

## Effective Emotions: The Enactment of a Work Ethic in the Swedish Meeting Industry

By Erika Andersson Cederholm

### Abstract

The meeting industry – an encompassing term for services related to various kinds of professional meetings, from mega-conventions to the ordinary work meetings – is increasingly consolidated and legitimated as a specific sector in the service industry. New professions such as meeting designers, meeting facilitators and meeting consultants are emerging, promoting new knowledge in this field. By focussing on processes and social interaction, and highlighting emotional dimensions of meetings, these professions pave the way for new modes of conceptualising and practising professional relationships. The intangible, emotional and playful dimensions of social interactions are promoted as effective means to achieve economic goals, thus highlighting a professional ideal that is here called “effective emotions”. The aim of this article is to show how the work ethic promoted by the meeting industry encourages new intersections, and tensions, between the idealisation of the tangible/measurable/rational on the one hand and the intangible/emotional/magical on the other hand, and between working life and intimate spheres. Through a discourse analysis of a Swedish corporate meeting magazine, it is shown how the distinction between work and leisure is dissolved in this specific work culture, and by this, it is discussed how the meeting profession acts as a normative regulator by reinforcing ideal ways of being and interacting with others. Creativity, personal growth, reflexivity and flexibility are enacted as idealised personal assets as well as moral imperatives in the discourse of the meeting profession and through the practices of various meeting techniques, thus reinforcing not merely a professional ethic but cultural ideals of being as a person as well. It is also suggested that this reinforcement may, under certain circumstances, turn into its opposite and undermine the promoted ideals, thus pointing at the importance to pinpoint the dynamic and situated tension between economic rationality and emotional intensity.

**Keywords:** Work ethic, emotions, meeting industry, discourse

## Introduction

The meeting industry in Sweden - an encompassing term for services related to various kinds of professional meetings, from mega-conventions to the ordinary work meetings - is increasingly institutionalised, consolidated and legitimated as a specific and important sector in the service industry. One example is the emergence and growth of international associations such as Meeting Professionals International (MPI), initiated in the US in 1972 and established in Sweden 1994. Furthermore, there are new media covering the specific interests of this industry, such as the Swedish corporate magazine *Meetings International*, established 2003 and some years later launched on an international market. Simultaneously, as the industry is increasingly consolidated and legitimated as a specific sector of the service industry, and particularly the tourism industry, there is a growing complexity within the sector. One example is the large amount of meeting professions emerging on a new service market, with a growing emphasis on the value of social interactions. Meeting designers, meeting planners, meeting facilitators and meeting consultants are just some examples of new professional roles, promoting new knowledge on how to stage a good and efficient meeting.

In the professionalisation efforts of this “new” meeting industry, professional ideals, norms and practices are highlighted and reinforced. Despite a range of professional roles and types of meetings in the industry, I will use the singular term “the meeting profession” to elucidate the discursive formation of a professional culture embodying a specific work ethic. This professional culture conveys values and recommendations on the instrumental aspects of practices, that is, specific techniques to evoke the ideal meeting, as well as on ways of being and relating in social interaction. There is an emphasis on creativity and reflexivity as personal assets, and authenticity and intimacy feature the idealised social interaction. On the one hand there is a strong concern for economic efficiency through the development of new meeting techniques, on the other hand ideals of playfulness and emotional intensity are highlighted, and the intrinsic value of social interaction is idealised. Hence, a distinction between the rational/cognitive and the emotional is reinforced, simultaneously as these rationales are being intertwined in the culture of the meeting profession.

The aim of this article is to show how the work ethic promoted by the meeting industry encourages new intersections, and tensions, between professional and personal roles, working life and intimate spheres. By introducing the concept “effective emotions” I will highlight how ideals of economic rationality and emotionality are intertwined in a knowledge-intensive service industry and how discursive practices in these types of professions may reinforce certain ways of being in professional as well as personal relationships. Whilst the meeting industry is paving the ground for new service markets, there are not merely new professions arising, but conceptualisations and ways of thinking about and practising services and

professional encounters emerge that reinforce ways of being and relating to others. The meeting profession is thus an agent of change, a catalyst in an increasingly significant service economy. The meeting profession embodies both change and stability and highlights cultural values, social norms and work ethics not merely in a growing meeting industry, but in a cultural economy where the intersection between commercial and professionalised services on the one hand, and the non-commercial and non-professionalised on the other, is vividly negotiated and complex (du Gay & Pryke 2002). In the following section, I will set the frame for my analysis by discussing an emerging work ethic and new capitalist “spirit” (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005) in Western societies that emphasises creativity, flexibility and self-development. I have outlined two dimensions that I suggest play a crucial role in this development: the commodification of social relationships and the articulated increased significance of emotions at work. These two dimensions have a general significance in Western societies today, but are highlighted in certain industries and management ideologies, such as the meeting profession.

