Site-seeing Humanness in Organizations

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In this study, we theorize humanness in organizations as a property of practice. We apply practice theory to examine how humanness becomes enacted in a business organization as people prioritize organizational and individual ends in their work activities. Our empirical case study examines the everyday interactions of development team members in an R&D organization of a large Nordic cooperative. Challenging the dominant individualist and structuralist approaches in humanness and human dignity studies, we identify and locate four different aspects of humanness in organizational practices. As a result, we show how the emergence of humanness is an ongoing process that transpires through two mechanisms: site shifting and reconciliation; that is, people shift between different sites of the social, consisting of different sets of practices with underlying disparate assumptions of humanness, which requires reconciliation. These findings provide a basis for an alternative theorizing of humanness in organizations.

Key Words: social practice, workplace dignity, humanistic management, business ethics, site

O ne of the intriguing ethical paradoxes of business is how respect for humanness, that is, the consideration of employees as whole human beings, coexists with organizational needs to use people as a means toward profit-producing ends (Arnold & Bowie, 2003; Bowie, 1998; Kennedy, Kim, & Strudler, 2016; Margolis, 2001; Phillips & Margolis, 1999; Pirson, Goodpaster, & Dierksmeier, 2016). The conflicting ways people are viewed as organizational actors are highlighted in the different theoretical disciplines examining organizational life, which adopt different perspectives and underlying assumptions. Two competing types of economic sense can be identified: one that focuses on creating a good society and one that focuses on creating business profits (Sen, 1999). Theories of the firm and management studies have traditionally focused on the latter, adopting the view of homo economicus (Ghoshal, 2005; Pirson, 2017, 2019; Pirson et al., 2016) as an underlying assumption of human nature. Business ethics and humanistic management studies try to shift the focus toward the former by, for example, "supporting a different normative paradigm of business practice" or "drawing on the notion of human rights and protection of human dignity" (Pirson et al., 2016: 471). While highlighting the recognition of both views and their contradictory demands on organizations, humanistic perspectives bring forward a "means–ends paradox": how human beings as organizational actors can simultaneously exist as means to an end and as ends in themselves.

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Extant studies have mostly regarded humanness as a property of persons and organization as a fundamental problem for humanness due to its instrumental perception of employees (Arnold & Bowie, 2003; Bowie, 1998; Kennedy et al., 2016; Margolis, 2001; Phillips & Margolis, 1999; Pirson et al., 2016; Sayer, 2007), consequently focusing on different types of maltreatment or resistance against indignities (Caesens, Nguyen, & Stinglhamber, 2018; Lucas, 2015; Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018). Currently missing in the literature is a view on humanness in organizations that would enable examining both views of human beings as coexisting and thus provide conceptual means to understand the way employees in "humanistic" organizations cope with these contradictory needs in their everyday activities.

In this article, we aim to examine humanness when it manifests in organizations through the tension between individual and organizational ends at the level of action rather than through individual-level characteristics (Margolis, 2001). For this purpose, we adopt a practice approach, according to which human existence always transpires in a context, while each context and its entities and events are mutually constitutive (Schatzki, 2005). We examine the everyday interactions of development team members in an R&D organization of a large Nordic cooperative. As our research question, we ask, How do organizational actors enact their understanding of humanness through their work practices?

By using practice theory and Schatzki's (2002, 2011) site ontology and the concept of teleoaffective structures as theoretical resources, we conduct an inductive analysis of interviews and observations. As a result, we identify four aspects of humanness through which humanness manifests in organizations and how its prioritization is situationally and contextually embedded. We describe two mechanisms through which emergent employee humanness is renewed and reproduced in an organization: *site shifting*, or movement from one social context to another, and *reconciliation*, or how individuals situationally deal with contentious perspectives of humanness. Our findings contribute to research on business ethics and humanistic management by providing a basis for alternative theorizing of humanness in organizations. First, the novel notion of reconciliation captures the dynamics through which humanness becomes enacted in organizations, that is, how the underlying ethical paradox is played out as tensions between prioritizations in everyday activities and what makes organizations "humanizing." Second, by presenting humanness as a property of practice rather than a property of the individual, the focus shifts to a context that is redefined through the logic of practice: an organization and its sites of the social. Therefore this alternative view regards humanness and its conditions as mutually implicated.

PERCEIVING INDIVIDUALS AS "HUMAN" IN ORGANIZATIONS: SITES OF HUMANNESS

In recent decades, interest in "humanizing" management and organization studies has increased, even though the philosophical discussion on humanness itself is

centuries old (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Dierksmeier & Pirson, 2009; Hodson, 2001; Pirson, 2019; Pirson et al., 2016). Business ethics research has highlighted the need for a more humane and realistic consideration of employees (e.g., Kluver, Frazier, & Haidt, 2014; Pirson & Lawrence, 2010) and for assessing business enterprises through their human wholeness (Melé, 2003). In line with these developments, humanistic management has emerged as a wider management orientation to challenge the homo economicus consideration of humans that has dominated management theories (Hühn & Dierksmeier, 2016; Pirson, 2019; Pirson et al., 2016) and to promote humanism in management and business thinking (Dierksmeier, 2016; Melé, 2003; Pirson et al., 2016; Spitzeck, 2011). Central to humanistic management is developing an understanding of humanness and its implications for management theory (Pirson, 2019; Pirson & Lawrence, 2010; Cherry, 2009).

When reviewing the humanistic management and business ethics literature, we observe that even though the literature recognizes the difficulty of operationalizing humanness or dignity through empirical studies, most studies still maintain the field's acontextual, normative philosophical stance and adopt either an individualist or a structuralist ontological perspective. The need to move beyond these perspectives has been suggested by those few studies that have adopted process or practice approaches. For example, Mitchell (2017) examined dignity as a phenomenon that is processually negotiated through interactions rather than a property possessed by individuals, and Bal (2017: 108) identified dignity as an "eternal work in progress." Studies that draw on practice theories have examined, for example, how people engage with ethics at work, that is, "the conditions of the possibilities of ethical conduct" (Clegg, Kornberger, & Rhodes, 2007), or how shared values are enacted in organizations (Daskalaki, Fotaki, & Sotiropoulou, 2019; Gehman, Trevino, & Garud, 2013). In addition to shifting away from defining humanness as an individual characteristic, practice-process studies have highlighted a different understanding of context for humanness. In what follows, we first draw on the discourses of humanness/dehumanization and human dignity. Then, we discuss the basic tenets of practice theory and introduce Theodore Schatzki's concept of site as a lens to examine humanness through those different social contexts of organizational life in which it is construed, that is, the sites of humanness.

Promoting Humanness in Organizations

The discussion on perception of individuals in organizations has evolved around two concepts that have been used interchangeably: humanness and human dignity (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Hodson, 2001). Whereas management theories focusing on individualist perspectives in psychology-oriented studies have highlighted the meanings of those characteristics that define us as humans (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014), critical scholars and political economists have adopted a more structuralist stance accompanied by the idea of human dignity (Bolton, 2007; Hodson, 1991, 2001).

Understanding of human dignity in business ethics literature usually draws on the Kantian philosophy (Bal, 2017; Dierksmeier, 2016; Lucas, 2015; Rosen, 2012), focusing on morality that depends on *autonomy* and *equality*. Following this view,

dignity can be defined as an inherent, existential value of humans (Pirson et al., 2016). Autonomy, referring to human capacity to exert free will and to set our own moral laws, represents the source of the intrinsic equal worth that should not be violated, and humans as autonomous beings should never be used as means to ends (Bal, 2017; Rosen, 2012). In addition, all individuals should be considered equal and provided with equal opportunities to pursue their higher goals. Consequently, Kant separated universal human dignity and the praise of the moral stature of those who live exemplar moral lives. Conceptualization divides dignity into *unconditional dignity*, which belongs to everyone as their birthright, and *conditional dignity*, which is earned through exemplar deeds (Bal, 2017; Dierksmeier, 2016; Rosen, 2012). Whereas unconditional dignity highlights the rights of human beings, conditional dignity points toward the duties of respect, owing to which people are not free to act as they please. Dignity as a value demands recognition from others, and respect toward humanness is the way dignity manifests through social actions (Bal, 2017; Rosen, 2012).

