

**What is success?**

**A work on the reciprocal dependency between successful workplace and successful  
organization**

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### **Author Comments**

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I wholeheartedly believe that the best work is done in collaboration and co-operation with others. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the inspiring and knowledgeable people that I have had the privilege of interacting with in various contexts.

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## **Abstract**

Despite extensive studies on the characteristics of successful workplaces, the assumption that the topic is still relevant and attracts many to continue studying the subject. Previous studies have shown the complexity of the field, especially given the all too rapid change in our world that challenges the predictability of tomorrow. Hence, this report aims to provide a general picture of the characteristics of a successful workplace thru successful organization. Furthermore, it aims to put into perspective possible interventions using previous theory and research on how organizations can achieve successful workplaces.

The results of this report indicate that what characterizes the success of an organization is the degree of goal attainment, which tends to occur through employee goal seeking. This work will initially provide an introduction to organizational psychology and different aspects and views of both organization and success. The introduction will also highlight the social system within organizations and a general explanation of behaviours. Furthermore, the work will provide a general definition of success. The analysis section will, with the help of the definition, deal with the concept of goals and goal seeking in relation to different aspects of behaviour. Furthermore, the section will highlight the moderating role of communication and relationships in the emergence of emotional dissonance and consonance. Finally, the report will suggest possible interventions that could contribute to organizational success.

## **Introduction**

Organizations in their quest to become more efficient, in order to achieve success, have had to reconstruct and adapt to the demands of the global marketplace (Hirsch & De Soucey 2006). Adaptation and reconstruction tend to be described in positive terms (Hirsch & De Soucey 2006), where the outcome in terms of increased profits, greater market share, reduced costs, better products, and achievable organizational goals are terms typically used to describe effectiveness (Aronsson et al. 2012; Andersen, 2006; Hirsch & De Soucey 2006), 2012; Andersen, 2006; Hirsch & De Soucey 2006). Adaptation from an evolutionary perspective is described as a process of change (Darwin, 2009), thus it can be assumed that organizations change to adapt to their environment. Efficiency tends to be described from two different aspects, internal efficiency, and external efficiency, which together could constitute total efficiency (Aronsson et al., 2012; Östman, 1979). Both Aronsson et al. and Östman describe internal efficiency as a measure of how resources are utilized in an efficient way to achieve the outcome. Whereas external efficiency is described as a measure of how well the organizational structure and the use of policy instruments are adapted to the environment. For successful adaptation to the market, it can thus be assumed that organizations make the right decisions based on the assumptions made, based on the structure and development of the external environment (Aronsson et al., 2012; Näslund & Jern, 2015).

As the pace of change becomes too rapid, it can thus be assumed that the assumption and predictability of the external environment becomes increasingly difficult, making it a challenge for organizations to adapt in a turbulent environment. The evaluation criteria that an organization needs can be referred to goal (Scott, 1992). Hence, a possible aspect of success may lie in the flexibility of goals, allowing the organizational structure to adapt to the environment. According to Mintzberg (1987), goals are among the most important aspects of managing an organization. Goals can thus indicate the direction of the organization and thus also create measures for evaluation criteria for what can be assumed to be success. The organization's goals can thus be a measure of the future desirable situation.

Previous studies have shown that there is an interdependence between successful workplaces and successful organizations. This reciprocal dependency has been explained in terms of loss and profit cycles. The loss cycle refers to the fact that unsuccessful organizations tend to have fewer resources to achieve a successful workplace. Less successful workplaces can thus lead to dissatisfaction and thus create less successful organizations, which can lead to a vicious cycle. The profit cycle, however, is that organizations that are successful are assumed

to possess more resources and thus create opportunities for a successful workplace, the successful workplace thus tends to increase the success of the organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Thereby, the focus of the paper will be on the characteristics of successful organizations.

