Georgiadou Andri* (Orcid ID: 0000-0003-0384-405X)

Title: Leading Through Social Distancing: The Future of Work, Corporations and Leadership from Home

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Authors[1]:

Elena P. Antonacopoulou (eagnosis@outlook.com), GNOSIS Institute, UK. ORCID: 0000-0002-0872-7883

Andri Georgiadou[a] (andri.georgiadou@nottingham.ac.uk), Nottingham University Business School, Business North School Wollaton Rd Nottingham NG8 1BB, UK.

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[a] Corresponding author

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Abstract

At this critical juncture when the COVID-19 health crisis has disrupted our ways of living, working and relating to each other, we are perforce to explore and cocreate the Future we want to be part of. Drawing upon feminist theory, we introduce the notion of 'inclusiveness' as a fresh conceptualization of the impact of meaning rendering from working, almost irrespective of where work takes place. The 'new (ab)normal' that is emerging, is challenging the future of corporations not only in fulfilling their purpose, but also in leading the future leadership necessary to restore the balance between economy and ecology. In this respect, the corporation is more than a workplace, and leadership is more than a relational process. Inclusive leadership as we will elaborated when 'leading from home', invites us to rethink social distancing and remote working as a platform for rebuilding the fundamentals of humanity. We propose an agenda for leading on leadership in cocreating the future of work and corporations by outlining themes as well as, an approach to connecting that no longer separates research and business practice.

Keywords: Future of work, Future of corporation, Leading on Leadership, inclusiveness, meaningfulness, social distancing

"And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of
experience, you'll have understood by then
what these Ithakas mean". (Cavafy, 1975)

Introduction

At this most critical juncture as we redesign the Future of Work and Corporations, we are also called upon to rethink the Future of Leadership. This is why we start with Cavafy's words as a reminder that co-constructing the future is not only a journey, it is a 'home coming'. We elaborate Cavafy's quote which succinctly captures the complexity of 'meaning rendering' and extend Bateson's (2011) notion of 'home-making' to explore future-making in relation to the meaning of work and the workplace (beyond corporations as institutions where work is conducted), in light of the radical shift that COVID-19 has implicated in all aspects of life (Vohra and Taneja, 2020; Yarrow and Pagan, 2020). We are perforce appreciate, as Ulysses did, that returning to Ithaka was not only the destination of his journey, but also the mark of leadership as he navigated myriad of unknowns, during his travels, enduring all the crucibles that challenged his humanity. His journey would only become meaningful when he recognizes what coming home means. It is such a home-coming, as we will show in this paper, that is the key challenge we are experiencing in these moments. As we write 'history' in the choices we make individually and collectively. As we are called to reflect what meaning we attribute to the journey of becoming human, given the 'pause and reset' that COVID-19 has catalyzed, not least through social distancing (Bahn and Cohen, 2020).

We draw attention to 'meaning rendering' as opposed to sensemaking (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014), because we want to explore further how meaning is generated *individually*, from a person's own expectations and perceptions, *socially*, from customs, norms or collective perceptions, or can be constructed based on *both* influences (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Drawing upon feminist theory (Hearn and Collinson, 2009), we recognize that meaningfulness at work stems from different categories of mechanisms including authenticity, belongingness, cultural and interpersonal sensemaking, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, and transcendence (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). The gap beyond masculine conceptions of meaning rendering in and at work, is what the role of home plays; not just as the new place of work, which is part of the new norm, but as a new ideology.

Moreover, we note that the literature on the meaning of work emphasizes that meaningfulness can be fostered either *at* work or *in* work (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Meaningfulness *at* work focuses on the nature of the work being performed, and *in* work focuses on the context in which work is performed. The meaning of work has been shown to be fueled by autonomy work affords (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, Shantz and Soane, 2017), when in alignment with personal values (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). This is recognized as providing the sense of belonginess in a society where respect and confidence interact (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, Shantz and Soane, 2017), and supports personal development, self-esteem and the fulfilment of a higher purpose (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010).

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Having reviewed the existing conceptualizations of meaningful work, Lepisto and Pratt (2017) develop and propose two new ones: 'realization', where meaningfulness generates through the fulfilment of desires, motivations, needs, associated with self-actualization, and 'justification', where meaningful work profoundly entails accounts justifying the worthiness and value of work. These now fundamental insights about why work matters to us become even more prominent at the critical juncture of redesigning the future of work and corporations where work is taking place. It could be argued that these hitherto conceptualizations, rely upon a masculinist approach of how meaning is generated; centered around embedded masculine values and assumptions in the organizational culture (Collinson and Hearn, 1994).

In light of the recent social distancing measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some of these otherwise established and unquestionably valuable accounts of meaningfulness in and at work, are brought to new focus (Hennekam and Shymko, 2020). The health crisis has unveiled the urgency for human-centred leadership, the type that prioritizes stability, equality and conflict prevention; issues that are often overlooked by the patriarchal system (Markham, 2013). When exposed to the broader macro-environment - be it organizational or social- and in the context of the social distancing now required, the whole organizational and social dimension of 'meaning rendering' is being redefined. Everyday practices are changing, new processes and technologies are being imposed, while the physical distance between social actors in and out of work settings has mobilized different ways of interacting, working and living. The blurring of boundaries and roles between work and family/social life, but also the very thesis of previous accounts of what the 'work-life' balance (Guest, 2002) constitutes, are now called in for review.

The adjustments called for in the ways and patterns of working even post COVID-19 are redefining the meaning of work. But what is also being transformed is where we derive meaningfulness in what we do that is called 'work', especially when the boundaries and rhythm of working life are being reconfigured. Moreover, the means by which we co-construct 'meaning rendering', given the far greater reliance on digitalization, offers in itself an important platform to explore the ways we are learning to interact, but also relate and connect both 'virtually' and 'remotely'. The latter offers a fresh way of extending hitherto accounts of virtual modes of work and remoteness. It does so by adding 'solitude' to agility and resilience as a critical emerging capability. Such solitude is also fueled as we will show by solidarity that embraces feminist principles and exposes more prominently the 'home-coming' we promote as part of meaning rendering so critical to shaping the future of work, corporations and leadership.