Whereas dignity represents a rather philosophical stance, *humanness*, from a psychological perspective, refers to those characteristics that define us as humans (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Haslam's (2006) dual model of dehumanization categorizes essential human characteristics and the ways these can be neglected. *Human nature* refers to characteristics tied to the biological nature of human beings and shared in all cultures, such as empathy. When people are treated as agentic individuals capable of recognizing others' emotional needs, their human nature is protected. On the other hand, regarding others horizontally as something other than human—mechanistic automata—denies their universal human nature (a mechanistic dehumanization). Moreover, *uniquely human* characteristics differentiate us from other mammals, and they are acquired through learning and vary across cultures; therefore they are inherently cultural and social. These features do not define us as humans but determine who we regard as one of "us." Thus encouraging civility, maturity, and moral responsibility promotes people's human uniqueness. In contrast, coarse treatments and perceptions of others as vertically lower, childlike, or immature beings incapable of moral behavior deny their human uniqueness features (an animalistic dehumanization). By applying this dual model of dehumanization, studies have shed light on topics like declines in employees' subjective well-being (Caesens, Stinglhamber, Demoulin, & De Wilde, 2017), how increased emotional labor decreases job satisfaction (Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2018), what factors impact turnover intentions (Bell & Khoury, 2016), and the roles emotional exhaustion and cynicism play in these processes (Baldissarri, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2014).

Though studies of humanness and dignity in organizations have adopted somewhat different stances (individualist vs. structuralist; Hodson, 1991), Pirson (2019) notes that the current conceptualization of dignity comes close to Haslam's (2006) model, in which *unconditional dignity* corresponds to *human nature* and *conditional dignity* is aligned with *human uniqueness*. Both stances focus on the organizational setting as the fundamental problem. Organizations hiring people with certain tasks in mind creates the basis for instrumental perception of employees; that is, employees

are not regarded as relevant as humans but because of the ends they help achieve (Sayer, 2007). Humanness is therefore unintentionally neglected through dehumanization by omission, the main reasons for which are a lack of interdependence and social distance between people (Waytz & Schroeder, 2014). If we do not collaborate with, depend on, or interact directly with others, we tend to tacitly perceive them to be less experiencing and agentic and therefore less human (Waytz, Gray, Epley, & Wegner, 2010). In addition, considering ourselves to be self-sufficient and others less important might lead to negative behavioral consequences, such as disregarding others' well-being, reducing prosocial behaviors, withdrawing from social interactions, objectifying others, and engaging in moral distancing (Waytz & Schroeder, 2014).

Thus it is unsurprising that the focus of existing studies has been on denial of humanness (Hodson, 2001; Pirson, 2017, 2019). By focusing on instances that neglect important aspects of humanness, these studies have increased our understanding of the organizational conditions that make it difficult for individuals to respect others' humanness and of how organizations could better protect employee dignity (Pirson, 2017, 2019). Studies adopting a structuralist perspective have focused on how economic systems (Healy & Wilkowska, 2017), societal norms (Chiappetta-Swanson, 2005), or workplace inequalities (Cooper & May, 2007) threaten employee dignity and on how resistance against structural forces and solidarity promotes dignity (Lucas, 2015).

Navigating the two aforementioned stances, some scholarly analyses discuss how humanness is recognized in organizations at the organizational, group, or unit level. For example, Väyrynen and Laari-Salmela (2018) explore interplays between dehumanization and organizational trust via ethical climate. Within humanistic management, Melé (2012) outlines how conceptualizing organizations as communities of persons enables dignity and human flourishing. Scholarly works of this type acknowledge the importance of contexts and shared meanings as crucial components of how employee humanness is recognized, but they often fail to move beyond individualist theorizing. For them, it is an organization, colleague, manager, or some other actor that is responsible for fostering the humanness or dignity of individual employees. Delving deeper to further develop knowledge of any phenomenon requires questioning and challenging the existing ontological assumptions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Accordingly, we supplement previous research by applying culturalist theorizing and draw on practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002). This allows us to approach humanness through routinized activities interconnected by material environments, uses of things, and shared understandings. We demonstrate that individuals, instead of functioning as providers of humanness or subjects of external forces that grant humanness, play roles as carriers of the practices that constitute humanness through activities.

Studying Humanness through the Logic of Practice:
Sites and Enactments of Humanness

Practice theories are schools of thought that challenge individual–structural dichotomies and/or theories based on stable, self-sufficient entities (Aspers & Kohl,

2013; Emirbayer, 1997; Sandberg & Dell'Alba, 2009; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). While varying in many ways, practice theories share commonalities. First, they understand human existence through entwinement. Entities, including humans, cannot be understood separately from social practices. Instead, recursive enactments of practices constantly reconstitute entities in relation to one another (Sandberg & Dell'Alba, 2009; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). Consequently, the focus of practice theories is on socially shared practices that provide intelligibility for actions and social order (Reckwitz, 2002).

Practices are collections of habituated human activities, such as teaching, with the understanding of the appropriate norms, values, and meanings related to a particular practice (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). The activities that compose a practice are purposive but not necessarily deliberate. For example, in a teaching practice, a pointer may be purposefully used during a lecture to highlight key elements, but the use of the pointer most likely happens without deliberation.

Moreover, people draw on the same practices differently, depending on the other, overlapping practices that they carry with them from other contexts and on their own internal volitions. Nevertheless, such practices provide a shared understanding of what people normatively "ought to do" according to the logic of a given practice, thereby shaping how employees perceive themselves and others (Margolis, 2001).

Because we are interested in how people prioritize different ends and, through that prioritization, enact humanness, we draw on practice theory to examine how acceptable behaviors are defined in each situation and context. More specifically, we use Theodore Schatzki's (2002, 2005, 2011) conceptualization of a *teleoaffective structure* and his wider theory of practice based on site ontology as theoretical resources, thereby approaching organizations as *sites of the social.*

This theory views human coexistence, meaning, knowledge, and action as mutually constitutive in the context in which they occur—the *site* of social life (Schatzki, 2002, 2005, 2011). A site as the context of activities is constituted by a nexus of practices and their material arrangements. Hence Schatzki defines a practice as a compilation of organized actions in space and time, without any clear beginning or end. Material arrangements form the physical settings for practices.

As organizational actors engage with their work activities, they draw on different practices that provide them with understandings of *how to do things*; explicit *rules* concerning what is supposed to be said or done; a *teleoaffective structure* that comprises hierarchically organized ends, projects, tasks, and combinations thereof, which each participant of a given practice should pursue; and *general understandings* that contain reflexive senses of common issues relevant to practices (Schatzki, 2011). Though this viewpoint is not deterministic, people also produce and reproduce practices through their actions.

As examples of work practices, "designing software architecture" and "writing code" are both activities in a "software development" project, done toward the end of "keep internet services running," which also contributes to another end, such as "generating profits." In addition to defining what is acceptable, each teleoaffective structure provides a *hierarchy* of ends, projects, and tasks. Thus, in pursuit of the end

of "generating profits," the relevant teleoaffective structure produces prioritization of various actions, such as "motivating employees" or "enforcing overtime," that diverge in how their requisite tasks address employee humanness. Participants' actions, thoughts, and readiness then provide them with a distributed "memory" to store the appropriate prioritization (Schatzki, 2006).

Notably, ends, projects, and tasks are not the property of participants but the property of the practice (Schatzki, 2002, 2005, 2011). The understanding of ends, projects, and tasks is unevenly distributed among participants. Thus a developer performing a task of "writing code" is most likely unaware of all the support actions and projects involved in achieving the shared end of "keeping services running." Participants might not be consciously aware of the end goals they are pursuing. Indeed, employees do not need to consciously think about "generating profits" to contribute toward that end.

Moreover, practices are carried out in a variety of contexts. What is reasonable in one context might not be possible in another. At the same time, the open-ended nature of practices entails the constant renegotiation of teleoaffective structures. The correct behavior is indeterminate until issues are resolved. Without a deeper analysis, it is impossible to say what should be done when the end of an activity is "keeping services running" but the servers are down. When the context is understood, negotiation of the proper and acceptable ends, projects, and actions can begin. As a result, a shared understanding of what is and is not acceptable in practice arises through actions. In this example, resolving a server crash might require demanding overtime work from employees, that is, prioritizing the end of profit over employees' work–life balance. If the participants cannot reach an agreement about the relevant normativized structure, conflicting groups may emerge, and a practice may diverge accordingly (Schatzki, 2002).

Therefore our analysis of humanness in organizations begins by identifying those elements in teleoaffective structures that people draw on in given situations and how humanness becomes enacted through that process. Through the practice lens, humanness is seen as a prescriptive, normativized content embedded in a teleoaffective structure, providing a context-dependent understanding of the proper treatment of other people. This understanding describes how the expected "ought to do" action is assessed with respect to an actual behavior, that is, the experienced treatment of people. Accordingly, humanness is considered, not an individual characteristic, but a part of the logic of practice.

Each practice on which people draw always transpires in a certain context: the site that is constituted by a nexus of practices and their material arrangements. Organizations consist of linked and overlapping sites, that is, practice-arrangement bundles that can either cohere or compete with one another (Schatzki, 2005). When engaging in different activities and drawing on different sets of practices and their material arrangements, employees change contexts, that is, they *shift* between sites. During shifts, employees might experience bewilderment due to the divergence of practices as their knowledge changes (Nicolini, 2011). Thus we need to understand both aspects of humanness that employees prioritize through their actions and the dynamics of the contexts in which those aspects are enacted.