In the field of psychology, psychologists have long been interested in individual behaviour within the organization, which is the root of organizational psychology. Thus, previous research has focused on the individual's abilities, personality traits and other personal characteristics (Eysenck, 1990; Cattell, 1965; Goldberg, 1990), which could predict human behaviour and its impact on the organization. However, an increasing number of studies point to the fact that organizations are complex social systems, which are assumed to need to be studied as a complete system (Schein, 1965, 1985; Kozlowski, 2012; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Näslund & Jern, 2015). The complexity of the organizational social system can give rise to abstraction, where the goals, structure and design of organizations consist of individuals composing them. The organizational social system can therefore create a reciprocal relationship between organizations' goal achievement and individuals' goal seeking (Kozlowski, 2012; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lewis, 2011). Individuals' goal seeking has been explained in terms of two behavioural systems in the brain that control individuals' actions (Carver & White, 1994; Lewis, 2011; Gray, 1990). These behavioural systems are the Behavioural Activation System (BAS), which is associated with the individual's active search and exploration to achieve personal goals, and the Behavioural Inhibition System (BIS), which is typically described as an inhibitory behaviour, associated with the avoidance of situations that could lead to punishment or no reward (Carver & White, 1994; Lewis, 2011; Gray, 1990). These two systems, BIS and BAS, are assumed to be activated at any time independently of each other. What causes differences between individuals in response to these systems, BIS and BAS, seems to be related to individuals' personality traits (Lewis, 2011). For example, an extrovert personality trait may be associated with the active system BAS and the neuroticism personality trait is associated with the inhibitory system BIS (Lewis, 2011; Goldberg, 1990). The scope of this work is to provide a general picture of the characteristics of a successful organization. Furthermore, it aims to put into perspective possible interventions using previous theory and research on how organizations can achieve success.

## **Definition**

### ***The definition of success***

In order to discuss and study the characteristics of a successful organization, it may be important to define success. The aim is to provide a general picture of success in order to examine what can characterize a successful organization. In this work, success is defined as *a measure of achievable organizational goals in a changing world through employee goal setting.*

## **Analysis**

### ***Different aspects of organizational goal***

The organizational goal may differ from one organization to another. Organizations' goal tends to be associated with the amount of resources, such as tangible or intangible resources, that the organization has available and allocated. Thus, it can be challenging to compare goals of organizations with each other. The organization's goal achievement should therefore be compared with how well the organization has succeeded in meeting its own goals based on the resources it possesses. A comparison should therefore be made within the organization, which means a comparison with how well the organization has succeeded in relation to the assumption of goal fulfilment (Aronsson et al., 2012; Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002; Näslund & Jern, 2015). Thus the work will examine how goals can be formulated, in order for organizations to be able to relate to and operationalize these goals. The main focus will be to describe how goals can be formulated based on short- and long-term and duration.

### ***Short- and long-term organizational objectives***

The time perspective on how long it will take to achieve an organizational goal can vary. Some organizations tend to have goals that are more of a long-term nature and do not believe that they will achieve the goal in a short time (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002; Näslund & Jern, 2015), while other organizations may aim for more short-term goals that are possible to evaluate and use goals as a motivational factor (Aronsson et al., 2012; Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002; Näslund & Jern, 2015). When the health care system announces that "one of our main goals is to create patient and staff safety", it may give the impression of a vague goal that may not be achievable in the short term (Aronsson et al., 2012; Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002; Näslund

& Jern, 2015). However, there are differences of opinion on whether goals should be short-term or long-term. While there are arguments that short-term goals are more suitable as a means of control and motivation (Simon, 1964), there are arguments that long-term goals can create flexibility, innovation, and adaptation without losing focus on the long-term horizontal goal (Tregoe et al., 1990).

### ***Duration in organizational goal***

Beyond the time perspective of short- and long-term goals, goal duration tends to be another aspect of the organizational goal. Goals can either be clearly formed where there is a clear start and end or they can be formulated vaguely where it can be almost impossible to determine when the organization has achieved the goal (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002; Näslund & Jern, 2015). Public authorities and government organizations usually formulate goals that are characterized by continuity where there is no formal start or end. One example is the Swedish National Accident Commission, which writes "The National Accident Commission shall give an overall account of how the authority has worked to manage and develop its information security and how it plans to meet future needs" (esv.se), which means that the objective gives rise to complexity and is formulated in a way that does not indicate a clear end state (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002; Näslund & Jern, 2015). The private sector, on the other hand, whose association is profit-oriented, can formulate goals that are characterized by a clear end state and are not as complex, making them "easier" to measure. One example is Railcare, which provides products and services for the railways; in their interim report for 2023, they write "The goal is to increase turnover by 60 percent over the next five years, to SEK 800 million, with a maintained margin of 10%." (railcare.se), suggesting that the target could potentially be achieved in five years. Organizations that tend to formulate clear goals with end states will probably be able to say, "we reached the goal", this will probably not cause the organization to dissolve, but rather they might set new goals that could make it easier to measure the degree of goal achievement (Aronsson et al., 2012; Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002; Näslund & Jern, 2015).