## **The Emergence of a Work Ethic of Self-Development**

### **Commodification of Social Relationships**

In the emerging Swedish meeting profession, there is a growing focus on social interactions, not merely as by-products or means to an end in the service encounter, but as a product of its own. In the discursive formation of the meeting profession, the importance of social interaction is emphasised and juxtaposed to the “old” authoritarian one-way communication between meeting participants, as in the following statement by the chief editor in *Meetings International*, an influential Swedish corporate meeting magazine:

Now the time has finally come for dialogue and interaction and we have once and for all put an end to meetings as a medium for one-way communication. Now we have to get used to lots of new specialists and competencies to be able to engage people with our message – most welcome interaction-designers, stylists, anthropologists and scenographers! (*Meetings International* 2008, no. 28: 63, my translation)

The focus on social interactions, framed as an objective with a value of its own, in contrast with a previous, presumed ignorance concerning the interactive dimension of meetings, highlights the intrinsic value of social interaction. In this sense, social interaction as it is articulated in the meeting profession has similarities with the notion of sociability, a concept coined by the sociologist Georg Simmel (1949). Sociability refers to the intrinsic value of social interaction or, more specifically, the play-form of sociality. Although the world of the meeting business, emphasising values such as efficiency and cost-effectiveness, seems quite remote from the intrinsic values of Simmel’s sociability, it highlights a tension between the autotelic dimension of playfulness and the instrumental efficiency of the in-

dustry. The meeting profession enacts ideals of reflection and egalitarian and non-authoritarian communication, which, in line with Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) study of the changes of the capitalist culture at the end of the 20th century, is typical of the anti-hierarchical ethos highlighted in management discourses of the 1990s. In order to reach this ideal, the meeting industry emphasises the importance to stimulate all senses in order to create a sense of here and now. Particularly in the event-oriented type of meetings, the context is explicitly framed as experience-oriented and playful, illustrated in the following quote from *Meetings International*:

This time the sales manager Hans-Åke Antoniussion chose a different type of context for the meeting. During three days, 32 colleagues were all gathering on a camping ground in Vaxholm outside Stockholm. Dressed in jogging-suits. Staying in caravans. On Svensson Svensson's camping ground (Emdén, *Meetings International* 2006, no. 15: 40, my translation).

The sales manager continues: “- It makes a great difference when everybody has the same clothes. We become equals. You mix the group but everybody still look the same. It is like being in a sauna.” (ibid., my translation). Although most corporate meetings are not framed in this obviously playful context, the focus on interactivity and process in the meeting context is assumed to encourage an egalitarian social structure and evoke reflexivity. The choreographed meeting thus embodies a ritualised playful aspect, like a liminoid out-of-the-ordinary situation (Turner 1969, 1978). The play-form of sociality is thus visible in this type of meeting. However, although the meeting itself may have the autotelic aspects significant of the play, the overall objective of the meeting industry is to satisfy the customer's seemingly rational motives, implying more cost-effective and efficient meetings.

This commodified sociability, highlighted by the professional culture of the Swedish meeting industry, is one example of a more widespread phenomenon in Western societies where relationships and interactions are increasingly commodified and ascribed a value in themselves (Wittel 2001; Rojek 2010). In a society where the service industry is becoming increasingly important, social competencies and “people skills” are not only seen as a personal bonus, but also necessary in order to function as a professional. This is in line with what Andreas Wittel (2001) calls a “network sociality”, where the art of socialising, particularly in the in-between spaces of work and leisure such as networking at conferences, dinner parties and at the pub, is perceived as crucial for success in both work and non-work contexts. Since these skills are presumed to be tacit and highly personal, it is the sphere of play and leisure that primarily provide the basis for this type of learning. Consequently, leisure-oriented activities are seen as an investment in personal development where we can develop social and emotional competence in order to enhance work performances (Heelas 2002; McRobbie 2002; Rojek 2010).