METHODOLOGY

We adopted grounded theory principles (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) based on an open-ended, inductive research design. Grounded theory is well suited for building an understanding of complex phenomena and advancing existing theories (Birks & Mills, 2011; Locke, 2001). To meet our initial aim of understanding how humanness is enacted in an organization, we examined manifestations of humanness in organizational work practices in an R&D unit of a financial cooperative.

The organization and the unit were considered suitable for this study for three reasons. First, although the unit is relatively new, established in 2011–12, the organization itself is more than a hundred years old. This means that the unit did not have a long history of stable practices, but at the same time, it was old enough to have developed shared ways of working, providing us with a suitable environment for observing how practices contest, change, and take form. Practice theories are well known for their usefulness in understanding how a social order changes and takes form (Spaargaren, Lamers, & Weenink, 2016). Second, concerning the previous point, the unit director told us that the organization gave them the freedom to organize activities as they saw fit. We expected this to provide ample possibilities to witness tensions between the new unit's practices and older, organization-wide practices. Whenever the former combined with the latter, we expected to observe many breakdowns in practical awareness, which are useful in practice-based theory building (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). Third, the unit is considered a respected employer with multiple high ratings in internal employee satisfaction surveys, implying that employee humanness is a recognized value in the unit.

The suitability of context arises from other issues than the form of a cooperative. We thus believe that the findings can also be relevant for other forms of business organizations. The practice perspective adopted here turns the focus into a context redefined by the logic of practice, and in that sense, the context is not defined beforehand. The way we examine sites and practices here can be done also in other organizational settings. Moreover, the organizing logic does not forbid social initiatives or dictate how employees should be treated in organizations, which is arguably the most relevant aspect considering employee humanness (Klein, Holmes, Foss, Terjesen, & Pepe, 2022; Warren, 2022).

Data Collection

We focused on two software development teams consisting of internal employees and subcontractors operating in a horizontally individualist Nordic country (Shavitt, Johnson, & Zhang, 2011). One of the authors followed the teams' work activities through biweekly technical meetings and product development meetings, which were organized every ten weeks for one year. Recording meetings was not possible due to confidentiality issues, and we relied on observation notes. These nonparticipant observations were unstructured and unobtrusive, whereby the observer silently followed meeting discussion and practices while taking notes with a computer (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). Notes were then used to write descriptive vignettes

of the relevant events. These primary observations were supplemented by secondary observations from spending time in shared breakrooms with employees. The purpose of the secondary observations was to sensitize and sharpen our contextual understanding about the organization, but they were not part of the empirical material used in our analysis.

In the primary observations, we focused on the interactions between participants and the flows of dialogue, prioritizing the general objective of understanding how people perceive themselves and others. Our aim was to observe practical activities transpiring during meetings. Therefore the observer paid attention to the unofficial parts of the meetings and the nontechnical parts of the discussions. The observations also enabled us to gain contextual sensitivity, which helped us guide and conduct interviews with the team members and supervisors. The interviews were conducted by the same author who made the observations, which were thematic and lacked strict structures.

The purpose of the interviews was to understand how employees perceived themselves and their work histories, how they had come to work for this organization, what gave meaning to their work, whether they felt respected, and how. Asking employees whether and how they felt respected allowed us later to apply the site lens to identify the different contexts of organizational activity in which humanness emerges. We aimed to understand how employees view themselves holistically, rather than simply as paid workers contributing to organizational ends. In addition to these themes, we asked about issues arising from the observations, such as details concerning friction between teams. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Altogether, the empirical material consists of sixteen interviews and field notes from thirty-seven observations, totaling approximately eighty hours of observation and nineteen hours of interviews. Appendix A lists the roles and responsibilities of the interviewed employees.

In addition to the interviews, we had an appointment with the site director to gain a general understanding about the history of the site and its relation to other sites. We also arranged meetings with the release train engineer to gain an understanding of the interplay between different development teams.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, we roughly followed an iterative analysis (Tracy, 2013). Because we began our study with only a preliminary idea of how to better understand the manifestation of humanness in organizations, we did not initially commit ourselves to any literature. However, both authors were familiar with the dehumanization and dignity discussion before starting the research process, which undoubtably sensitized us to a certain perspective of humanness.

During the data immersion phase, we discussed and exchanged ideas about what story we were observing (Tracy, 2013). While coding, we first decided to identify broad descriptive categories. This descriptive in vivo coding contained categories like "workload," "fairness," and "collaboration," which were used later in the research process as a basis for generating the analytical codes for theory building. The categories contained both negative and positive descriptions. For example,

under "workload" were descriptions of how easy or difficult it is to balance a workload.

In the next phase, we engaged in analytical coding and iteratively shifted back and forth between in vivo codes and memos to create analytical codes. Our first major insight during analytical coding comprised different "moments of epiphany." We noticed that in some cases, employees explicitly or implicitly described their surprise regarding employee treatment in the organization. We decided to call these situations "moments of epiphany" because they elaborated something meaningful about employees' experiences amid unexpected disruptions in how they expected events to take place. Focusing on the "moments of epiphany" as an analytical concept made us reevaluate our in vivo codes. During reexamination, we observed the importance of context, which we labeled as an epicenter, that is, a context in which people experienced a sudden shift in how other people perceived and acted toward them. Appendix B contains our inductive phase data structure.

After developing an initial inductive theory of humanness embedded in epicenters, we began looking for literature for constant comparison (Glaser, 1998). Through a theoretical integration, we chose to use the site ontology and practice lens (Schatzki, 2002, 2005) to theorize these "epicenters" as the loci of the "moments of epiphany." How teleoaffective structures guide organizational practices proved crucial to understanding the "moments of epiphany" and the disjunction in employees' knowing rising from sites. When analyzing practices from the perspective of humanness, we utilized the idea of sensitizing research questions presented by Nicolini (2013: 220). Our focus was on understanding practical concerns, the tensions between the creativity and normativity of practices, and what those reveal to us about employee humanness. By further analyzing the data through this lens, we derived four aspects of humanness. These aspects of humanness were then connected to Haslam's (2006) dual model of dehumanization. This connection was done to ground our conceptualization of humanness in existing literature and validate our findings. In the following section, we describe the findings of our study.

FINDINGS

Viewing the organization through the site lens, we understand the organization to consist of a multitude of sites constituted by different work practices and their material arrangements (Schatzki, 2005). In the analysis, we therefore approached humanness as a part of the logic of practice. To structure the presentation of the findings, we utilize Table 1 as a navigation tool. First, we describe the research organization as sites of humanness and how humanness emerges through enactments of practices in work situations. Because practices contain an understanding of appropriate behaviors (i.e., a teleoaffective structure), each prioritization of humanness is intertwined with these organizational settings. Thus we identify four organization-related aspects of humanness that employees continuously prioritize differently in their everyday work activities. Second, we show how these aspects of humanness in different practices and their underlying understandings of appropriate behaviors concord or deviate as people shift socially between sites, that is, as

Table 1: Examples of Site Shifting

Site	Excerpt from the narrative account	Coded as aspects of humanness	Interpretation of humanness (Haslam, 2006)
1. Premeeting discussion *Core practices and TAS prioritization*: Socializing and bonding; nonhierarchical communication	*The meeting starts with small talk while people are waiting for everyone to arrive. The conversation wanders from personal topics to technical work details, the atmosphere is relaxed, and people act like friends having a get-together.*	*Hierarchy*: Free-form discussion that does not recognize hierarchical positions *Boundary*: Free-form discussion crossing organizational boundaries *Individuality*: People are free to discuss their personal lives	Everyone is equal. Everyone is part of the same group. Employees treat each other as whole human beings, not only as tools toward organizational ends.
2. Working parenthood *Core practices and TAS prioritization*: Work–life balance; employee–life balance	*The organization employs flexible working methods and allows remote working for employees to balance their private and work lives. RTE is at home taking care of his newborn baby and has called in to the meeting. PO and SCM are making sure the lines are working properly.*	*Lifeworld*: Organization provides the possibility of calling in to meetings from home, making combining childcare and work easier *Individuality*: Organization recognizes and respects employees' personal lives	Family life is an essential part of who the employees are, and the employer should respect that. Employees treat each other as whole human beings, not only as tools toward organizational ends.
3. Premeeting discussion *Core practices and TAS prioritization*: Socializing and bonding; nonhierarchical communication	*Once the connection is working, PO starts joking about "diaper routines" with RTE. Similar congenial remarks are made regarding the coming paternal leave of a subcontracted developer. It is going to be the firstborn of the developer, and he seems slightly anxious. The developer does not seem to mind about comments and participates in joking.*	*Hierarchy*: Friendly joking between employees does not follow organizational hierarchies *Boundary*: Joking goes between in-house and subcontracted employees, lowering the boundary between these two groups *Lifeworld*: Paternal leave is one of the practices that allows a better combination of parenthood and work *Individuality*: Based on the joking, parent as an identity is accepted within the organization	Everyone is equal. Everyone is part of the same group. Employees treat each other as whole human beings, not only as tools toward organizational ends. Family life is natural for employees, and the employer should respect that.