### ***Different aspects of employee goal setting***

The employee's goal-seeking can be based, inter alia, on the search for coherence in personal career choice and coherence in emotional goals. Coherence in personal career choice can consist, among other things, of the tasks an employee performs. The extent to which the work tasks correspond to the personal career choice will potentially affect the degree of perceived coherence in the personal career choice. The less alignment between the personal

career choice and the task, the less interest in the task and thus indicating less attention to the task, and vice versa (Kohn & Schooler, 1983). Furthermore, the experiences that an employee brings to the organization, such as education, professional experience, can constitute the coherence of the personal career choice. The degree to which these experiences are recognized and given importance tends to create coherence in personal career choice and thus interest in the job (Kohn & Schooler, 1983).

Coherence in emotional goals can include social support. Social support could be conceptualized as a positive atmosphere at work. This means that when there are good relations between colleagues and or manager/supervisor, there is a positive atmosphere in the team. The good relationship tends to be a consequence of mutual understanding of each other among coworkers. In case employees find coherence between emotional goals and social support, employees tend to show a higher degree of loyalty (Aronsson et al., 2012). Another aspect of emotional goals is stress. Stress can arise from the perception of whether an event is perceived as a threat to physiological or psychological well-being (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2014). When demands increase and control decreases, it tends to lead to workload and thus perceived threat to physiological or psychological well-being (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Another aspect of coherence in emotional goals is the sense of perceived fairness. Fairness tends to be associated with the relationship between effort and reward (Adams, 1963, 1965). Social exchange theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) is the relationship between individuals, where individuals are willing to make effort to obtain rewards that maximize their own satisfaction. Furthermore, individuals tend to search for relationships where the reward exceeds the effort made, which is assumed to be guided by the emotional goals. In cases where effort exceeds the reward the individual receives, the individual tends to want to make the least amount of effort possible. Employees who make efforts expect not only to be rewarded, but also to be rewarded fairly (Adams, 1963, 1965; Aronsson et al., 2012; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). The employee's perception of fairness can thus control the degree of coherence in emotional goals.