This paper addresses these important and timely themes and aims to contribute to the redesign of future work by inviting us to explore new ways of drawing meaning *from* (beyond *in* and *at*) work and working, extending the traditional boundaries of our roles and identities in the workplace. These issues are integral to how we have come to conceptualize leading and leadership which is why our focus will be also to inspire through 'meaning rendering' a new agenda for leading on leadership not least in the choice of redefining what working life could mean. Finally, in extending the way we understand leading through social distancing, we also mark the future of the corporation as an institution that is far more than merely the place where work is conducted. This can contribute to ongoing efforts to embed purposefulness and impact as integral to rethinking what corporations' social and environmental contribution may be beyond their economic contribution.

We organize the discussion in three sections. Firstly, we extend the overview of the meaning of work in and at work by rethinking what work means and what constitutes the workplace. We highlight through this, that meaningfulness in who we are and what we do, is essentially a relational process. This we elaborate further in the second section where we account for the shift in working-life through the new ways of connecting remotely. We distil the main insights from previous accounts of virtual modes of work and present here the shift from technology and digitalization as the main focus of the future of work. By highlighting that relatedness is a key aspect of redesigning the future of the corporation as the place where working life is played out, we place social distancing as not just physical separation, as it is often understood due to the focus on virtual ways of interacting supported by IT platforms. Instead, we focus on distancing as a platform for rebuilding the fundamentals of humanity. Distancing then, can become a foundation for rethinking not only ways of relating remotely, but also the implications that this presents for future corporations establishing an inclusive workplace. Creating meaningful working life experiences amid social distancing conditions and the solitude that these invites beyond agility and resilience, is fundamentally a key leadership challenge. In the third section, we address the future of leadership by exploring inclusiveness as a key idea promoting ways of

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engaging, encouraging participation and highlighting the importance of breaking down barriers, integrating diverse individuals, placing respect for diversity, empathy, compassion, and celebrating difference as key characteristics. By placing leading and leadership as central to these forms of distancing and solitude, we introduce as essential to leadership practice 'onenness' as a basis that connects ecologically human agents. We argue that distancing physically provides a foundation for coming together socially in fostering new ways of connecting founded on principles such as 'isotimia' and 'filotimo'.

The conclusions outline an agenda for action expressed in a series of themes that demonstrate the contribution management education and research in partnership with business practice, can make, in advancing the future of work and redesigning workplaces in future corporations. These workplaces are inclusive despite remote ways of working, because they are founded on leadership that empowers the taking of initiative and creates the conditions that strengthen the meaning, as well as character of work and working life. And that, firstly because work is placed in the midst of everyday life and secondly because all of nature (human and otherwise) participates. It is precisely that cultivation of an in-depth respect for all forms of life and their interdependence within nature that will restore balance (Warren, 1997). The merit-based duality on which patriarchic school of thought lies has so far favored the structures of inequality and exclusion, and we are calling for a more holistic approach (Salem and Yount, 2019). With this vision in mind, when 'leading from home' becomes the new place for practicing leadership in the future corporation, then the future of work becomes a home-coming.

The Future of Work: Revisiting the meaning of work

In this section, we elaborate the vision of redesigning the future of work, by accounting for the following issues: what is work and why it matters, and how meaningfulness in work is rendered. This thesis provides a foundation for rethinking the future of the corporation beyond merely it being understood as the workplace.

What is work and why does it matter?

Much ink has been spilled on the importance and role of *work* in human life. We now appreciate that work entails the conscious effort of a person (physical and/or spiritual) that aims to create a useful result (production of goods or the provision of services) in order to satisfy their needs (material, social, psychological). Engels (1975) argued that work is the basis of human life, because it had enhanced human development, by providing quick and effective solutions to problems that afflicted individuals. For Freud (Erickson, 1963), work is, along with love, an essential parameter of the normal functioning of the individual and thus, mental health. Finally, human needs theories (Maslow, 1943; Alderfer, 1969) propose that work not only ensures biological survival (satisfaction of material needs, financial security and independence), but also guarantees the acceptance of the individual by others (due to the social contribution of work) and also the individual's differentiation from them (recognition through work). Fulfilling these needs allows people to pursue self-awareness (i.e. discovering their abilities and weaknesses) and ultimately self-realization (realizing their potential); notions that are fundamental psychological needs and ultimate life goals.

Thus, the universal impact of work and the emerging identity that this creates (Fukuyama, 2019) shapes people's quality of life not only because it is a means of livelihood but also a deep existential need. Work becomes a critical source and resource for living, raises the standard of living and quality of life, influences social acceptance, creates culture, upholds belonging, maintains the individuality and helps people to define who they are as a person. Fukuyama (2019: 9-10) explicates this in relation to identity as "one's inner self and an outer world of social rules and norms. The inner self is the basis of human dignity, the inner sense of dignity seeks recognition".

In this respect, work is a 'place' where dignity is affirmed (and potentially violated) and the sense of worth earned in the 'workplace' marks forms of rewards that can explain why work matters beyond utility maximization. Work marks the inner impulse of individuals to offer something that lasts and is beyond them (Ebberwein, 2009). This is what has been recognized and framed as a 'calling' / 'vocation' (terms that have also defined what is a profession (vocation → vocare = 'call' means). Duffy and Dik (2013, p. 429) define calling as an "approach to work that reflects the belief that one's career is a central part of a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life and is used to help others or advance the greater good in some fashion". If we entertain work and associated professional practice as a calling, then we recognize that work becomes not only integral to our life's purpose. It also endows 'workers' with a deep sense of meaning, because it is socially orientated and contributes to the greater good. In this respect, workers feel 'called' to the particular work, because the associated

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vocational privileges, a sense of civic duty and responsibility to perform socially significant work, endure personal sacrifices and negotiate challenges faced in the workplace (Dik and Duffy, 2012; Schabram and Mailtis, 2017). This may hold important insights about how meaningfulness from work could be rendered.