Table 1: continued

Site	Excerpt from the narrative account	Coded as aspects of humanness	Interpretation of humanness (Haslam, 2006)
4. Review meeting *Core practice and TAS prioritizations*: Software development and progress information sharing	*As soon as everyone is their place, the official part of the meeting begins. SCM starts going through general issues related to the activities of the development team. The beginning of the official part of the meeting ends in joking and chitchat. SCM takes the position of leading the meeting.*	*Hierarchy*: The meeting has a hierarchical structure; SCM is leading the meeting, developers are presenting, and stakeholders are listening *Boundary*: Everyone in the meeting represents their group—developers are there as developers, testers are there as testers, and so on; the team presents; stakeholders receive information *Individuality*: Instrumental role supersedes personal identity	Employees are divided into different hierarchical levels. Employees are divided into different groups, such as developers, project stakeholders, and SCMs. Employees are participating due to their instrumental roles in organizational ends.

Note. Abbreviations: PO, product owner; RTE, release train engineer; SCM, scrum master; TAS, teleoaffective structure.

they engage in *site shifting.* As a result, people draw on different types of *reconciliation* to resolve emerging conflicts between different views of humanness.

The Sites of Humanness in the Organization

The operations of the R&D organization revolve around software development. Therefore the biweekly technical meetings, during which the organizational actors reviewed completed work and planned for future tasks, represented a central site in which people constructed a shared understanding of both the work to be done and what kinds of behavior were approved of and expected in each situation. Thus we took this site (*review meeting*; Table 1) as the starting point of the analysis and then examined its connections with other sites. In the following vignette, people are waiting for the review meeting to begin and are engaged in a *premeeting discussion*:

> *Isac, Thomas, and Sam are already in the meeting room. Isac has been helping Peter to set up a remote connection, as he is at home taking care of his baby. Isac is asking Peter how the diaper routine is going or whether Peter has merely adopted the role of an observer.*

> *The discussion flows into the anticipation of the meeting and its contents:*

> PETER, via computer: *Have you checked the features?*
> THOMAS: *We haven't checked those.*
> ISAC: *We'll have a meeting about that on Wednesday. I'm not sure if any one of those is going to be ready in time.*
> THOMAS: *If we do our own as mock-up or against a virtual service, we can say that we have done our share. So, we should have exact specs of the interfaces that we are going to use.*
> PETER: *We need to be careful regarding the testing. They might not correspond to the reality after all …*
> THOMAS: *The intention was to talk about this in the retro.*

> *The next people to arrive at the meeting room are Andreas and Jonathan. They are discussing some technical executions. Andreas is working his last day before paternity leave. Isac asks whether he feels nervous. Sam makes a joke about the most exciting part being over already.* [Chuckles] *Isac responds that after a week, he will be asking if he can come back already.* [Chuckles]

Here we can differentiate between more general work practices, such as meeting practices in the meeting room, and practices that are not directly work related but serve another type of goal, such as socializing. Even though the participants touch upon work-related issues, the desired end relates more to social bonding. As an event, it has a context of its own that is constituted by other practices and its material arrangements (i.e., the meeting room with its different facilities or, for Peter, the facilities providing his remote connection). Once everyone has arrived, the event changes. Despite the physical location staying the same, the context for activity changes, whereby people engage with a different site (review meeting) and begin to draw on a different set of practices. Therefore, during the same meeting, people engage with different sites, as presented in Table 1.

As people draw on different sets of practices while coping with the ongoing event, they also continuously shift between different sites. In the following sections, we first describe the mechanism of site shifting and then elaborate on the different aspects of humanness and their reconciliation.

Site Shifting

When a set of practices individuals draw on changes, they shift between different sites, as demonstrated in Table 1. A teleoaffective structure defines the normativized hierarchy guiding the enactment of practices, and therefore the humanness embedded in a structure is manifested in different ways at different sites. Premeeting discussions take place in a very relaxed atmosphere. Discussion does not separate people by their organizational status or other work-related boundaries. Social aspects, such as equality and fairness, are a priority. Once everyone is present and the official meeting begins, the site then shifts into a review meeting. Although the shift goes unnoticed, it changes the practices people draw on (meeting practices, software development practices) and the governing teleoaffective structure. The previously prioritized nonhierarchical and boundaryless communication is replaced by communication based on employees' organizational roles. Hence the site assigns people according to their organizational positions. Previously "Janes" and "Joes" discussing informally, the commencement of the official meeting entails that the attendees are now developers, testers, product owners, or even head administrators. The *activities* and *tasks* involved in the practice reflect these roles, for example, the developers and testers must provide information for stakeholders. The *end*, the outcome of the meeting, is clear to everyone: to review what the development team members did and distribute the information about these attainments.

Sites shift during the meeting based on the matters that are discussed. For example, during one of our observations, the team discussed their need for more space and the potential relocation of the release train engineer, a person responsible for the software delivery of multiple teams, into the same open office as the development team.

> *As soon as everyone is in place, the official part of the meeting begins. The scrum master starts going through general issues related to the activities of the development team. The beginning of the official part of the meeting ends all joking and chitchat. The scrum master begins leading the meeting.*

> TIM: *OK. Let's get things started. As you remember from the PI meeting, there has been a lot of talk and dissatisfaction about how clogged our premises are. There are going to be some changes in seating order. Peter is moving into the open office with you.*

> *The developers and testers look at Peter, nod in greeting, and warmly welcome the release train engineer into their midst.*

> JONATHAN: *Welcome to the salt mines* [old local joke about how horrible it is to work in open offices].

During this discussion, the site of "office life" intervenes, and "faculty services practice" is enacted. As people focus on the topic relating to space without needing to pay direct attention to the purpose of the meeting, their previous prioritization of hierarchical roles is reversed. In this site, equality is prioritized. Thus the release train engineer is on equal footing with others in the same open office. The shift is subtle, because no actual tasks related to faculty service practices are enacted. However, the participants still enact these practices via sayings as they complete the task of agreeing on details about the planned move. After the topic has been covered, the focus then shifts back to the meeting, in which the previous organizational meeting roles are prioritized.

These kinds of site shifts are of key importance to analyzing the prioritization of humanness. As the aspects of humanness depend on practices and their enactments, humanness is not stable but constantly in the making. During these shifts, employees gather experience of *emerging humanness*—an intuitively assumed hierarchy and its acceptability of actions. Over time, the multitude of sites and enactments of different practices constitute employees' humanness in the organization. This "emergent humanness" is information stored in a distributed and interactionally maintained organizational memory based on the practices that employees enact (Schatzki, 2006). Through site shifting, we can understand how the different aspects of humanness are enacted and why they are either recognized or disregarded by organizational practices.

If an employee intuitively considers the ends-projects-tasks-actions hierarchy located in the different sites' teleoaffective structures compatible and acceptable, the shift between sites takes place unnoticed. Here we call this unproblematic movement *latent site shifting*. Movements between most of the sites described in Table 1 represent these kinds of shifts. For example, employees shift from "pre-meeting discussion" to "working parenthood" without experiencing any inconvenience, as the teleoaffective structures of both sites assume similar hierarchies and prioritization similarly reflects humanness at both sites. On the other hand, if teleoaffective structures conflict, the employee becomes aware of the tension between the aspects of humanness involved in different sites, resulting in *disruptive site shifting*. The disruption is experienced due to the emergent humanness stored in the organization's memory. If there is tension between the end-project-task-action hierarchies of different teleoaffective structures, the expectations set by emergent humanness are not met. As a result, employees experience disruption during such a site shift, and this tension needs to be reconciled for them to continue with the task at hand.

For instance, we witnessed a disruptive shift during our meeting observations, when developers described their frustrations with communicating with another team:

> *Andreas points out that they do not have any actual information about the new customer, what information should be put into the database, what the allowed parameters are, and so on. Ralph complains about the "Indians" not responding to emails.*

> *ISAC: This is the best part, ignoring others' emails.*

RALPH: *What is, then, the "definition of done"? We can create customership, but what information can be inserted?*

...