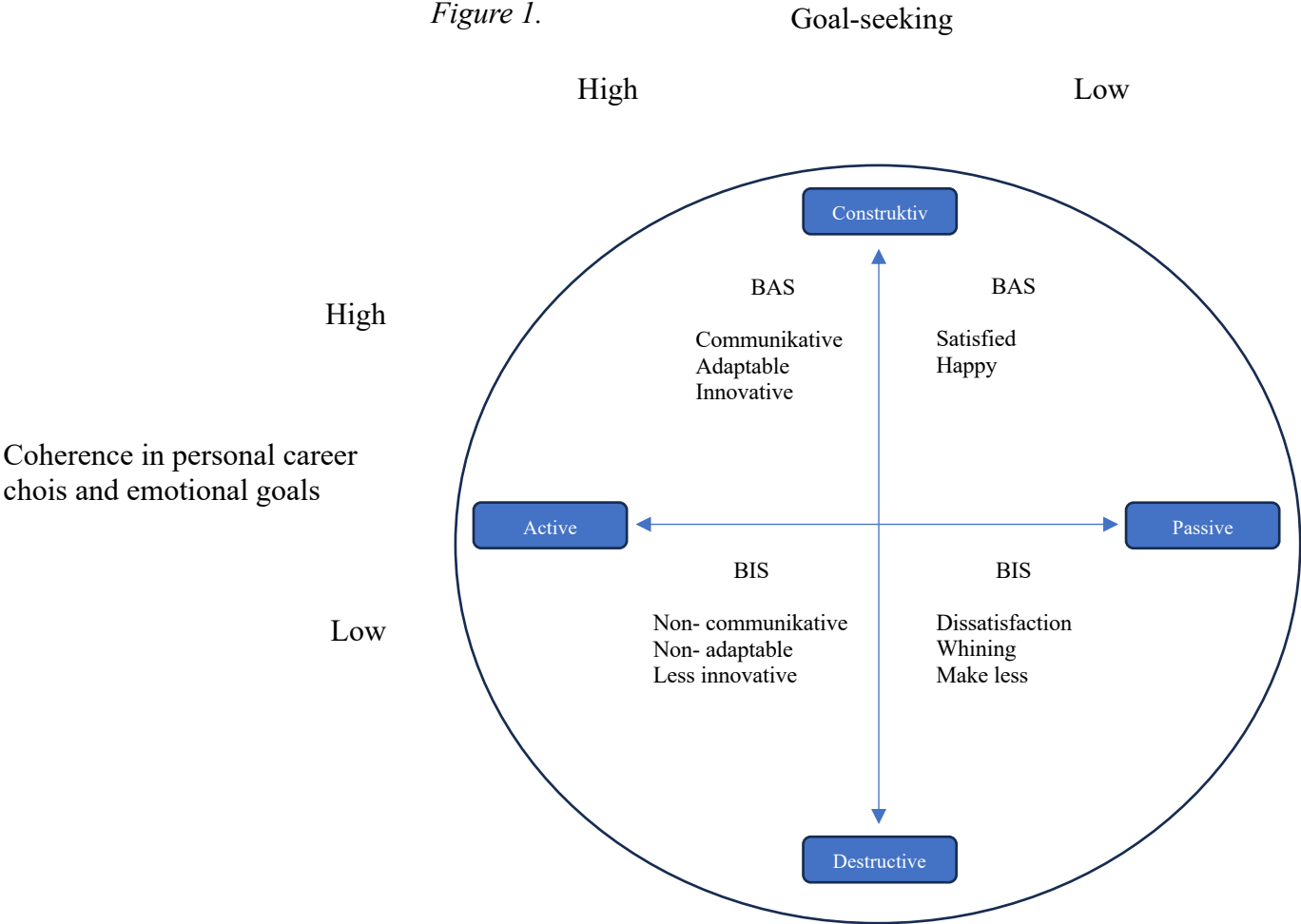
### ***Different aspects of behaviour***

The employee's evaluation of the degree of coherence in the personal career choice and emotional goals in relation to the degree of goal seeking, may result in different behaviours (see Fig. 1). Typically, a behaviour may be either inhibitory or avoidant, and the employee is likely to respond in a more destructive way, such as engaging less at work, which has been described as the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS); or a behaviour may be characterized by a more constructive Behavioral Activation System (BAS), as a result of which



the employee may feel confident and perceive themselves to be rewarded, thus being able to act purposefully (Carver & White, 1994; Lewis, 2011; Gray, 1990). The employee's evaluation of the degree of coherence in the personal career choice and emotional goals in relation to the degree of goal seeking can be either high or low. In case the employee experiences high coherence in personal career choice and emotional goals in relation to the degree of goal seeking and a sense of reward that is free from punishment, the behaviour is likely to be characterized by active provision of more constructive behaviour (BAS). On the contrary, if the employee experiences low coherence in the personal career choice and emotional goals in relation to the degree of goal seeking and feeling of punishment, the behaviour will probably be associated as inhibiting and thus a more active supply of destructive behaviour (BIS) (Carver & White, 1994; Lewis, 2011; Gray, 1990).

Figure 1.



