in her /his storytelling that had happened in the past and still seemed to cast a shadow to present, my interaction was in accordance with counselling ethics: I avoided actions that cause harm and worked for the good of the interviewee (Suomen opinto-ohjaajat 2019; ACA Code of ethics 2014). Also for this thesis to be ethically accepted I have followed the guidelines of good scientific practice (Hirsjärvi et al. 2010) throughout the research process. In addition to previously mentioned responsibilities this research follows the principles that are endorsed by the research community: integrity, meticulousness and accuracy. Furthermore the results are communicated in an open and responsible fashion. And of course other researchers' works are respected by citing their publications appropriately. (TENK 2016.)

I have been transparent in everything concerning this study. I have presented in detail every step that has been taken and how it has been done concerning this study. To make this study more trustworthy I have made my interpretations of the stories after reading and listening them repeatedly. I transcribed the interviews soon after taping them to avoid bias (Bailey 2008). The quality of sound was good in all of the recordings so I was able to hear the interviewees clearly and make my transcriptions accurate. Transcription involves close observation of data through repeated careful listening. This in turn leads to familiarity with data and attention to what is actually there rather than what is expected. (Bailey 2008.)

## 4.2 Limitations and further study

This study was conducted using narrative approach. The strong aspects of this research lie in the sense making of meaningful work and illumination of finding meaningful work. All in all it is not meant to nor does it produce information that could be generalized to apply to neither all experiences of meaningful work nor finding meaningful work. Interview settings being always unique and narratives produced in interaction in a certain time and space, they are never reproduced the same manner. (Bailey 2008.)

The data was collected through individual interviews during 2017 August - 2019 January in Finland. The time period was quite long, but the social situation in Finland remained relatively the same during the time. All in all no distortion was caused by the time period. The possibility to participate to this study was published in social media, sent to a few organizations via e-mail and the researcher would ask her friend and two people she randomly met if they would like to participate. All the interviewees would participate voluntarily to this research. They all described helping others and interacting with other peo-



ple being the causes of experiencing their work meaningful. It would be an interesting research topic to study employees, who prefer working in environments without human contact and find out the reasons behind experiencing it meaningful, if it were meaningful. This study concentrates solely on the experience of meaningful work among Finnish employees. It only illuminates the current state in Finnish culture. It is likely that examining meaningful work in other countries and cultures would provide very different results. In addition there is one male and all the others are females who were interviewed. It might be interesting to study males and females separately and see if the experiences differ between genders. Also family status or life transitions may affect work meaningfulness (Allan et al. 2016), so it would be beneficial to study the impact of living through transition and careers before and after having children. Without a doubt, increasing the amount of interviewees might reveal some new factors concerning the questions studied. Additionally there could be multiple interviews during a career to examine how experiences may change during the process.

The researcher as well inevitably has an influence on what is known (Hirsjärvi et al. 2010). The knowledge is constructed together and the researcher has to interpretate the data (Heikkinen et al. 2010). On both stages might happen that the researcher makes too strong assumptions about the story or might not notice the actual message (Hänninen 2010). As a researcher I forced myself to maintain critical to my own assumptions and frames of meaning, focusing on what the interviewee is saying. In other words listening carefully to the interviewees' telling and let them talk about anything they felt necessary, not limiting the storytelling in any way. Considering the facts that one of the interviewees is a friend of mine and another has similar meaningful work experience as I have, I would stay extra alert to my pre-assumptions. When interviewing I didn't get carried away by my enthusiasm about the topic, but kept calm and focused on the narrators story. Furthermore communicating with interviewees who had a very different background I realized being invited to the unknown and I tried my best in understanding their stories. During the interviews I asked many times the interviewees to explain the happenings again to make sure that I have understood what is being said.

This research was conducted truly independent without any funding. The liability has not been affected by any funding organizations. It was me who made the decision to study paths to meaningful work and meaningful work as an experience. Of course I recognize that my subjective values and choices guided me to this topic. As Hirsjärvi et al. (2010) stresses values and choices are constantly present in the research process. I also chose two of the participants based on my pre-assumptions of them experiencing their current work meaningful. To avoid bias I asked, before giving any information about my research, did they experience their work meaningful. In addition to increase the liability of this study I have described the research process in detail. I have also used quotes of the interviewees' speech so that it's possible for the reader as well to evaluate the interpretations. The quotes are found in Finnish just as they were spoken and translated in English.