ISAC: *Could we get any information from today's meeting?* [He looks tired and irritated with the situation, e.g., he curses the slowness of his computer.] *Add me and Tina as CCs if no emails are answered. Tina is responsible for the contact persons. The problem of not getting replies might be because we are not allowed to approach the teams directly but contact needs to be made according to the chain of command. This way to prevent work disturbances apparently exists somewhere.*

The developer expected a certain prioritization of interteam collaboration and free-form communication. Such a hierarchy would characterize shared humanness by considering everyone as part of the same group and within the same moral boundaries, ready to help one another when needed. However, the developers were disappointed that their comments and requests for help had been disregarded. While an ingroup boundary protects those team members from outside interference, the employees outside of the boundary found the situation irritating and felt excluded from the shared moral community. To resolve the tension, the product owner suggested adding himself and another person from product management to the discussion. Involving product management shifted the prioritization from a free-form communication between teams into a chain-of-command-based and more bureaucratic communication, thereby resolving the tension.

As shown, tensions caused by disruptive shifts need to be resolved somehow to allow a new practice to make sense to participants. In the following section, we discuss the different aspects of humanness in which disruption occurs and the mechanism of *reconciliation*, which people use to address disruption by redefining the meaning of humanness.

Reconciliation

When the expectations between different sites differ, the attempt to resolve the relevant tensions requires work. On the basis of our analysis, we identified four different aspects of humanness: *hierarchy*, *boundary*, *lifeworld*, and *individuality*. These aspects should be understood as dimensions that flow between individuals and organizations, depending on how a practice prioritizes them and how they are enacted. When tensions occurred in our investigation, employees used four different forms of reconciliation to find an appropriate way of understanding humanness and behaving in confusing situations. Table 2 describes the aspects of humanness and presents examples of their reconciliation.

All aspects are bidirectional and nonexclusive, whereby each form can be enacted in either direction and at the same time. None of these aspects, nor their different ends, are inherently negative or positive. What matters is the context in which these aspects manifest, and how. For example, boundaries can be seen both annoying and useful, depending on the situation and perspective, as described in the third vignette. Typically, the work substance-related practices (such as review

Table 2: Examples of Reconciliation

Reconciliation	Aspect of humanness	Excerpt from data	Site in tension	Disruption
Hierarchy reconstitution: Abolishment of hierarchies	Hierarchy: Individual end	*Product owners and their superiors stop by casually in our room to say hi and give some update where we are. There's a quite low threshold to go and speak to anyone in the organization (developer).*	Office life	Casual visits by superiors in the open office create an informal environment.
Hierarchy reconstitution: Enactment of hierarchies	Hierarchy: Organizational end	*The discussion turned sour quickly. The team was promised that they could use a particular interface in implementation. The decision was overturned after a few months of development. One of the more experienced developers felt that the rug was pulled out from under his feet. "It feels like good old days" [referring to old workplace], he says. Tester, who had been working in the same company previously, seems to be agreeing. She thinks that no one is taking responsibility (observation).*	Review meeting	Organizational hierarchies do not support the everyday work of the developers and testers, creating confusion about the proper way of working.
Boundary setting: Dissolution of groups	Boundary: Individual end	*During the first days working here, I went to a big open office to ask if anyone had a spare cable for the monitor. Everyone stopped working. Roughly ten people turned their heads toward me and advised me where to find one. The point is that everyone stopped. Everyone listened and was ready to help me. … I have had experiences where people do not help or even look at you. They just continue working and ignore you (scrum master).*	Office life	Everyone in the organization is eager to help, even when they do not know the person asking for help personally.
Boundary setting: Establishment of groups	Boundary: Organizational end	*We are known to make things happen. For example, there is a mentality within our team that we will help other projects if they ask for help. This mentality is not necessarily shared in other development trains. Developers do not*	Development work	There are different expectations regarding helping one another between development trains.

Table 2: continued

Reconciliation	Aspect of humanness	Excerpt from data	Site in tension	Disruption
		respond to your emails. They just focus on their things and what they have committed to. It might be that they have decided that assistance requirements have to go through management, but here we understand that if you help others, you will also receive help (product owner).		
Entwining lifeworld: Merging of lifeworld	Lifeworld: Individual end	*Meeting has just started. Scrum master, product owner, and two developers are present. The team tester seems to be late. Just as scrum master opens up Kanban and starts moving tasks to the done column, the door opens, and Jane, team tester, walks in. Behind her enters a young, roughly fourteen-year-old boy. According to Jane, the boy was her relative from elementary school and was here to do his "working life familiarization" schoolwork. Everyone greeted the young boy as he took a seat against the wall (observation).*	Review meeting	A young relative of the tester suddenly appears in the meeting that was supposed to be a professional meeting.
Entwining lifeworld: Domination of lifeworld	Lifeworld: Organizational end	*Thomas starts closing the sprint plan. The meeting is about to end. Participants start a free discussion on various topics, and some are relevant to work, others are personal. THOMAS: Our burndown charts look bad. Good example how not to do things. [Straight line and then on the last day, third of the work just disappears.] ISAC, sighing as he leans back: PI meeting is coming. I had already agreed on a conference trip to Copenhagen at company expense but had to cancel it due to the hassle with other teams. I have tried to get rid of those teams, but no luck (observation).*	Project management	The product owner is overburdened with work from other teams to the point that it impacts his plans.

Table 2: continued

Reconciliation	Aspect of humanness	Excerpt from data	Site in tension	Disruption
Individualization: Recognition of individual	Individuality: Individual end	*The latest entry to the team, Jonathan, demonstrated how users could verify themselves with an SMS message. The product owner seems to be happy with what he sees. Release train engineer asks whether one can send SMS to any number. Both Jonathan and the tester start explaining simultaneously how the implementation has been done and what is possible. After a confusing few seconds, the tester gives Jonathan space to give his explanation. The leader of service design is impressed by how verification works. Based on body posturing, it is clear that Jonathan is proud of his accomplishments* (observation).	Review meeting	There is approval and positive feedback of implementation in the meeting.
Individualization: Instrumentalization of individual	Individuality: Organizational end	*Supervisor just walked into the room and asked a few good developers to form a task force to fix a bug. We had a short conversation about the issue, and two people left the team for a few weeks. Of course, it is understandable from a production point of view that it needed to be done, but still, all our goals and plans were scrapped* (scrum master).	Project management	The organization moves people from task to task without properly consulting teams about moves.

meetings or software development) promoted divisions into hierarchies and groups, thus prioritizing organizational ends over employees' personal lives and the increased instrumentality of employees. Moreover, those practices that facilitate individual ends tended to emphasize equality, fairness, organizational flatness in interactions, shared community belonging, the multitude of priorities that employees might have in their lives, and the aspects of employees that are not directly productive.

Reconciliation of Hierarchies and Boundaries: Enactments of Human Uniqueness

The first two aspects of our categorization of humanness—hierarchy and boundary—indicate how each employee is located within the context of organizing, that is, where an employee is positioned in a hierarchy and their relation to others, what their ingroup is, and who is placed inside or outside that ingroup's boundary (regardless of hierarchy). As community-emphasizing aspects, these also connect to the respect for uniquely human features through a consideration of others as vertical equals and members of the same moral boundary.

Hierarchy refers to the relationship of official and unofficial organizational hierarchies and, as part of a teleoaffective structure, defines what kinds of interaction and interplay between different levels of each hierarchy are prioritized. The work organization builds positions, such as developer, tester, software architect, scrum master, product owner, and release train engineer. While there is no explicitly defined organizational chart indicating the hierarchical relations between these different positions, a certain consensus of these relations still exists. How employees perceive and enact a hierarchy as an aspect of humanness relates to whether hierarchies are viewed as fair and just and connected to work or whether they remain vague or disconnected from that work. For example, the third vignette highlights the positive aspects of hierarchies and boundaries. Boundaries and demands for hierarchical chains of command can also help to protect development teams from external disturbances that could break their workflows, even if those boundaries are irritating to outsiders.

When the understandings of the appropriate prioritizations of hierarchy between the teleoaffective structures of practices collide, employees engage in *hierarchy reconstitution* to modify the hierarchy aspect of humanness. When hierarchies are made more explicit or are emphasized through practices (*enactment of hierarchies*), hierarchy reconstitution modifies the understanding of humanness so that practices reasonably provide privileges, rights, or responsibilities based on the positions or demands of a chain of command, thereby shifting a hierarchy's aspects toward organizational ends. Alternatively, when hierarchy reconstitution is used to hide or weaken hierarchies or make them implicit (*abolishment of hierarchies*), it alters humanness so that it is no longer reasonable for organizational practices to consider hierarchical positions when assigning rights, responsibilities, or other behavioral norms, which underscores individual ends. In such cases, everyone is on equal footing, and the idea of special privileges is preposterous. The following quote from an interview with a developer illustrates how a site initiates hierarchy reconstitution.