***The relationship between personal career choice coherence and emotional goals and emotional labor (EL).***

Emotional labor can be described in terms of the employee's subjective evaluation of emotional experiences and control over their emotions (Hochschild, 1983). In order to localize what subjective evaluation of emotional experiences is based on, it is necessary to clarify what emotion is. It can be assumed that the reason why emotions arise is based on four different steps, i) Evaluation of the event. When something happens that may be surprising to an individual and it may be of significance to the individual's interest. ii) Putting the emotion in its context. iii) The physiological change phase, which may occur as a result of the readiness to act. iv) The communication of emotions through actual actions, such as smiling, crying running etc. (Jansz & Timmers, 2002; Sun et al., 2020; Markarian, et al., 2013). The coherence of personal occupational choice and emotional goals can be assumed to be an evaluation of one or more events. In order to understand whether or not work tasks or experiences match the individual's expectations, it is conceivable that the individual makes some kind of evaluation based on these events. The feeling of agreement or disagreement will probably be put in its context, such as the tasks assigned. The physiological change will thus spur the individual to act, e.g. if the individual feels a threat to the physiological well-being, the need to escape may arise and, on the contrary, if the feeling of security arises, the individual will want to approach. The translation of emotions can thus be shown in the form of action in the form of communication, the individual can either act in a non-verbal communicative way, e.g. screaming, crying and laughing, or verbal communication, e.g. by sharing their emotions with others, e.g. by talking to a friend (Jansz & Timmers, 2002; Sun et al., 2020; Markarian, et al., 2013).

However, it can be assumed that the individual's judgement to act in a non-communicative way, e.g. crying, may not always be appropriate, leading to control of the emotions. When inconsistency in personal career choice and emotional goals occurs, employees may not want to express it by crying, but rather control their emotions and put on a smile. When an individual cannot express the 'right' emotions, dissonance will occur, whereas if the individual can express the right emotions, consonance is likely to occur (Jansz & Timmers, 2002; Sun et al., 2020; Markarian, et al., 2013; Jeung et al., 2018; Hochschild, 1979).

### ***The moderating role of communication and relationships in emotional labor (EL)***

Communication can be either verbal or non-verbal. The verbal communication aims to verbalize and transmit a message, which can be intentional. Non-verbal communication includes all forms of communication that are not verbal, such as body language, facial expressions, or tone of voice (Larsson et al., 2008). Communication can thus be seen as a tool for transmitting messages in the form of emotions, among other things. Whether the communication will result in the desired state or not may depend on, among other things, knowledge, and willingness to cooperate. Willingness to cooperate and communicate can also be based on the individual's emotional state (Jansz & Timmers, 2002; Sun et al., 2020; Markarian, et al., 2013; Larsson et al., 2008; Nilsson & Waldemarson, 2017). Thus, communication can affect and be affected by emotions. When an individual can express the real emotions, i.e. emotional consonance, and does not have to pretend what emotions they are expressing, it will probably create a buffer of emotion management (emotional resources). The buffer of emotional management can lead to satisfaction and thus willingness to co-operate and communicate. However, good communication can create a permissive environment for the expression of real emotions. In summary, the results of previous research indicate that there may be reciprocal influence between communication and emotion, where as well as emotion can influence communication, communication can influence emotion, leading to emotional experiences that influence future communication outcomes.