Meaning From Work: Rendering and enriching meaningfulness in working life

Baumeister (1991) defines *meaning* as the sense of possible connections between things, events, relationships, and *meaningfulness* as the perception of the individual that this connection exists. As suggested by Cavafis' quote in the introduction, the literature on the meaning of work has primarily employed the below three perspectives in defining meaningful work (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010): a) those who argue that the meaning of work is individually structured (from one's personal perceptions); b) those who argue that the meaning of work is socially structured (by norms or commonly accepted perceptions), and c) those who argue that the meaning of work is structured in both ways (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). The first set of definitions, reflects a subjective perspective on constructing meaningful work, based on one's interpretations of experiences and interactions at work. That is, evaluating the meaning of the work is an individual process that people undertake by activating the various potential sources of meaning that exist in their working environment. Within this psychological framework, scholars have introduced various definitions of meaningful work, ranging from those who advocate compact ways of constructing meaning (e.g., personal perceptions come from judgments about perceptions and attitudes about work, Hackman and Oldham, 1980), to those who argue that meaningful work is created through personal experience and the importance individuals attach to their work (Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe, 2003). The second set of definitions adopts a social perspective on meaning construction and argues that people perceive meaning in their work (and perceive it as more or less important) in a way that reflects their socially or culturally influenced worldviews and value systems. According to this set of definitions, whether meaning will be given to work or not, depends on the value that the present social or cultural system places on their work-related activities.

Although many studies adopt definitions based on an amalgamation of individual and social perspectives, the vast majority of meaning of work research emphasizes subjective experiences, knowledge, and emotions, even though those might conflict with socially and culturally held values (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). In the existing literature, emphasis is placed on individual ways and perceptions of ascribing meaning at work, which can be summarized based on four main sources of meaning in work: the self, others, the context of work and spiritual life.

Studies that examine the self as a source of meaning in work mainly explore three areas: (a) the personal values of employees and how they determine the direction of effort and job evaluation, b) employees' motivation to work (type - internally, externally - and quality) as sources of meaning in work, c) employees' perceptions of the role that work plays in people's lives in general (e.g. a higher calling, work is a source of income), but also specifically how their current work affects their wider lives (e.g. how central is their work role in relation to their family, religion, etc.).

Research examining the impact of others as a source of meaning in work mainly explore the influence of colleagues, supervisors, groups and communities in which the employee and their family are involved. Close interpersonal relationships with colleagues are claimed to be a source of meaning for the employee either because they offer acceptance and support for their work behaviors (stimulating self-esteem) or because they influence them to adopt what is meaningful to their peers. Leaders' choices on the identity of the organization and the style of leadership they adopt, also play a key role in shaping and influencing the way individuals ascribe meaning in work. For example, it has been suggested that the adoption of transformational leadership succeeds to create inspirational followers that go beyond their personal interests in order to achieve a collective purpose (Howell and Avolio, 1993). It is this type of meaning in work that employees tend to regard as aligned with their personal values and hence, are internally committed towards achieving it. Such perceived meaningfulness has been found to increase work efficiency, engagement, motivation and satisfaction (Bono and Judge, 2003). Lack of meaning at work has been associated with powerlessness and self-estrangement (Sarros, Tanewski, Winter, Santora and Densten, 2002), with a feeling that employees are used for reasons other than those they consider useful (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017), they perform unnecessary tasks, experience unfair treatment, receive no recognition and support, and that they do not contribute to a greater purpose (Sarros, Tanewski, Winter, Santora and Densten, 2002).

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Post-structural and postmodern feminist theories approach the concept of perceived meaningfulness and individual experience as the basic starting point from which the reversal of attachment to the social establishment can start off (Butler, 1990; Worts, Fox, and McDonough, 2007). Experience, whether personal, social or cultural, is not a "product" of socialization, but a dynamic, communicative and interpretive process of synthesis and meaning rendering of the experiences and all kinds of social relationships of the individual. Multiple experiences and their corresponding interpretations constitute a form of identity, which is constantly evolving, as we acquire knowledge, skills and social aptitudes of self-consciousness, interpretative or comparative standards and interests. These dimensions of identity are evaluated by the individual, prioritized, reconstructed and accordingly strengthened or discarded through their values lens; the way meaning is rendered is defined by the lens that conceptualize those interpretations (Rakow, 2015).

Since, as noted above, work affects people's lives, the future of work cannot be divorced from the space where working life is played out. Understanding the challenges of redesigning the future of work calls for revising the design of work in the space where it takes place, so we can enrich our appreciation of how meaning is attributed to work and the sources from which this meaning derives as well as, the mechanisms, (i.e. the processes) through which it occurs. In short, enriching meaningfulness at work is as much about creating the conditions for meaning construction in the way personal perceptions and social conditions are aligned. It is also about mobilizing initiative, elevating worth and human excellence by propelling leadership as an integral relational force that inspires serving the common good. This offers a new way of thinking about the Future Corporation and the principles that could govern the workplace.

The Future of the Corporation: Rethinking the Workplace

In this section, we explore how can meaningfulness at work in the 'new (ab)normal' be enriched, especially if the future of the corporation is to be more than just the workplace.

What does the workplace provide?