The software developer describes a situation in which different employees in the organization are treated unequally:

> *Managers are always reachable through email and such, but I have this feeling that if one walks around the office during evenings, it is the "code monkeys" who are still here. Product management and supervisors are long gone. That is how it goes in this field of business. It is also one of the incentives for career development. You get job descriptions that are more aligned with office hours, and work is no longer a way of life.*

This developer was paying attention to how different types of employees divide their working hours and workloads. It was typical for this firm's practices not to demarcate employees by hierarchy levels (e.g., as seen in the second vignette). The shift to the site of "office overtime" made the developer wonder whether he should expect everyone to work during the evenings. Outside traditional office hours, managers were not present in the office, but it appeared to be a normal practice for developers to work after office hours. Thus the site where working outside office hours was conducted, accompanied by relevant practices, seemed to contradict the assumption of equal treatment of employees regardless of their hierarchical status. Owing to this tension, the question of unfairness between employees requires reconciliation, which is then accomplished through *hierarchy reconstitution.* Accordingly, employees are divided by their organizational positions, as teleoaffective structures prioritize the work of managers and developers differently. At the lower levels of this organizational hierarchy, the "code monkeys" are expected to work in office outside office hours when needed. The managers located at higher levels of the hierarchy are not subject to this assumption. As a result, the hierarchy aspect of humanness is reconciled toward organizational ends, where hierarchical status determines different kinds of expectations.

Accordingly, *boundary* refers to the relationships of different horizontal groups within an organization, defining what kind of interactions are prioritized over potential group boundaries. These boundaries can stem from an organizational structure, that is, people who belong to different silos in organizational charts, or those formed by, from an organizational perspective, unofficial groups. For example, the border between developers and UI designers can be considered such a horizontal boundary. Both groups work within the same organizational silo but have separate group identities based on profession. Each of these groups can have specific gatherings, ways of working, and goals. When this kind of division is prioritized, different treatments become more likely and can reduce the sense of humanness of outsiders; when group boundaries are hidden, different treatments become more difficult.

Moreover, different group boundaries are either highlighted or obscured through *boundary setting*. Boundary setting can be used to strengthen boundaries and the identities of different groups within organizations (*establishment of groups*). Here a boundary is adjusted so that it is normal to separate people into different silos and/or groups rather than approaching them as a single community. This makes it feasible to treat employees from different groups differently. On the other hand, weakening

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group boundaries modifies the boundary aspect of humanness to encompass everyone within an organization in a single family (*dissolution of groups*). Thus practices no longer separate people into different groups or professions. In an interview, a subcontracted developer explained how group boundaries came as a surprise to him:

> *You get a feeling that your employer is no longer anything but a name on a paycheck. You start to think that you are part of that organization in which you do your everyday work. But, then comes a Christmas party or some other once-a-year event or benefit, and as a subcontracted employer, you must pay to participate or you are left out.*

The case organization has emphasized building a workplace where everyone can feel part of the same community. One of the goals is that there should be no difference in the way in-house employees and subcontractors from different companies are treated, as demonstrated by, for instance, the collegial joking in the first vignette or how one subcontracted developer said during an interview that they did not even know who was in-house and who was a subcontracted employee. Thus the developer first describes how he felt he was part of the customer organization even more than his own organization. However, the site where the Christmas party practices transpire follows a different kind of "ought to do," prioritizing boundary drawing between in-house employees and subcontractors. When this site intervenes, the subcontractor's feeling of sameness and the assumption of equality are eroded by the rare events that the organization holds for its own employees. Instead of getting a free invitation to the event, each subcontractor needs to pay to participate. Accordingly, a reconciliation of the boundary aspect of humanness occurs by dividing employees into those who are part of the organization and those who are not. As a result, humanness is shifted toward organizational ends, and treating employees with different contract types becomes comprehensible.

Reconciliation of Lifeworlds and Individuality: Enactments of Human Nature

The other two aspects of humanness—lifeworld and individuality—reflect the perception of an individual employee, how their personal life interacts with work context, and how the employee can manifest their own agency through work. These aspects connect to the respect for human nature that views everyone as unique and different from others. In their work-related practices, employees were assigned and behaved according to instrumental roles with organizational ends, yet the teleoaffective structures of more informal practices guided people to treat each other as whole human beings, not simply fungible tools used for organizational ends. In the organization in general, family life was regarded as a natural part of employees' lives, which the employer needed to recognize. Additionally, the organization expected employees to use agency and creativity in developing solutions.

Accordingly, *lifeworld* refers to how organizational activities can overlap and interact with other aspects of an employee's life. These aspects include study, family, and recreational activity, among others. A lifeworld promotes human nature through organizational practices, such as flexible working hours, that make it easier for people who study or are parents of small children to arrange their lives. The dimension does not refer to the degree of overlap but rather to the degree that an

individual has a say in how and how much their personal and work lives overlap. Some might regard work as an important part of their lives, providing content and meaning, but for others, a personal life might merge naturally with a work life.

When employees' organizational lives and personal lives interact, contradictions between lifeworld prioritizations may emerge, which require reconciliation by *entwining lifeworlds.* When employees entwine lifeworlds, they modify their lifeworlds so that their personal and professional lives can blend without noteworthy impacts (*merging of lifeworlds*). Individual ends are being prioritized in the case organization, whereby employees are in control of how much their private and work lives overlap in their day-to-day work. However, the entwining of lifeworlds can also be subject to organizational dominance. In such cases, individual ends are subjugated by organizational ends (*domination of lifeworlds*). Work and the needs of the organization take precedence over private life. Thus the lifeworld is reconciled to organizational ends. For example, during an interview, a developer described his experience of how work had come to dominate his personal life:

> *With better organizing and risk analysis, things could have been handled so much better and without being in such a tight spot. . . . Feels like things are intentionally made more difficult for me. Usually, one can solve issues just by working a bit more, but is it really fair that I need to work twelve-hour days, when others work eight hours? … I have been warning that we are running out of time, but more features and changes have been requested for the upcoming releases.*

Previous experiences led the developer to expect that employees could handle their work responsibilities relatively easily during normal work hours and that one's personal life should not suffer due to work. For example, the first vignette depicted how the "review meeting" site allows people to participate from home and take care of their family responsibilities at the same time. In this type of practice, the tele-oaffective structure prioritizes individual ends. However, this was contradicted by the experiences of the developer at the site where development work transpired. As the developer shifted between the sites of project management and everyday development work, he tried to warn that the organization was running out of time, but this warning was disregarded. Thus, in the end, normal working days were not sufficient to fulfill work responsibilities, and as a result, the developer's personal life began to suffer. As the free and effortless merging of different parts becomes more difficult, an employee's lifeworld aspect is reconciled toward organizational ends, and thus putting more pressure on an employee becomes an expected part of the work process.

As the final aspect, *individuality* refers to how an organization considers individuals and their characteristics. When an organization gives employees the ability to exercise their agency, use their own judgment on issues, and make decisions regarding their own work, it provides them with a sense of individuality and identity. Thus, in the case organization, the overall work process scrum provides everyone with opportunities to show how they have approached technical challenges. The extent to which employees can exercise their agency is always constrained by the organization, but this can be enacted in different ways.

The extent to which an employee's individuality and agency are prioritized within organizational boundaries is defined through *individualization.* When individuality is used to reconcile organizational ends, individualization modifies humanness so that employees are perceived more as tools for organizational ends (*instrumentalization of individuals*). When the opposite end is prioritized, individualization reconciles humanness to align with employee individuality and agency (*recognition of individuals*). Such individualization is demonstrated by, for instance, whether people are considered thinking and feeling subjects who take responsibility for their work and if their personal qualities are emphasized. As an example, finding the right personality is a fairly common practice to hire people where a good "fit" with an organization is emphasized more than merely looking for a person who could contribute to the organization's immediate ends. This type of practice contributes to an understanding of employees as human individuals rather than as tools for organizational ends. A subcontracted developer described a recruitment experience:

> It is nice to be here. I made it clear in the interview that I do not have experience with the technologies used. Just to make sure that they know what to expect. They responded that you learn things as you do them … an ideal client for me. Knows what my situation is and accepts it.

While this kind of focus on fit is typical when hiring in-house employees, it is a less common practice in subcontracting. Thus, based on his experiences with the subcontracting firm, the developer here was expecting more emphasis to be placed on those skills that can be utilized immediately. At the site of recruitment, the developer was clear about his limited technical capabilities regarding what the organization was looking for. To the developer's surprise, the client was more interested in him as a person than in his immediate technical expertise. Thus, because of reconciliation, it follows that the developer's understanding, the individuality aspect of humanness, shifts to emphasize individual ends and recruitment based on personal characteristics.