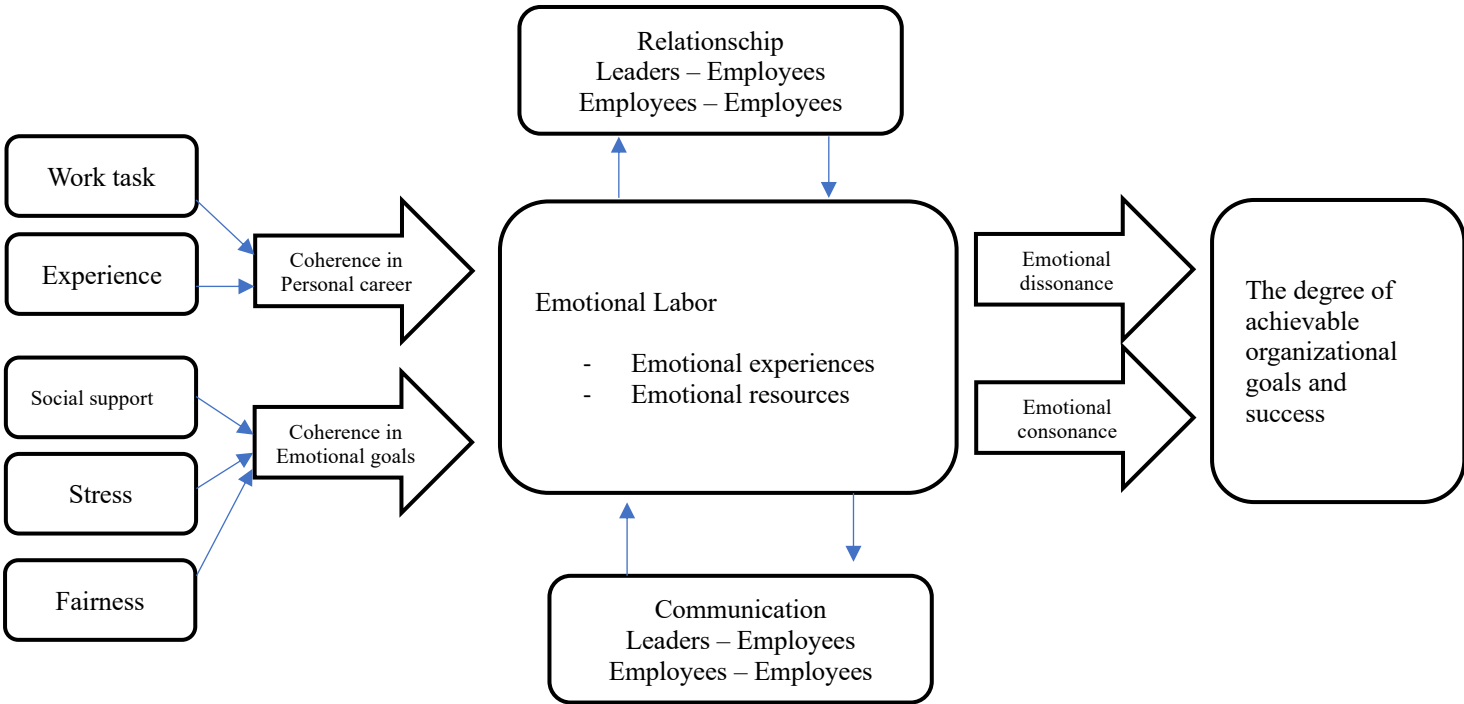
The relationship is another aspect that can influence and be influenced by the emotion. When there are good relationships between colleagues and/or manager/supervisor, there is a positive atmosphere in the team. The good relationship tends to be a consequence of mutual understanding of each other. Good relations and social support between colleagues and or manager/supervisor tend to result in good co-operation to solve suddenly arising tasks.

According to previous research, managers/supervisors whose leadership style is associated with the 'transformational leadership style' tend to be described, among other things, as ethical, selfless, influential, inspirational, motivational leaders who mentor and listen to their employees. Furthermore, previous research describes that the transformational leadership style is characterized by leaders who put the good of the employee before their own gain. Transformational leadership styles have shown positive effects on employee motivation and performance, which is linked to the leader membership exchange (LMX) between leaders and employees. Loyalty and dedication can be partly based on good employee-leader relationships

(Aronsson et al., 2012; Näslund & Jern, 2015). In cases where employees find coherence between emotional goals and social support, employees tend to exhibit higher levels of loyalty.

Finally, the results of previous research indicate that there may be reciprocal influence between relationship and emotion, where as well as the emotion can influence the relationship, the relationship can influence the emotion, leading to emotional experiences that influence future relationships (see Figure 2).

Fig 2



### ***What can organizations do to achieve success?***

Participatory Action Research, also known as Action Research, is a part of the procedure that has been used in the past to develop and improve working conditions in different sectors. The purpose of Participatory Action Research has been to improve working conditions and to help organizations achieve their goals and thus achieve success. The improvement of working conditions can be described, among other things, as the coherence of the personal occupational choice and emotional goal. Thus, the method is useful for all types of intervention and in different sectors (Koshy et al., 2011; Whitehead et al., 2003). Participatory Action Research (PAR) has previously been used to systematically investigate and bring about change in specific contexts. Systematization is part of the cyclical process, which consists of a) Identification or screening. b) Developing methodologies for information gathering. c) Interpretation. d) Identifying appropriate intervention and preparation. e) Implementation and execution. f) Evaluation (see Fig. 3). Furthermore, through dialogue, collaboration and awareness raising, Participatory Action Research tends to enable desired change (Dollard et al., 2008; Nielsen & Noblet, 2018).