Questions such as 'why do we work?', 'why different people perceive their work differently?' or 'what is the effect of the importance people give to work, how do they feel, think and act?' have shaped the field of organizational psychology tremendously. Ongoing scientific research in search of answers to these questions remain fundamental to understanding how employees approach, practice, and experience their work, as well as how they perceive and perform in their work environment. The way in which employees perceive their work (i.e. as means of securing their livelihood, as a way to pass their free time, as a field of satisfaction of fulfilling needs, as part of personal and social recognition, or as an experience that adds value to life), affects: a) the level of pleasure resultant from it (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz, 1997), b) how challenging they think their work is (Ryan and Deci, 2001), and c) the intensity with which they are activated to carry their work out (Vecchio, 1980). Therefore, the way in which work is perceived by employees affects the health and well-being not only of themselves, but also of the organizations to which they belong, of the communities in which they live and thus, inter-connectively, of the wider societies they constitute.

We can trace the historical roots of the place of work in social affairs, in ancient Greece, where work was a form of punishment or an underestimated degrading activity that only suited slaves. Slaves worked to produce the "necessary and useful" (Barker and Stalley, 1995), so that free Athenians could engage in "doing good", that is, socially recognized activities, which were important to them as individuals and thus motivating in a way that would lead them to their self-realization. The 'aristocracy' in the Ancient Greece, as Socrates attests in the 'Republic', were distinguished by their virtue – "willingness to risk their lives for the public good" (Fukuyama, 2019: 20). Here it is highlighted that despite social classes, there was still a common drive underpinning social interactions in working life; namely "to be seen as 'just as good' as everyone else, something we may label 'isothymia'[1]. The workplace then becomes an 'arena' not merely 'agora' (market place) where human excellence is played out, a theme that we note is subsequently extended and modified (in the 19th century) as a rule of moral order and a form of creative activity (Nakamura, 2000). This time is found within the Christian community, where work is now regarded as a precondition for the existence and operation of the 'community', reaffirming the greater good both as the placement and positioning for work.

During the Industrial Revolution, efforts were made to improve labor productivity which, while temporarily increased production, still appeared to have had an alienating effect on employees, who were not only unmotivated to perform their work, they were actually experiencing work-related stress (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987). Elton Mayo's 'human relation model' offered a welcomed response

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suggesting that productivity could increase when employees feel they belong to a group where good relationships prevail and their opinions and feelings are a valuable asset to the business (Bartell, 1976). We are reminded again, that the workplace fulfils a variety of needs including opportunities for creativity, communication, collaboration, and leisure (Warr, 1987).

Appreciating that work is the call and mobilization of a person to participate meaningfully in the world, as we discussed in the previous section, is also a reminder that the act of working brings us closer to recognizing not only human behavior, but human nature. It is here where we are perforce to go beyond the (re)design of work and embed more centrally the principles that underpin working and why the workplace becomes an arena where such principles can become shared values. These shared values emerge as a culture and 'the way we do things around here'. Such orientation may help explain why the focus of research studies on the meaning of work more recently have been focusing beyond the employee's personal work experience, and their social right beyond serving as a precondition for self-preservation (securing material goods).

The evolution of technology has led to changes in organizational configurations transforming both shared values (and prevailing culture and politics), as well as the way work itself is structured presupposing the acquisition of new skills, thus leading to a change in the employees' attitudes, motivations and beliefs about work and job satisfaction (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman and Lance, 2010). According to Twenge et al. (2010), in contrast to previous generations, employees nowadays expect that their work will provide them with enough free time, a satisfactory salary and a sense of *inclusiveness*. These findings justify high levels of self-confidence, when expectations are met, as well as, enhanced anxiety and depression, when the psychological contract is breached. This justifies the thesis that a range of additional dimensions are now constitutive of the meaning deriving process in the workplace.

Rethinking the Workplace: Beyond Digitalization in the 'New (ab)Normal'

The Future of Work as we have come to conceptualize it in recent years, under the gaze of exceptional technological advancements, has been colored by the dominant preoccupation with digitalization. Digitalization has been revolutionizing the ways individuals interact in the workplace, their expectations from their employer and career trajectories, as well as when and where and how work is conducted. In this sense, the development of digitalization impacts organizations internally on many levels, as it requires the adaption and development of new knowledge and new ways of working (Bondarouk and Ruël, 2009). The significance of investing in the development of required new skills, is amplified by the ongoing advancements in technology and new roles (Heracleous, 2003). Digital technology is constantly transforming how organizations recruit, support and manage people (Bondarouk and Ruël, 2009). Mindful that a core mission of HR managers is to support and develop the employees in line with the overall organizational strategy (Watson, 2009), we believe it is critical that scholars look further into what consequences digitalization has for ensuring that this is not at the detriment of meaningfulness at work.

Technology is having a profound effect on human resource management (HR) processes and is propelling them in some entirely new directions. For example, technology, especially the internet, has helped modify a plethora of HR processes including compensation, human resource planning, performance management, recruitment, selection, workflow, and training. In particular, most of multinational corporations now use internet-based systems of recruitment and are implementing web-based (online) training programs and webinars. The recent COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating their adoption (Collins, Landivar, Ruppanner, and Scarborough, 2020). These new systems have enabled HR professionals to provide superior service to their stakeholders and lessened the corresponding administrative burden in the field (Gueutal and Stone, 2005; Stone and Dulebohn, 2013).

In this sense, another form of digital transformation that is increasingly being adopted in organizations is virtual work and teleworking. With teleworking, employees have the ability to perform certain or all of their duties at home or in an alternative place (Golden, 2007). Teleworking, sometimes referred to as tele-exchange, is a flexible work arrangement in which employees perform all or a significant part of their work away from their employer's place (Baruch, 2001).