Meaningful work plays an important role in peoples' lives. The participants in this study felt meaningful work even more worth pursuing after they had gained experience of such. The one's working in meaningful sphere would gain the knowledge of being in the right place. Therefore, meaningful work might be reasonably addressed in career counselling. It would also be interesting to examine if clients want to explore their careers from this point of view and if career counsellors are already providing it. Furthermore it would be intriguing to study what kind of an impact career counselling has on searching meaningful work. Anyhow in career counselling it is important to remember that it is always to take place as client-centered and aim is to help clients in their aspirations (Peavy 1998), even if there would be good reasons to utilize for example the findings from this study.

### 4.3 Discussion of the results

In this thesis my aim was to increase understanding about meaningful work. Hopefully the presented results have painted at least a somewhat picture of the journeys leading to meaningful work and meaningful work as an experience. The concept of living a life that fulfils persons own purpose has an impact on how each and every day is to be experienced. The significance of having a meaning in life cannot be overstated. (E.g. Frankl 1959; Deurzen 2015.) If our work is in some extend aligned with our passions and dreams, it can be the provider of meaningful life. Meaningful work can be defined as the subjective experience of how significant and intrinsically valuable people find their work to be (Martela & Riekkı 2018), which is how the interviewees in this study understood the phenomena in question. The results of this study showed each path to meaningful work being unique and the experiences of meaningful work were unique as well. Although there could be found some similarities in the stories.

In every story, meaningfulness was narrated to be a feeling and dependable on the interviewee's point of view. According to this study, work meaningfulness has a positive influence in well-being. The findings are supported for example by Allan, Autin & Duffy (2016) who argue meaningful work correlating to life satisfaction and less depression. Martela and Riekkı's (2018) suggestion that autonomy, competence, relatedness and beneficence substantially influence work meaningfulness supports the findings of this study. It is a creation of a person, but cannot totally be made out of nothing. The interviewees were able to construct it if the conditions were preferable: The tasks have to match personal tendencies, the work should contribute to common good, there should be freedom to develop and there is a need to be allowed for the person to be his /her true self. This is in accordance with Rosso et al. (2010) theory of two key dimensions that seem most fundamental to the creation and maintenance of meaningful work: agency and communion.

In unfavourable conditions the interviewees would feel distressed and lost, thinking their way out toward more proper conditions. The possibility to expe-

rience work as meaningful is blocked when employee is given neither freedom to design nor implement ones work. Furthermore work is meaningless if the employee is to struggle in responding to the outer demands that are not in accordance with ones values or true self. The findings are supported by Rosso et al. (2010) as they suggest autonomy, self-concordance, perceived impact and value-system being the essence in experiencing work as meaningful. Based on the results of this study a lack of meaning was experienced when working was solely based on its ability to provide security and financial stability. In other words meaningfulness of work is not found by making money. This is where the society could take action; if all citizens were provided sufficient financial security the individuals could concentrate solely on finding meaningful work. The conditions would enhance individual wellbeing and nourish new innovations pushing us towards a flourishing society.

Theories support the findings concerning money and meaningfulness. Hurst et al. (2016) argues that purpose is valued over money or status globally and greater wealth does not necessarily contribute to greater happiness (Michaelson 2011). Although Allan et al. (2017) found American undergraduate college students' aim to being very well off financially rather than to develop a meaningful philosophy of life, the one's aiming to meaningfulness would benefit from greater satisfaction in life. Our culture encourages us to choose a career based on money and unfortunately this makes it harder for the individual to pursue her /his dreams. We are indoctrinated to believe that material goods lead to happiness. Buying a house and a car may be without a question beneficial in everyday life, but will not be the source of meaningfulness. According to this study and existing theories (e.g. Allan et al 2017), the aspiring to meaningfulness of work is to happen at some point in peoples' careers. In this study, some of the interviewees would reach meaningfulness of work later on in their careers. The ones seeking meaningful work in the beginning of their career would achieve more consistent career and feel more content about their decisions.

The primary research question in this thesis was to find out how people end up in meaningful work. Based on the results of this study the key features in aspiring meaningful work are self-knowledge, attitudes, actions, other people and happenings. A precondition for finding meaningful work is authenticity. Facing truth and allowing this stance of truth seeking inform our actions happen when inauthenticity becomes intolerable and there is a need to respond to the call of conscience (Deurzen & Adams 2016) supports the findings of this study. For some of the participants it became a question of not accepting current situation forever, but to make change according to one's true values. Knowing oneself is the essential when trying to find meaningful work. Holland's (1985) model of interest types is in accordance with the findings of this study as he posits the existence of six personality types that proposes people having more of some kind of tendencies and less about something else. For example accounting was not the place for a social type. The existential approach is in line with the participants attitudes: realization and the acceptance of suffering to confront life as it is and solved cases of questioning have led to meaningful work (Appignanesi 2008). In order to learn and develop oneself, challenges

should not be avoided but confronted (Stenberg & Stenberg 2016), the interviewees were willing to challenge and confront themselves as learning and developing were seen as important.