Although far from all meetings advocated by the Swedish meeting profession are framed in such a leisure-oriented and playful manner as the teambuilding ac-

tivities referred to above, it is a professional culture that emphasises both emotional and cognitive/rational skills. Through the concept “effective emotions” I will highlight the aforementioned tendencies and discuss how professional ideals in the cultural economy of services are intertwined with the ideals of personal development. More specifically, I will analyse how a professional discourse blurs the boundaries between work and leisure, between the market and the personal life sphere, and thus reinforces professional and cultural ideals.

### **Emotions at Work**

Previous studies on the intersection between the personal sphere and the market have developed into different lines of thought. One is the work on emotional labour, a concept discussed by Airlie Hochschild (1983), indicating the emotional work involved in service work to create satisfied customers (Hochschild 1983; Anderson 1993; Ashforth & Humphrey 1993). Additionally, Hochschild (2003) discusses a general tendency in late modern societies of blurred distinctions between commercial spheres and intimate personal life through the commodification of services surrounding households and intimate life. A similar line of thought is Viviana Zelizer’s studies on the role of money in intimate relationships (1994, 2005), where social negotiations that are creating distinctions between the commercial and non-commercial life sphere are in focus. By focussing on the monetary value that emerges in the non-commercial life sphere, such as the cost of non-paid service work, the norms related to the boundary between intimate life and the market are brought into light (Zelizer 2005). Another similar, albeit slightly different, distinction that has been discussed and critically analysed is the one between work and leisure. The pertinence of such a distinction in the capitalist culture of today, has been called into question since we all seem to engage in a “labour of leisure” (Rojek 2010) where the notion of “being creative” encompasses both work and leisure and is dominated by a logic of economic rationality (Banks 2009). This implies, for instance, that the instrumental focus on self-development and emotional competence in our so-called “free time”, corresponds with a similar preoccupation during our working hours (see also Wittel 2001).

The discussion of the distinction between work and leisure calls forth the notion of work ethic, that is, the values and cultural meanings of work. Organisational studies on emotional labour in creative work have pointed at a dominating work ethic where the notion of flexibility connotes values of freedom and lack of rigidity, and the line between work and leisure is thus transgressed. However, the flip side of the coin is the precariousness of such “free” working conditions, which may reinforce hegemonic social structures (Ross 2003 & 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2008). For example, the notion of “free choice” when it comes to working long hours in knowledge-intensive work that is often perceived as personally rewarding, is not only an issue of individual choice, but normatively embedded and gendered in the organizational culture (Grugulis et al. 2000; Lewis 2003). The

historical conditions and social consequences of a work ethic promoting flexibility has been thoroughly analysed by Richard Sennett (1999), who argues that a neo-liberal political and economic culture that expresses contempt for routinized work and praises creativity, individual self-determination and short-term job-commitments, will undermine long-term commitments regarding personal relationships. The result, according to Sennett, is a “corrosion of character” since our possibilities for building long-term personal trust is undermined.

Although the development foreseen by Sennett may not be equally pertinent to the entire work-force in a society, the ideals of flexibility, creativity and self-determination are, however, relatively wide-spread and accepted in Western culture. That is, if we see these ideals as dimensions of a “labour of leisure” in Rojek’s sense (2010), implying that we engage in self-management and self-development in order to lead a creative, self-determinant life, beyond routinisation and boredom (see also Goldschmidt Salomon 2005). One example of this is how the tradition of preparing oneself to get a job has been displaced by the notion of a “building a career”, and how it has become increasingly important for people to incorporate private and leisure oriented experiences into their notion of a career (McRobbie 2002; Salomonsson 2005). In this sense, the formation of a professional life is also the formation of a subject (Salomonsson 2005: 125). It is thus not merely important what we may accomplish as professionals, but how we *are* as persons (Heelas 2002). By showing that we take responsibility for our personal development by being creative and flexible, we are presumed to be more attractive on a labour market.