One of the key features of virtual work is location. The fact that this way of working is not centered around a specific work *place* affirms the positive benefits of this form of work, such as empowerment of vulnerable social groups, activation of marginalized social groups, and environmental protection (Haddon and Brynin, 2005). However, it is also likely that through virtual work, the individual could experience feelings of isolation both from the work environment socially, but also from any potential developmental and progression opportunities. These have been concerns raised in relation to virtual teams (Martins, Gilson and Maynard, 2004) for some time before

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social distancing in response to the COVID-19 resulted in the renaming of all these modes of operating as working 'remotely' (Gao and Sai, 2020).

However, digitalization is not the only force propelling the redesign of models of work. Crisis has become endemic to working life evident in the persistent cycles of economic crises which are in turn exposing misconduct in the way work is both designed and performed (Gabbioneta, Prakash and Greenwood, 2014). We also note that crises are now increasingly social, environmental and health related and not only political or economic in nature. If there is a big lesson from the COVID-19 if it were to be considered a social experiment as much as a health crisis, is how radical and swift the call for work redesign has become, introducing notions like agility, resilience, renewal in the mainstream focus not only of business and organizational practices, but social structures around which 'normal' routines were configured (Mukhtar, 2020).

A fundamental challenge, therefore in considering the future of work is not only the work redesign itself, but the reconfiguration of social structures and the impacts these have not only on how work is taking place (Thomason and Macias-Alonso, 2020), and meaningfulness derived. It is also a call to reassess the future of the corporation as the place where work is performed and working life is played out.

We draw attention to inclusiveness as a key challenge that future corporations need to consider specially amidst social distancing and remote modes of working. Amidst 'the new (ab)normal', where the workplace will never be what it once used to be, corporations are not only perforce to rethink their purpose in balancing shareholder and stakeholder interests (Mayer, 2018; The British Academy, 2019). The impact of the future corporation is not only in the way it contributes to the wider 'eco-logy' and not only 'eco-nomy'[2] (which also contributes to creating). It is also a call for better aligning external political, economic, social and environmental pressures and balancing the internal management practices that make meaning rendering possible in a remote workplace. A workplace, we would emphasize, where the basic foundations for meaningfulness are being redefined; not least in the way social conditions that once made the workplace a place where work is performed, are also imposed through remoteness hence, recognizing that it is no longer the *only* place of work.

One of the big lessons from the COVID-19 is the impact of unforeseen external conditions (i.e. disasters, pandemics) forcing individuals, organizations and societies to practice social distancing. Working from home has now become the 'new norm' when once virtual teams where the exception to the rule (Dobusch and Kreissl, 2020). This does beg the question of how can the digital transformation that has shaped the emerging future of work be harnessed to safeguard and enhance inclusiveness amid social distancing efforts?

Inclusiveness in the Remote Workplace

Hitherto studies in the field of organizational psychology have linked experiencing positive meaning at work to several benefits for both the employee and the organization (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012). Research findings indicated that a positive sense of meaning in (or at) work is associated with better physical (Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower and Gruenewald, 2000) and mental (Helgeson, Reynolds and Tomich, 2006) health, as well as the employee's subjective well-being (Dezutter, Casalin, Wachholtz, Luyckx, Hekking and Vandewiele 2013). Another empirical link to the meaning of work arose through the study of its relationship with a sense of meaning in life in general (Allan, Duffy and Douglass, 2015), life satisfaction (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012) and personal happiness (Lent, 2004). Other streams of research assert the relationship of the meaning in work with motivation and action for self-fulfillment (Kahn, 2007) and with decreasing episodes of anxiety and depression (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012). Scholars have also studied various organizational factors that are influenced by how people ascribe meaning in work including cooperative work behavior, job satisfaction, career commitment (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz, 1997), empowerment (Littman-Ovadia and Steger, 2010), and internal work motivation (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012).

Organizational benefits associated with the attribution of meaning in work are centered around behaviors of engagement and commitment at work (Hult, 2005), a greater effort to perform and invest resources in the organization (Saal and Kingiht, 1987). Undeniably, the meaning of work has been proven to impact some of the most essential outcomes in organizational studies, including absenteeism (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz, 1997), intention to quit (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012), work behavior, individual performance and organizational identification.

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We introduce the notion of 'inclusiveness' as a fresh conceptualization of the impacts of meaningfulness from working almost regardless of where work takes place, as long as it remains meaningful. We would argue that work and working if seen as processes (as opposed to a verb and noun) they signal mobility, liveliness, purposefulness and a drive (energy) to create, get things done and achieve certain outcomes from the labor/effort involved. We position inclusiveness, as more than a process of accommodating diversity and celebrating heterogeneity (Georgiadou, 2016; Vassilopoulou, Kyriakidou, Pascal da Rocha, Georgiadou and Mor Barak, 2018). Instead, we put forward the thesis that inclusiveness is a new place for deriving meaning from working in a workplace that is not just a physical place – topos, but a *place as an event* (Massey, 2005, p. 68) a temporary constellation of trajectories, always contested and reconstructed, because "the 'difference' of a place" is also the "ineffable sense of the constant emergence of uniqueness out of (and within) the specific constellation of interrelations within which that place is set". In this sense, inclusiveness is about temporary, contested, unique and parallel connections characterizing the *'throwntogetherness'* (Massey, 2005) of a place beyond firm boundaries in time and space and where some degree of coherence is possible, because of the ongoing and relentless negotiations.

The workplace then can be 'any' place not only because it is the context where work is performed, but it is where meaning is rendered. And that rendering is taking place in the ongoing presence we give to, what we will term here drawing on Thich Naht Hanh (Sieber, 2015) as 'inter-being' to, account for equanimity as integral to inclusiveness but also the new workplace. We are witnessing the *home* (in recent months due to the COVID-19 social distancing), becoming a new place from which not only work is performed, but personal and professional identity are being reconstructed as roles (parent and professional) are blended, and life (whether work or leisure) is balanced in new ways. Working from home is starting to feel less alien a notion, when *homeplace* is replacing the *workplace* as the one place where all of life's richness (social distancing not withstanding) are played out.

