

BOOK REVIEW

The map of meaning: a guide to sustaining our humanity in the world of work, by Marjolein Lips-Wiersma and Lani Morris

The Map of Meaning skillfully marries idealism and practicality. Growing out of 15 years of research and application, the book explicates both a theory and its practical use. Lips-Wiersma and Morris begin by laying out their Holistic Development Model, demonstrating, first, how individuals can use it to create and sustain meaningful work. They then move to showing how organizations can improve morale, employee engagement, productivity, and profit by attending to what makes work meaningful.

Through a carefully constructed argument, the authors convincingly demonstrate the power of their model, both for individuals and for organizations. Part 1, "Taking Personal Responsibility for Meaningful Work", helps the reader learn to talk about what matters most and to bridge the gap between inspiration and reality. The authors provide many examples, as well as exercises that help the reader apply the material. Part 2, "Where Meaning Meets Organisation", focuses on bringing the insights of Part 1 into contemporary organizations, by creating organizational practices and structures that respond to the whole human being. Again, examples and exercises flesh out the framework.

The Holistic Development Model is not naive, having been tested in many settings over many years. The authors understand the tensions, paradoxes, and imperfections of individual humans and of organizations. The model is built to work in the midst of imperfection.

I found the authors' response to readers' unspoken question, "Is this another fad?" to be particularly powerful. "Being human is not a fad", they assert. They point out that being human is enduring and needs to be taken seriously. Individuals and organizations will thrive only if they build on the foundation of attending to what makes humans thrive.

The Map of Meaning is an excellent resource for individual employees seeking meaning in their work, for organizational leaders committed to building a better organization, and for faculty seeking a practical, realistic, down-to-earth text that will inspire students and teach them enduring skills.

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