Other people can be helpful or harmful when it comes to finding meaningful work. The sense of identity rests on the sense of an unquestionable belonging to the crowd (Feist & Feist 2009) and being committed to other people (Fadjukoff 2015). This is perfectly in line with the findings of this study. Moreover the need for other people was a thriving force for the participants when looking for meaningful work. Before making career decisions they considered if there would be other people involved. Unplanned events are a normal component of every career (Krumboltz 2009). Based on the results the interviewees were forced to make decisions after many kinds of random happenings. There were layoffs, rejection to the desired faculty and sudden ignorance. They were to evaluate whether the potential benefits are worth the potential costs when responding to happenings (Krumboltz 2009).

Career counselling can help clients in finding meaningful work. If the client desires to explore her /his career from meaningful perspective and take into consideration the question: How to find meaningful work..? There are things that can be done in order to help seekers find meaningful work. In career counselling the focus could be on the four dimensions found from this study that are supported by existing theories. In counselling the aim should be to helping the client in becoming aware of his /her intuition or at least help recognize feelings of good when doing something. On the other hand feeling opposite to good is valuable information as well. Improving self-knowledge is important: One should know her /his strengths and interests. The realization that engaging in a variety of interesting and beneficial activities is more valuable than being fixed minded towards a certain career or tasks. The importance of other people should be present in counselling. Which are the ways for the client to feel community and what kind of a role she /he would like to be in among other people? Meaningful work can provide the feeling of belonging to a community. Because meaningfulness in work does not hinge to money, the client could be asked to imagine a situation where money was not an issue. What kind of work would she /he then prefer?

In counselling, it is beneficial to discover the need to break free from other people's authority or expectations. Conditions should be taken into consideration. Past experiences have inevitably affected in the way the client is to see her/himself. There might have been negative conditions which have led the client to fail and she /he might link that past experience to her /his abilities. Because meaningful work is a value based question, career counselling should aim to help the client became aware of what her /his code of ethics are. In this study the interviewees would emphasize other aspects than career counselling being helpful in making career decisions, but this may well be due the fact that none of the interviewees had participated in career counselling. This in turn raises a question about the accessibility of career counselling and if the ones in need are receiving it. It would be important and beneficial for the individual but also for the society if career counselling were easier to access. Which are the places it

could be found for the ones seeking? This would be an interesting research topic to investigate in the future.

There was a recurring theme in the stories concerning finding meaningful work and that was childhood. The impact of childhood seems to be strong when making career plans. Despite the fact that education at least in Finland makes it easier for children from different kinds of family environments or social backgrounds choose their future career however they see best. Still the examples, ways to think, values and expectations from family environment are framing the understandings about possibilities and decision making. Not to mention other aspects that are affecting life: such as self-confidence, courage to follow ones heart and feelings of capability. Children should be provided an upbringing that supports them in their aspirations. They should be able to benefit from an environment where they are seen as they are, receiving positive feedback and be regarded from their strengths.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The purpose of this thesis was to find out how people find meaningful work and what is it like as an experience. Based on this study it can be concluded that meaningful work can be acquired by implementing a designed plan or accidentally when responding to random happenings. Both meaningless work experience and meaningful work experience deepens the understandings concerning meaningful work. All the interviewees recognized their limits to be less about accessibility, and much more about limitations they impose on themselves. It takes courage to get to know oneself, admit possible demands for change and pursue ones dreams knowing that one might fail. The interviewees had clearly solved this by taking agency of their lives and knowing the risks. They all depicted it to have been worth the struggle because of the importance of finding meaningful work couldn't be overemphasized.

Finding meaningful work is a multidimensional question with no easy answer. Despite the positive rhetoric of individual choice, there are social-structural, and also individualistic factors that create opportunities and barriers for the ones seeking meaningful work. People act by their present perceptions of the past and their present expectations of the future. Furthermore we are never able to hold on to the present and we are always no longer or not yet what we would like to be. The change being always around the corner the most difficult part for the seeker of meaningful work is to decide how to live her /his life at the time. Afterall finding meaningful work is not exclusive for anyone. Being such an important issue, it should be considered as birthright. At the end of the day there is no need for extraordinary talent, wealth or an unusual drive to succeed. Anyone can be empowered to accomplish meaningful work.

## **EPILOGUE**

Do you know; what are you doing here? If not, you might have ended up doing as expected or doing the things most people are doing. Much of our lives can be spent making decisions in response to other reasons like family expectations, cultural pressures or people's opinions. If you take a look, you can see the life you would like to have, but for any number of reasons, you don't. However, you can challenge yourself to think about how you want to spend each day. Just open your eyes and enter your life.

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