Inclusiveness by extension, becomes the new principle guiding meaningfulness not only from work, but because work is no longer some activity we are undertaking from another designated place. The future corporation, therefore, will need to address inclusiveness as a basis for redefining the meaningfulness that working provides. In light of this, it should qualify it as *the place* where human and nonhuman entanglements (Massey, 2005), act as *events*, shaping not only business but humanity at large in the social, political economic and environmental dimensions it is reflected in and which it fuels. This means that the future workplace and corporations act as potential 'containers of events' (not merely workplaces), where inclusiveness mobilizes. Hence, new possibilities call for new ways of managing and organizing. This is about exploring different ways of *being present* in community and in solitude not only negotiating, but weaving roles, powers, interests, as bundles of co-evolving trajectories. Such co-evolving trajectories, organized in specific configurations in relation to a place, may not be anything other than home or the 'office'. As recent research has explored the outdoors (Crevani, 2019) also presents a place for performing work, as well as, providing organizational presence (in the traditional sense). Navigating the new place of work invites to form the connections that inclusiveness promotes and calls for leadership among the many and not the few. We turn to the future of leadership next.

The Future of Leadership: Leading from Home

Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 crisis has sparked a renewed attention on leadership (Alcadipani, 2020). It is not just the leadership of political leaders and the judgement calls that will define the fade of a nation; it is not just the leadership of corporations and those that 'lead' them (in senior management teams) that is also called for in how they respond to government guidelines and support their stakeholders and shareholders when business is on a standstill. It is the leadership of everyday ordinary men and women as they make choices in navigating the new way of living and working out how and if the various measures taken, including social distancing, may work to protect health, the environment and the economy. This is relatively underexplored perspective in thinking both about leadership traditionally (with exception Antonacopoulou and Bento, 2020) and its future.

Recognizing that COVID-19 calls on multiple levels of leadership and one that is distinctly orientated towards service of the common good, provides the foundation of rethinking leadership anew. Such a leadership crisis in itself is an act of leading, for it places leadership amongst the many and not just the few. Leading on leadership as we will elaborate here is a call for redesigning work, rethinking the workplace and moving beyond the future corporation to create the platforms (such as the place) from which impactful

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leading may be possible. This necessarily calls going beyond notions of 'inclusive leadership' given the focus on inclusiveness discussed in the previous section.

We make the case for 'leadership from home' and 'home-coming' as an act of leading on leadership. These conceptualizations provide fresh foundations for meaning rendering in working life and beyond, as they propel a call for a new social conscience and a set of principles that can pave the way for the future of work and corporations with leadership that serves the common good (Clavijo, 2020).

Beyond 'Inclusive leadership' in social distancing

As we continue to co-construct a sustainable response to the COVID-19 health crisis, a collective (social) consciousness is emerging heightening our appreciation that the world is changing, perhaps faster than our ability to keep up with it, and especially from a leadership perspective. Manville and Ober (2003) acknowledge that entering the Knowledge Age and Industry 4.0 has created the need for new leadership and governance systems, which in practice, these systems appear to have been immobilized in the demands of the Industrial Age. New and unexpected work models (e.g. home as a remote working place) are emerging rapidly and will continue to shape the business landscape as Drucker (2012) predicted. Organizations that survive and thrive will be guided by leaders who recognize what is happening and adapt their leadership styles and practices to facilitate the emergence of new conditions (Rietsema and Watkins, 2012).

A shift is also called for on what leadership means and what leading entails when navigating the unknown. When it comes to leadership theories there is an urgent need for these to reflect the changes in the nature of work and the consequences of these changes (Hooijberg, Hunt and Dodge, 1997). Leadership models which are based on traditional management perspectives are mostly static and are not flexible enough to offer alternatives to organizational challenges within the modern chaotic environments (Northouse, 2018). Antonacopoulou and colleagues (Antonacopoulou and Bento, 2018; Antonacopoulou Moldjord, Steiro and Stokkeland, 2019) emphasize the leadership responses to volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) conditions, and draw attention to the learning implications at individual and organizational levels.

Undeniably, central to the future of leadership has progressively become the positioning of character qualities and virtues (Crossan , Byrne, Seijts , Reno M, Monzani and Gandz , 2017 Antonacopoulou and Bento, 2018). This is as much about determining the aspects of the leader's character that are essential for achieving effective leadership as Crossan, Byrne, Seijts, Reno, Monzani and Gandz. (2017) suggest, as it is about positioning these character principles and virtues as integral to mobilizing a leadership response. In other words, recognizing dimensions of character such as integrity, accountability and motivation as extremely important while others such as humility, humanity and justice are desirable but to a lesser extent is an important first step in aligning leadership in different (work) places. For example, some organizations' tendency to use the notions of integrity, accountability and motivation within their value statements and in-house communication and place less emphasis on other elements may guide the character qualities that reflect the required leadership. However, an axiology of leadership may not result in leadership with virtue, if it does not mobilize the response VUCA conditions call for – summarized as 'curiosity, confidence, courage and commitment' (Antonacopoulou and Bento, 2018) - to reflect the capacity to 'feel safe being vulnerable', remain 'unnerved' navigating the unknown with 'candor', demonstrating what being 'awaken' entails. Hence, being fully present becomes necessary to the entrepreneuring that must underpin the modes of VUCA leadership that is itself a leap of faith (Antonacopoulou and Bento, 2020).