Emergent Humanness

Collectively, our findings therefore show that humanness is not a stable consideration of human beings but a social accomplishment constantly in the making; that is, an organizational consideration of humanness emerges through the prioritization of individual and organizational ends in organizational practices. As individuals draw on different sets of practices during their everyday interactions, they continuously *shift between sites*, that is, the contexts of social activities. During these shifts, they may need to reconcile tensions that arise from the different kinds of humanness among sites. Through these shifts and the resulting reconciliations, organizational actors continuously produce and reproduce an evolving organizational understanding of humanness. Depending on the type of reconciliation, the practices and teleoaffective structures then align with specific aspects of humanness.

The findings show how striving for organizational goals and promoting employees' humanness are not necessarily contradictory; prioritization is not defined by a single work practice but is constantly redefined and renegotiated in different contexts.

Furthermore, the findings highlight both the constant work that maintaining humanness requires and the organizational policies that enable this maintenance. Disruptive site shifts are of key importance here: through them, the changes in practices take place in a subtle manner and can go unnoticed. However, disruptive site shifts also change the tendency of an organization to perceive and recognize humanness, for example, by forming silos, increasing competition, and emphasizing utilitarianism instead of benevolence. Accordingly, the findings have several theoretical and practical implications, which we discuss in the following section.

DISCUSSION

The motivation for this study was to understand how humanistic management could address the ethical paradox of humanness in organizations: how organizational actors simultaneously exist as means to an end and as ends themselves (Arnold & Bowie, 2003; Bowie, 1998; Kennedy et al., 2016; Margolis, 2001; Phillips & Margolis, 1999; Pirson et al., 2016; Sayer, 2007). Thus the aim of this study was to examine how organizational actors enact their understanding of humanness through their work practices. Through our findings, we locate different aspects of humanness in practices and their teleoaffective structures. We show how the prioritizations of individual versus organizational ends are ongoing processes in which people shift between different sites of the social, whereby differing sets of practices require reconciliations of disparate underlying assumptions. These findings provide a basis for an alternative theorizing of humanness in organizations. First, we propose the novel notion of reconciliation to capture the dynamics through which humanness is enacted in organizations. Second, we provide an alternative approach to understanding humanness by presenting humanness as a property of practice. Thus, rather than regarding humanness as a property of an individual that could be intentionally respected or violated, or as an object of action that could be directly addressed, this alternative view shifts the focus to a context redefined through the logic of practice: the organization and the sites of the social, regarding humanness and its conditions as mutually implicated.

Reconciliation of Humanness

Coping with the tension between organizational and individual ends arising from the "means–ends paradox" in organizations would require viewing and accepting the seemingly opposite ends as simultaneously valid (Smith & Lewis, 2011), which, however, has not been enabled by the existing (normative) conceptualizations of humanness. One contribution of our study thus arises from the alternative way of viewing this tension and theorizing humanness in the organizational context accordingly, through the notion of reconciliation. By examining the prioritizations of individual versus organizational ends as ongoing processes, reconciliation draws attention to those aspects that may be negotiated during disruptive site-shifting events, that is, those disparate underlying assumptions in tension that need to be reconciled. Our conceptualization includes four aspects of humanness, each of which may be enacted anywhere between its respective dimensional poles.

Reconciliation can therefore be seen as a form of "deparadoxization" (Luhmann, 2018; Seidl, Lê, & Jarzabkowski, 2021), a mechanism through which the individual aims to find a justification for a certain activity and make the experienced tension latent—like in the situation where the team was frustrated by not getting answers to their emails. To cope with the tension, they went along with the assumptions of the conflicting practice, which emphasized enacting hierarchies and establishing boundaries. Reconciliation may also work in other directions, such as on occasions when the employees were positively surprised by being able to use their time flexibly or being recognized by others.

Because the questions of who we are as humans and how we should relate to each other are central for the study of cooperation and morality (Haidt, 2008; Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013), the notion of reconciliation and its aspects have implications for a wide range of academic debates in the field of business ethics. For example, ethical or transformational leadership research could use reconciliation to recognize those transformative events that leaders can utilize to make changes in organizations (Montuori & Donnelly, 2017). Moreover, the aspects of humanness allow deeper understanding of the "self–other" relation (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma, Madden, Yeoman, Thompson, & Chalofsky, 2019): hierarchy and boundary represent relations among employees, whereas lifeworld and individuality reflect possibilities for self-fulfillment. Reconciliation and its dimensions thus provide an alternative means for understanding meaningfulness that meaningful work scholars have approached as an inherent condition of all humans arising from our relations to others and capabilities to fulfill ourselves in both work and personal life (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2014). The aspects of lifeworld and individuality could also provide a new perspective on the work–family interface and on the ways different aspects of family life interact with work (e.g., Holmes, Thomas, Petts, & Hill, 2020). Disruptive site shifting and following reconciliation may also shed light on, for example, how different employees can and want to balance pressures between work and family life and cope with the conflicts that those pressures might cause.

Humanness as a Property of Practice

Another of this study's theoretical contributions stems from its theorization of humanness through a practice approach. Conceptualizations like Haslam's (2006) dual model of dehumanization, the notion of infrahumanization (Leyens, Demoulin, Vaes, Gaunt, & Paladino, 2007), and the notion of the stereotype content model (Harris & Fiske, 2006) are based on essentialist and "substantialist" thinking (Emirbayer, 1997). In these theories, there is essential "human nature" that is denied or promoted, implying a strong normative and moral undertone. To move away from this theoretical stance, we draw on practice theories (Reckwitz, 2002; Sandberg & Dell'Alba, 2009; Schatzki, 2005) and theorize humanness as a property of practice. This theoretically distinct approach enables us to examine how humanness might be denied or protected but also how it can be promoted. With the notions of site shifting and reconciliation, we expand the discussion of human dignity in organizations that thus far has shed light on how economic systems (Healy & Wilkowska, 2017),

societal norms (Chiappetta-Swanson, 2005), or inequalities of workplaces (Cooper & May, 2007) threaten employee dignity; on those organizational conditions that make it difficult for individuals to respect others' humanness; and on how organizations could better protect employee dignity (Pirson, 2017, 2019). We show how context and activity are mutually constitutive; therefore humanness is continuously enacted in the everyday lives of organizations. This also means that humanness is no longer an external object of denial or respect, violation or protection, located only in individuals. Rather, it is brought into being through everyday activities and therefore becomes everybody's responsibility in reconciliation. Thus the role of an employee shifts from object to agent. Moreover, through this practice-based conceptualization of humanness, we add to the body of scholarly work that uses organization-, group-, or unit-level analyses to show how humanness is recognized within organizations (Melé, 2012; Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018). Nevertheless, we avoid the individualist theorizing that makes a particular group of actors, like colleagues or managers, responsible for violating or protecting humanness.

It is important to note that our four-dimensional descriptive conception of humanness reflects, not dimensions between dehumanization and humanness, but four different aspects that can be prioritized for individual or organizational ends. For example, low individuality should be considered not as essentially dehumanizing or negative but as an individually, socially, historically, and culturally informed understanding of humanness. People vary in how they relate to and balance individuality and community (Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2011). Similarly, there are cultural variations in the extent to which individuality is seen as positive or negative (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Hofstede & Bond, 1984) and in how individuality culturally manifests (Shavitt et al., 2011). The same cultural and individual reservations apply to all four aspects of humanness. Cultures and individuals vary in terms of what they consider proper "human" treatment and behavior.

Regarding humanness as a property of practice also changes the view of intentionality. Humanness as an emerging phenomenon, as described in our study, shares similarities with the notion of "dehumanization by omission" (Waytz & Schroeder, 2014) and the related discussion of the different contextual factors influencing dehumanization. Dehumanization by omission occurs due to indifference and passive apathy regarding others' well-being (Waytz & Schroeder, 2014). Emergent humanness shares similarities with this view, as respect for humanness is most often unintentional and situationally determined by the teleoaffective structures of practices. In our study, however, humanness is not the result of passivity. It is enacted, but not deliberately. As humanness is part of the practices, the "way things are done," it is not produced only by the cognitive processes of an individual; therefore it is not necessarily intentional. People are not necessarily aware of all the consequences of drawing on a practice. For example, providing the possibility for virtual participation in a meeting for a team member while he is taking care of a baby at home is not an intentional act toward humanness; instead, it is a solution for a more practical problem of increasing meeting participation. It, nevertheless, unintentionally, also provides employees a sense of being able to balance work and private lives. On the basis of extant studies, we know that contextual factors can suppress the

triggers needed to perceive the other as a human being (Waytz & Schroeder, 2014). Hence our practice-based analysis shows how these contextual factors can be better understood to regard humanness as situational and historical, that is, embedded in its social context (Margolis, 2001).