It can be assumed that employees observe and communicate with internally (colleagues) but also external (customers/visitors, etc.). Thus, employees make informal and formal evaluations, reflections, plans and judgements about a situation (or situations), which means that, regardless of the level of experience, it can be assumed that employees possess valuable knowledge and information. This information should thus be utilized with appropriate methods (e.g., diary, interview and focus group), in connection with the implementation of interventions that can lead to an increased degree of coherence in the personal career choice and emotional goal. It has been described earlier that the philosophy behind PAR is that:

"Organizational interventions designed to promote employee health cannot take place without the participation and experience of the subjects under study" (Griffiths, 1999 in Dollard et al., 2008, p. 354).

Against this background, a possible definition of Participatory Action Research could be as follows. A problem-focused, contextual, and future-oriented practical approach that examines, describes, interprets, and clarifies problems in specific contexts in parallel with the implementation of interventions aimed at changing the work environment towards a desirable state (Koshy et al., 2011).

***What is the intervention - a general picture and definition.***

The intervention can usually be described in terms of conscious actions in the hope of bringing about change. Interventions that are organizationally oriented in the hope of achieving a higher degree of coherence in the personal career choice and emotional goal are described in terms of the prevention of psychosocial problems (Nielsen & Noblet, 2018) The language normally used to describe intervention is characterized by action, treatment and/or intervention. In order for an intervention to bring about change in the desired direction, it is assumed that the organization that intends to implement the intervention understands how to design the intervention. Furthermore, it is assumed that the intended intervention will be implemented and finally evaluated. In many ways, the evaluation is the step that can be challenging, especially if the intervention is overly complex and results in inconsistent outcomes. Inconsistent outcomes can be caused by, among other things, internal or external disturbances. The internal shocks can, for example, consist of individuals quitting their employment and the external ones can be caused by the outside world, such as a recession or a pandemic (Nielsen & Noblet, 2018).

With this as a background, a possible definition of intervention would be the following:

"Organizational interventions can be defined as planned, behavioural, theory-based actions to change the way work is organized, designed and managed in order to improve the health and well-being of participants" (Nielsen & Noblet, 2018, p. 1).

Thus, the intervention aimed at organizational goal attainment will be presented in the next section. The aim of the intervention is to increase the degree of coherence in the personal career choice and emotional goal, which could lead to organizational goal attainment.

***The intervention linked to coherence in personal career choice and emotional goals.***

*a) Identification or screening.*

Identifying can be one of the most important steps in the process. Given that the identification is assumed to give indications of the degree of coherence of the personal occupational choice and emotional goal. Thus, by mapping roles and/or conducting a job analysis, organizations can accumulate adequate information on both the tasks and the experience required for the job. This requires organizations to accumulate information about

potential future employees, as well as existing employees, and to evaluate this information. The information that is accumulated and evaluated should be put in relation to the characteristics of the job, e.g., if an employee possesses knowledge and skills in architecture but the characteristics of the job require knowledge in concrete casting, the architect's skills will not be valued as highly as those of a caster, despite the skills. Hence, it can be assumed that job analysis is one of the most important aspects for the first identification phase. Thus, job analysis can be helpful to indicate what the work is about and provide the intervention process with an adequate job description and tasks. Using the job description can therefore be important in order to assume that knowledge, competences, skills, and other personal characteristics necessary to perform the job are identified. This step can thus facilitate the interpretation of the degree of coherence in the personal career choice. Coherence in the emotional goal should thus be identified through accumulated information on, among other things, mood at work, perceived support, and sense of fairness.

*b) Develop methodologies for information gathering.*

One of the most well-known methods of data collection is surveys. Survey methods in the form of employee surveys are common, which can usually create a basis for dialogue and improvement of the work environment, among other things. Previous research has shown that there is little evidence of the extent to which employee surveys can create dialogue, improvement or serve as an adequate information collection methodology (Huebner, & Zacher, 2021a, b). Another suitable methodology for data collection, which is based on qualitative methods, is the focus group. The method focuses on data collection through group discussion and is based on three typical characteristic steps 1) Predetermined topic to be investigated through specific questions. 2) The participants discuss the topic through interaction. 3) Accumulation of data from the participants' discussions. The discussion leader in a focus group act as a moderator and is supposed to lead the discussion, thus passive during the "interview".