Here lies the invitation to take a leap of faith in practicing leadership with a difference that the future of work and corporations calls for. Such a leap if it were to be aligned to the notion of inclusiveness through social distancing would be not only an extension of the vision of inclusiveness, but a set of new principles for leading. Inclusive leadership would still retain a focus on relationality and versions of leadership as 'distributed', 'shared' and 'relationist' (Wolfram and Hassard, 2018). However, social distancing is an invitation to understand further and extend our ways of relating (Sklaveniti, 2020) with each other in our professional and social relationships marking in turn, new ways of leading.

Leadership through social distancing is an invitation to relate to each other not only by recognizing the 'other' as a respected position/perspective but embracing the 'other' as a foundation for serving the common good. Leadership through social distancing is rediscovering inter-connectedness not just through interdependence (and acknowledging we are all on the same boat), but rather recognizing inter-relating (as a form of inter-being discussed earlier). This means that inclusive leadership is embellished by social

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solidarity, interest in other people and honesty, that is, within a framework of moral values (Rayner, 2009). That is why promoting inclusiveness involves engaging in 'reflexive critique' searching for one's relationship with justice, and in taking action to address inequalities in daily practice (Booysen, 2014).

An important factor contributing in the establishment of a culture of inclusiveness is the desire to apply ethical principles and values in daily life. Promoting social inclusiveness must be a moral imperative for one's selves akin to a calling in itself, consistent with the practices that one applies in their daily lives (Hollander, 2012; Randel, Galvin, Shore, Ehrhart, Chung, Dean and Kedharnath, 2018). Inclusive leadership then is not afforded to those who are disturbed by existing inequality and injustice and support social change, as the means for all employees to have access to realizing their individual and therefore organizational potential (Ryan, 2007). Nor is inclusive leadership only about the commitment to inclusiveness geared toward effective social positive change (Goldfarb and Grinberg, 2002).

Inclusive leadership involves sharing a common understanding of humanity, respect and solidarity. In other words, recognizing the right to equal treatment, without discrimination or prejudice based on any surface-level rounds (Kelan, 2019; Ardoin, Broadhurst, Locke and Johnson, 2019). In this vein, inclusive leadership is inspired not only by the intellectual ideals, but also by the moral shame of the unmet needs for belongingness, meaningfulness, wellbeing and engagement of individuals and a desire for a caring community where relationships and connectedness are important. Ergo, it is more than just good leadership (Hollander, 2012). It follows a philosophy and specific practices, which guides corporations to take a step further and stand out. In particular, it gives great value to diversity, promotes respect and facilitates integration safeguarding equality (Georgiadou, Metcalfe and Rimington, 2019; Georgiadou, Gonzalez-Perez and Olivas-Lujan, 2019a,b).

Inclusive leadership is an amalgamation of trust, empowerment, connectedness and inspiration. And that is, because it starts from the place of learning as a labor of love (Antonacopoulou, 2016) where *isotimia* (equal worth) as different people with different skills and expertise, different experiences, ambitions and dreams use the common language of relating to each other. Thus, placing individual and collective dignity as the linchpin that fuels mutual care and trust in each other to appreciate each other as we are. When we collectively and actively take steps to liberate love's capacity to nurture our humanity and support our alignment of our inner self with the world and each other, we strip off titles and qualifications as evidence of the credentials we bring to qualify ourselves to do our work. Inclusiveness provides a certification that we come to work with *philotimo* – the commitment to honor each other's worth - dignity.

Inclusive leadership that starts with love as a basic axiology for redesigning managing and organizing restores the balance and poise in the workplace wherever work takes place. It brings to the fore the power of inter-relating with each other not just through our shared interests but making that which rests between us (work). Inclusive leadership thus enables us to meet each other not only as equals, but with *equilibrium* as the basis of aligning in our work not only for self-interest, but the common good as well.

Leading on Leadership: Leading from Home

It is rarely that we make place for inter-being in the workplace. By placing the emphasis on learning to value each other as a labor of love as a catalyst for the future of work and corporation (as one of several workplaces) we can also lead a future of leadership that brings us to Ithaka. Leading on leadership that makes a difference is a 'home-coming'. We arrive to a place of inner peace and strength individually and collectively. Such leading starts with the choices we make in our everyday life – the choice to respect social distance to protect each other. Such leading enriches our lives and contributes to the quality of life that we share with those we call our home, which is not restricted to our family members.

COVID-19 has made us a family of strangers who have united in humanity. We are leading on leadership of the impossible made possible, because we *lead from home*. We lead from another place, a place of unity, solidarity, generosity, dignity. We lead with nature by reflecting human nature. We lead with VUCA conditions, because in our human condition we are not only naturally resilient and agile evident in our evolution as a species. We lead with newfound capabilities like *solitude*. We are alone but together, distant but close, absent but present.

When we are leading from home, from Ithaka, we have meaning in what we call work for the difference it makes to the workplace our life is becoming, enabling us to rebuild corporations with inclusiveness in our social distancing, purposefulness in attending to ecology and economy, and impactful in serving the common good. The choice of leading on leadership is a choice of learning to become human,

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distancing ourselves from versions of *'humane poverty'* that are inhumane. We learn to work to rewrite the history to secure the future we and the generations that follow deserve to have. We are the future.

Conclusion

In this paper, we offer a response to the COVID-19 pandemic by reimagining the future of work, corporations and leadership recognizing that such future is down to our collective effort and desire to rethink the meaning we render to what we call work, the workplace and our ways of relating in leading each other to a future we choose to co-create. Leading through social distancing offers a foundation for rediscovering not only shared interests imperative for defining the common good. We are learning to explore because of the 'space-in-between' that distancing creates, what is interesting is what rests between two. We rediscover what unites us, what matters to us and what we are prepared to do in demonstrating our humanity to each other to maintain that. What rests between us may be work (in the way we interrelate) across levels and units of analysis to create the social, political, economic structures we are governed by. However, if we reflexively explore what actually rests between us, is life and that is what calls for new ways of leading. Leading our lives to better ends that has no end – it is an ongoing journey in our endless work in progress to develop our humanity and arrive home – becoming fully human. This means not only transcending beyond personal interests (self-interest as drivers of 'humane poverty' and all its ills exceptionally evident in the reactions to the health crisis). Instead, it means understanding afresh that our home for solitude is a form of oneness that brings us closer to our humanity.