The notion of emerging humanness also contributes to understanding humanness and dignity in a processual way. Mitchell (2017) identifies dignity as processually negotiated through interactions rather than as a property possessed by individuals. Similarly, Bal (2017: 108) regards dignity in organizations as an "eternal work in progress" through interactions. Our research further elaborates on this nascent view of organizational dignity as a processual phenomenon. How employee humanness is understood in an organization defines the appropriate ways of treating employees in that context; therefore this understanding plays a decisive role in protecting and promoting dignity. As humanness is constantly being reconciled, so, too, is employee dignity. Thus different ways of protecting and promoting dignity become possible and impossible as humanness obtains different meanings in organizations.

Sites of Humanness: Reconsidering the Contexts of Humanness

Our final major contribution involves reconceptualizing the contexts of humanness through site ontology to complement existing individualist and structuralist approaches. Research on topics like how alienation impacts employees and violates their humanness (Healy & Wilkowska, 2017) draws conclusions from macro-level structures. Meanwhile, studies involving psychological conceptualizations, such as the relation between abusive supervisors and dehumanization (Caesens et al., 2018), use micro-level analyses. In contrast, the application of site ontology as a flat ontology rejects this demarcation between micro and macro; rather, both are made of practice bundles that form "large" or "small" spatiotemporal constellations that differ in their extension (Schatzki, 2016; Seidl & Whittington, 2014). Thus future studies are invited to explore how social phenomena manifest in local contexts rather than seeking explanations from macro-level structures or micro-level interactions. Using site ontology allows the theoretical integration of different levels of analysis. Both levels need to be understood as transpiring in a particular context through the enactments of practices. As described, these practices, whether "large" or "small," constitute sites, which then act as contexts for human coexistence. This allows a better theoretical integration of streams of different levels of analysis, making site ontology well suited for humanistic management.

Humanistic management questions shareholder capitalism and promotes a more responsible and stakeholder-oriented approach to business. The underlying aim of profitability is not challenged, but it is refocused and weighted against other important outcomes of business organization (Pirson, 2017). As White (2003) points out, there is nothing wrong, in a Kantian sense, with considering our time and talent to have a price, even if our value as human beings escapes market logic. Thus wage labor does not inherently conflict with the notion of Kantian dignity, but it needs to be understood as a contextual phenomenon. Therefore humanness in organizations is not determined by macro-level structures; it is a local phenomenon that requires stronger organization-level analyses. Thus studies like Melé's (2003) call for a "humanizing culture," while

Mitchell (2017) focuses on the impact of performative speech on dignity, highlighting the burgeoning stream of flat ontology scholarship within humanistic management. Further research would greatly benefit from taking site ontology seriously and focusing on performing nexus analyses, that is, trying to understand how different practices from different "levels" assemble and connect with one another in social contexts (Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2016). This means accepting that context is not defined beforehand but is something that needs to be empirically and analytically generated by researchers. By doing so, scholars can better understand how practices derived from macro-phenomena can influence and bind local practices to certain interpretations of employee humanness or how local practices can offer the space for different types of humanness to emerge and challenge reified interpretations through reconciliations, just as we have presented in our research.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study focuses on the manifestation of humanness in an R&D organization of a collaborative known as a "good employer" that has received high scores in employee satisfaction surveys. As previous studies in humanness have shown, most of the motivations behind any behaviors with ethical content remain hidden beneath the surface. Thus, instead of focusing on individual characteristics or structural factors, a contextual and social approach can improve the understanding of humanness and its recognition, or disregard, as a social phenomenon. To this end, we adopted a site lens and drew theoretical inspiration from Theodore Schatzki's practice theory and the concept of teleoaffective structures.

Implications for Theory and Further Research

By identifying how different aspects of humanness are parts of a given practice (i.e., the "ought to do") and analyzing how humanness is enacted in different contexts, we demonstrate that the emergent nature of humanness is constantly in the making. By presenting a practice-oriented view of humanness and revealing its relational nature, we contribute to the research on humanness (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Hodson, 1991; Pirson, 2017), which thus far has mainly examined humanness from an individual or structural perspective. On the basis of our study, we argue that employee humanness is a phenomenon that we constantly produce and reproduce through our everyday actions. Because humanness regarded as a property of practice is historically and culturally informed, further studies would be needed to understand how different cultural contexts regard the aspects of humanness relevant and what kinds of everyday manifestations they have.

We examined the case organization for a certain period; therefore we did not observe the development of humanness over time. However, by discovering the mechanisms of site shifting and reconciliation, revealing the dynamics through which humanness becomes produced and reproduced in organizations, our study has several important implications for theory and further research. A practice view provides us with a practical, theoretical tool to analyze humanness as situational, historical, and embedded in context. Management theories would benefit from less

individualist or structuralist approaches when trying to understand humanness and ethical behavior in organizations. A practice perspective within a humanness framework would help uncover the core of "good organizational practices" and provide ideas on how to better support humanness and human dignity in organizations.

Managerial Implications

The present study also has several implications for practitioners. First, our study shows how small, everyday activities impact humanness. Thus the respect or violation of humanness should not be interpreted as intentional but rather as a collective achievement of organizational actors and, as such, highly situational and contextual. Owing to their unconscious or unintentional nature, most ethical behaviors in organizations are difficult to examine. For those practitioners who seek ways to promote humanness in organizations, our four-dimensional conception of humanness could provide a conceptual tool for regarding relations among employees as well as the individuals' possibilities for self-fulfillment.

Second, the task of humanizing organizations faces the problem of addressing both needs that arise from the means–ends paradox: although they do want to achieve the goals of the operation and hire people into certain hierarchical positions to do that, at the same time, they wish to respect humanness in everything they do. While organizations may adopt different responses to the tensions arising out of the conflicting goals (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013; Schrage & Rasche, 2022), suppressing the tension being one option, organizations may also aim to find ways to proactively address the tensions and adjust both goals into their activities, as was the case in the studied organization. Enactment of both ends was supported by the organization's aim to provide a "humane" work environment, which was visible, for example, in the way merging of family and office life was normalized. Identifying the tensions arising between different sites can provide visibility to issues that might be considered problematic—and a possibility to intervene, like when the case organization eventually decided to change the problematic Christmas party practice.

Being sensitive to tensions should not, however, mean immediately taking a stance one way or another. As discussed in this article, people differ in their personal inclinations regarding different aspects of humanness. Tensions should be seen as an opportunity to make assumptions explicit, to discuss these assumptions, and to find ways to build a more complex understanding of tensions. This way, organizations can, for example, guide greater tolerance of individual differences in the organization or foster better participation in family life for those who want and need to do so.

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APPENDIX A: EMPIRICAL DATA

Interviews

Role	Persons interviewed	Responsibility
Supervisor	2	Line manager/supervisor for R&D personnel from multiple development teams
Product owner	2	Prioritizes product features and communicates them to development teams from product management
Tester	2	Plans and executes testing for developed product features
Scrum master	2	Leads meetings, prepares meeting materials, measures progress of development team, and protects development teams from external intrusions
Developer	7	Software developers are responsible for designing and implementing product features
Architect/developer	1	Ensures technical solutions proposed by developers align with existing software architecture and other teams
Total	16	Transcribed word count: 130,204 (non-English langue); minutes: 1,081

Observations

Event	Sessions	Hours	Word count of notes (non-English language)
Team 1 biweekly meeting	19	30.5	12,750
Team 2 biweekly meeting	19	20.5	6,358
Product increment meeting	6	31	10,533
Total	44	82	29,641

APPENDIX B:
INDUCTIVE PHASE DATA STRUCTURE

Analytical codes	Moments of epiphany	Epicenters
Flat organization	Organizing confusion	Open office
Bureaucratic		UI implementation, meetings
Authority conflict		Meetings
Principled design process	Development chaos	Meetings, open office
Happenstance development		Meetings, open office
Discursiveness and openness	Managing discrepancy	Meetings, open office, feedback
Directive and obscurity		Project management, UI implementation, nonlocal organization
Equality	Equality mirage	Open office, coffee breaks, meetings
Unequal		Overtime work
Contributing together	Community disjoint	Pair programming, using final product
Focusing on own things		Communication, collaboration
Shared signs and markings	Sense of sameness	Emails, badges, team lunches, seating arrangements
Unequal treatment		Yearly events, company info
Socializing	Soloing	Coworker trips, team lunches, sauna evenings, coffee breaks
Withdrawal		Team lunches, sauna evenings, coffee breaks
Helpfulness	Indifference	Open office, coffee break, meetings
Disregard		Communication
Common goals	Goal divergence	Meetings, using final product
Disparate goals		Communication, collaboration
Family-friendly work practices	Life balance	Remote work, meetings, visitors
Off-work support		Remote work, flexible work, coworker trips
Work pressures and workload		Project management
Self-determination	Autonomy	Meetings, open office
Compulsion		Project management, UI implementation
Instrumentality	Recognition	Review, meetings, project management
Intrinsic value		Recruitment, meetings
Appreciated and heard	Approved	Open office, meetings, feedback, project management, recruitment
Ignored and neglected		Communication, open office

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