The main task of the moderator is to create motivation among the participants to express their opinions in a multiple interaction situation, which means that the participants share their opinions with each other. Thus, it tends to be of utmost importance that the moderator shows great interest in both the group and the topic. The method thus offers a wide range of interactions and is thus better suited to study, among other things, the mental processes, and attitudes of participants (Morgan, 1998).

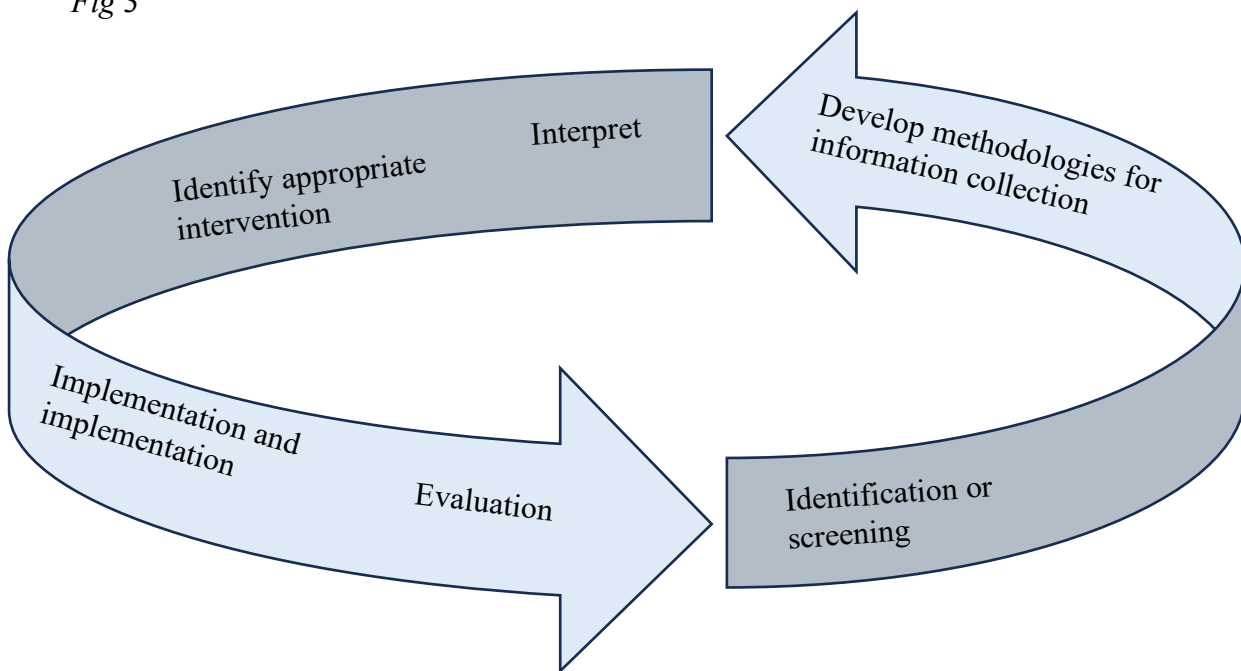
c) *Interpret.*

The interpretation of data at this stage should be done by a reference group. Reference groups are usually made up of specialists in different fields with different areas of expertise to drive a project forward.

d) *Identify the appropriate intervention and prepare.*

The identification of appropriate interventions should be based on achieving coherence in the personal career choice and emotional goal. The two final steps are e) *Implementation and realization.* f) *Evaluation.* Then the process should start the cycle again (see Fig. 3).

Fig 3





## **Final words**

The purpose of this work was to provide a general picture of the characteristics of a successful organization, which has been defined as a measure of achievable organizational goals in a changing world through employee goal setting. With the help of previous theory and research, this work has thus created new models to describe what creates a successful organization through employee goal seeking. The work thus indicates that the coherence of the personal career choice and emotional goal can be a contributing factor to the organization's goal achievement. A limitation of this work is that the theory has not yet been supported by empirical data. Another limitation is that no consideration has been given to culture or gender in this work. this work has also not considered different definitions of manager, leader, etc. This regarding the work's limitation in scope. For future work, it may be important to take these aspects into account.

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