This fresh conceptualization for how we can inspire the way we understand work, working and the workplace, alongside extensions of corporations as places were inclusiveness is fostered and new modes of leading are nurtured, raise important implications for both business practices, as well as future management education and research. Our analysis of the future of work has direct implications for society and the way work will continue to act as a catalyst for supporting social growth. This means that meaningfulness *in, at* and *from* work are being redefined as we navigate the unknown that the COVID-19 has marked as the basis of our everyday reality. Meaningfulness itself is being stripped to the basics of what matters in living a good life. There is no doubt that the social fabric of communities, regions, nations are being redefined, not least due to the ongoing threat the virus presents that renders mortality as the only certainty. Yet realistically, this is not new; bringing mortality (given also the numbers involved) closer to focus, is radically forcing us to reconsider where effort is directed.

Work, its meaning and significance to our everyday life, is being reassessed and more needs to be done to capture the lived experiences of the various social dimensions of this crisis, including the governance of the population and the compliance to social distancing and associated measures as well as, emerging community initiatives that positively mark humanity alongside sadly outbreaks of 'humane poverty' that the lack of copying will also unavoidably provoke. As the economic effects create a 'new (ab)normal' where previous routines and habits will not be possible to return to nor maintain, there is a need to provide support mechanisms for a populations' well-being through measures and proportions previously not remotely sufficient in the social services structures available. There are radical shifts to ways of living, interacting and working that need to be studied and understood for the social impact they are creating and the multiplying effects of such social impact in restoring the economy, political governance and sustaining the environment, which was already threatened.

It will be essential to actively seek to capture the lessons that the collective responses to the COVID-19 crisis have provoked and demanded, so that the 'right lessons' are learned, to medicate against a cycle of further crises becoming the order of the day (Branicki, 2020; Janse van Rensburg and Smith, 2020). Capturing and reflecting these emerging social patterns will be critical in ensuring that the much-needed learning informs collective choices that can serve the common good. Among the critical priorities will be how will technology and digitalization continue to shape our everyday lives and if robotics, automation and big data analytics do serve the common good. Similarly, the changing populations' demographics will propel new trends for what makes working possible, for whom and how, when social mobility is restricted? This may vary both regionally, nationally and internationally and considering that new measures will be imposed for population migration and the availability of skilled labor to perform work that needs to be done to keep the system we call economy, society functioning, there will be new challenges in how international collaborations beyond trade will be shaped and what working collaboratively will actually mean.

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All the social changes will have direct impact on the future of the corporation not only in the way meaningfulness in working is maintained and sustained, but also in radically rethinking how work is conducted and where it is conducted from. There is amble evidence that working remotely (e.g. from home) is working well, to the extent that it entrusts 'workers' to deliver the allocated tasks without being monitored, controlled or have the variety of target measured we witnessed to surveil or measure productivity and performance. If anything, these changes to work and modes of working are fundamentally challenging the notion of the 'working class'. Whether they are recognized as 'key workers' 'essential workers' or by any other label, the key issue is that they are the hard working men and women who have kept our economies going globally and have enabled us despite the social distancing rules internationally to continue to secure all our necessary means to live life well despite the restrictions.

These radical shifts in our social structures perforce reconfiguring not only to our social contract as citizens working together to rebuild and shape our future. They invite a new psychological and social contract which has manifold implications in the ways organizational and management practices will need to be readjusted to support corporations' efforts to embrace the inclusiveness, purposefulness and impact as central priorities that can in turn safeguard their sustainability. How might work be organized differently to foster responsible management that alleviates the misconduct risk that we have seen as an ongoing response to the economic crisis of 2008 for more than 10 years on? How will management practices like human resources, operations, strategy, supply chains, decision making, accounting and governance be redesigned in order to both organize the work and support inclusiveness in working through distancing? How will employment be sustained beyond the workplace and the traditional labor class structures? What is the new psychological contract that redefines work employment contracts?

Finally, the future of work and corporations cannot be conceived possible without the individual and collective leadership. The changing nature of working and the workplace where leadership practices may have previously been expected, will now feature impromptu in communities, neighborhoods, and new forms of social arrangements we are yet to see emerge, but which none-the-less, will be important platforms to understand inclusiveness, leading with humanity That, will redefine not only what qualifies as leadership behavior, but how leading through social distancing affords leadership in solidarity and in solitude fresh significance to that which we will recognize as contributing to the common good and our collective quality of life.

What these implications emphasize, in the ways they are also articulated and presented, is that there cannot longer be a division between implications for business practice and research. This is the moment of realization that research alongside business practice is essential and without practicing together to integrate different interdisciplinary fields to search and research what we are co-creating, we will not have the future we deserve. This is the leading on leadership we are perforce to learn to do collectively as we discover our humanity anew.

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[1] Fukuyama (2019: 18) explains *thymos* as 'neither just another desire nor an aspect of reason but an independent part of the soul… the 'seat of both anger and pride….the seat of judgements of wort ... Those judgements can come from within, [or] … by other people in the society … who recognize their worth.'

[2] We introduce the hyphenation to emphasise eco (vs ego). Drawing on Polanyi's (2001[1944]) distinction between 'formal economy' and 'substantive economy' or 'ecology' we account for the interdependencies of social, political and economic relations and responsibilities. We invite appreciating the notion of *ecos* (from the Greek 'oikos' meaning home) to remind us that goods, services, labour and land are all part of the socio-political context that shape and define the economy.

Accepted Article

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