

## The embodied roots of meaning, trust, and freedom

This conference raises the question of how leaders of today on one hand can cope with increased demands for productivity and on the other hand can maintain a work that feels meaningful and is based on trust and freedom. In this theoretical paper, I propose that in order to answer such a question it is beneficial to perform a thorough investigation of how the central concepts used in this question (i.e. 'demands for productivity', 'meaning', 'trust', and 'freedom') may be grounded in sensory experience.

This proposal is based on recent developments in cognitive science. In cognitive science, it has been shown that all concepts, even abstract concepts such as the ones in the question of this conference, are grounded in reactivations in the sensory-motor cortices, the so-called simulations (Barsalou & Wiemer-Hastings, 2005). For example, the concept of 'yes' can be represented through a simulation of contraction in biceps the muscle used to flex the arm and bring something closer, and 'no' through a simulation of contraction in 'triceps' the muscle used when extending the arm to push something away. Similarly, the concept of 'time' can be represented both through a simulation of the sensory experience of moving through a landscape where events are objects in the landscape and the direction of movement is the future. Alternatively, the concept of 'time' can also be represented through a simulation of the sensory experience of standing still and seeing events approaching from the future (Lakoff, 2012). The sensory experiences in which concepts are grounded are not merely experiences associated with the concept but are the very substance of its meaning (Johnson, 2007). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the main purpose of simulations is to guide action (Barsalou, 2008) and that learning to represent a concept through different simulations will enable new interactions with this concept that previously were literally unthinkable (Springborg & Ladkin, 2014).

It is, therefore, possible that some ways of grounding the concepts of 'demands for productivity' on one hand and 'meaning', 'trust', and 'freedom' on the other will make these appear as mutually exclusive. In this case attempts to answer the question would become focused on finding the best compromise. However, it is conceivable that other ways of grounding the central concepts of the question will not make them appear mutually exclusive. In this case, the question can be answered in ways, which do not rely on compromise. In other words, a thorough investigation of which simulations are used to ground the concepts in the question is important because the simulations used will frame (and limit) the way in which the question can be answered.

To illustrate the process of thoroughly investigating how concepts central to a problem are grounded in reactivations in the sensory-motor centers, I will present empirical data from a Ph.D. project in which 60 leaders from different Danish companies explored problems in their current work life that at once seemed important and unsolvable.

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