Although I have depicted some more generic tendencies in the cultural economy of Western societies, a work ethic that idealises creativity, flexibility and self-determination may be more significant in some professional cultures than others. The corporate cultures and management discourses and practices of the so called new economy has been analysed as particularly prone to embrace novelty and innovation, often with the unconventional pairing of the hard facts of economic calculation and psychological and emotional values, sometimes wrapped in an attractive package of playfulness (Löfgren & Willim 2005; Thrift 2001, 2002). Nigel Thrift (2002), for example, has shown that many companies today are under constant pressure of measuring performance and innovation, which evokes specific forms of management ideologies and practices. Thrift argues that although innovation has always been an important dimension of business growth, what we see in many businesses today is a greater emphasis on the prerequisites for fostering creativity. Consequently, creativity emerges to a larger extent than previously as a value in itself. Creativity in this sense implies that companies do not only seek employees who accomplish tasks that may lead to innovation, but they want creative individuals. Furthermore, the working subject wants to be creative as well, not primarily in order to fulfil work tasks, but to fulfil him/herself. Informed by Foucault’s notion of governmentality (Foucault 1991), that is, how modes of

governing becomes self-governing by the subject's themselves (see also Miller & Rose 1990), Thrift points at specific techniques or "performative spaces" (2002) that hasten the fusion between management ideology and the ideology of self-improvement. One is visual communication and visual rhetoric through new communication technology, the other is through managing the body through emotionally triggering events and performances that heighten social interaction, and a third are the techniques and prerequisites for mobility and travel that may enhance circulation. These techniques are particularly pertinent and visible in certain industries, especially those that, according to Thrift, characterise themselves as "fast", that is, those who wish to present themselves as being in a permanent stage of change. It is also particularly significant in companies with a highly educated management, especially human resource management preoccupied with "fashioning the self" (2002:207).

The meeting professionals presented in this study, through various portraits in the Swedish magazine *Meetings International*, are usually self-employed consultants, and many of them may be called entrepreneurs, emphasising innovation and growth (Johannesson 2005). Several of them actively annihilate the distinction between personal lifestyle and work, and are in many ways part of the creative workforce where flexibility and individual freedom are highly valued (Ross 2003 & 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2008). The meeting profession may thus be studied as a kind of creative work typical of the new service economy. However, since this type of profession focuses on social interaction per se, it highlights a phenomenon in late modern societies where the notion of social interactions becomes a product on its own terms, and shows how the modes in which we relate to others are deeply intertwined in market relations. As I will try to show in my analysis, the enhancement of psychological and emotional dimensions of meetings, and the promotion of humanistic and artistic knowledge in the new meeting profession, do not replace rational/cognitive modes of calculating business, but these rationales are intertwined in both management ideologies and ideals of being as a person and a professional. To illustrate the tension between these rationales, the outline of the analytical section of the article, "the enactment of a meeting profession", is divided in three main parts: "Techniques and materialities" highlights the measurable and "rational" aspects of the industry, "Interaction and being" discusses the emotional and elusive dimensions, and the third part, "the practices of being" is a synthesis of the two that focuses on how ideals and practices in "how to do" manuals enact a form of "how to be".

### **Methodology: The Meeting Magazine as a Discursive Medium**

The magazine *Meetings International* (the name of the owner organisation is Meetings International Publishing Ltd.) was launched in 2003 as the first Swedish magazine focusing primarily on the meeting industry and its growing professions.

It publishes approximately six issues per year and is the main forum for the Swedish association Meeting Professionals International (MPI) ([www.meetingsinternational.se](http://www.meetingsinternational.se)). As a corporate magazine, its readers are presumed to consist of professionals in the industry that, except from the “new” professions described above, includes all service producers in the meeting industry and their customers and potential customers. According to my analysis, the advertisers seem to be primarily conference organisers such as hotels. The magazine aspires to cover the latest trends in the industry, with many portraits of leading personalities in the profession. As the sole magazine of its kind in Sweden, it is an influential mediating factor in an institutionalisation and professionalisation process. Meetings International Publishing Ltd. has a newsletter and a web site as well, including a bookstore. The bookstore’s offerings are relevant for the analysis since it exhibits those books that, by the magazine, is considered to be interesting to the market in focus. The magazine has, from the start until issue 23/2007 been titled *Meetings International – your first lifestyle meetings magazine* (however, since issue 24/2008 changed to *Meetings International – your first meetings management magazine*). The first title associates it with other life style oriented magazines such as travel-, leisure-, health-, design- and garden-magazines. This life-encompassing aspiration corresponds well with the content, and the shift in titles does not seem to have changed the style and discursive content of the magazine. When it comes to issues of work ethic and cultural ideals expressed in the magazine, I do not see any significant changes during the period of five years that encompasses my document analysis, which includes 20 issues of the magazine between January 2005 and April 2009.

I have focused predominantly on this specific magazine in my study of the meeting profession, albeit aware of the lack of nuances that for instance interviews with meeting professionals may provide. However, the aspiration of being in the front highlights certain values in a distinct and discursive manner, which makes the magazine appropriate for a discourse analysis of an emerging professional culture. In line with Foucault’s (1993) discussion of the exclusive power of discourses, I will focus on the discursive formation of ideals and values, highlighted in a normative and thus exclusive manner, making the nuances of a complex and multifaceted professional culture less visible. The professional culture of the meeting industry displays similarities with a “doctrine” or educational culture (Foucault 1993:31) which ties subjects to certain manners of speaking and writing and exclude other discursive forms. The doctrine, according to Foucault, executes a double submission: the speaking subjects are submitted to the discourse and the discourse is submitted to the group of speaking subjects (ibid.).

One example of an ideal highlighted and promoted in the discourse of the meeting profession is novelty. Novelty, trendiness and being in the front are three notions that capture the spirit of the *Meetings International* magazine. The spirit of novelty is in line with the nervousness and “newness” that Löfgren and Willim

(2005) have distinguished as typical of the corporate culture of the new economy. Novelty in the meeting industry is not merely about covering the latest news and trends in the business, but also about conveying the profession as a whole as new, which is important in order to distinguish it from previous and other professional cultures. This does not imply, however, that the business of meetings is new. Hotels, travel agencies and transportation companies have for a long time provided services related to meetings, such as conferences and congresses. What is new is rather the discursive use of the notion of novelty and the narrative juxtaposition between the old and the new. One expression recurrently used in the magazine is “from logistics to content”, implying that the “old”, or rather “obsolete”, meeting industry was solely preoccupied with practicalities such as transport, accommodation, food, meeting rooms and technical facilities, juxtaposed to the “new” meeting industry that provides services more related to the meeting itself, everything from staging the setting or room in specific ways in order to trigger the senses needed to be triggered to achieve the goals, towards entering the meeting process itself, such as preparations for the agenda and coaching the customers to reflect upon and sharpen the focus of the meeting. Furthermore, the “old” type of communication in meetings is portrayed as authoritarian, hierarchic and non-creative, whilst the new type of communication emphasises mutuality and transgression of fixed traditional roles. Overall, there is an emphasis on processes and social interaction, and also an emphasis on the emergence of a new market, hitherto regarded as a black box in the meeting industry, but now discovered and promoted.

A discourse of a market does not only represent ideals, but enacts the market as well. However, when it comes to the notion of being in the front, it also implies the possibility, or risk, that the meeting profession is far ahead of the market. The focus on experiences and new dramaturgical devices in staging meetings may provide more than the market is ready to buy (see Acar et al. 2007), and the variety of new professions may still be unknown to the customers. Even though the gap between supply and demand is not specifically articulated or debated in the magazine, the ambition to narrow the gap is expressed through the persuasive tone in the magazine, where the new professions are promoted in an educating manner. The discursive power of the meeting profession thus includes not only what is being said, but also how it is said. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the discourse of novelty may reinforce certain work ethics and ideals and practices of a market, but simultaneously, if the emphasis on novelty makes the industry seem too avant-garde or even obsolete (if newness becomes a cliché), it may undermine or change the market. In the subsequent analysis, I will point at the discursive practices of the meeting profession by highlighting ideals and norms discernible through statements by the editors, personal portraits of professionals in the field and their work and publications, advertisements, and reportage of new techniques. The images and the text are included in the discursive practices of the meeting profession, but I will also discuss the specific meeting practices and techniques

that are referred to in the magazine. Although I have not analysed how these practices are performed in practice, they are referred to in a discursive manner in the magazine and may point at the ritual techniques or formalised practices that are important in order to sustain a discourse (Foucault 1993: 28).

## **The Enactment of a Meeting Profession**

### **Techniques and Materialities**

Although the meeting profession dissociates from the “old” practicalities surrounding meetings and emphasises the “black box”, that is, the elusive social interactions and processes within the meeting itself, these elusive matters are being concretised and materialised. One way of materialising is an emphasis on communication technology. This is not merely about making the computers work smoothly at the meeting, but through technical means trigger the meeting participants’ presumed capability of simultaneous sensory stimuli that may facilitate interaction. Thus, the ideal seems to be that the technique should be used not merely as a simple tool but as a catalyst for creativity and reflexivity. In promoting new technique, there is an obvious dissociation from a “previous” preoccupation with the technique as such, while “now” focussing on its potential in social interaction, illustrated in the following quote:

For many years there has been some kind of imagined threat that we will stop having personal meetings. Instead, we will look at each other through our computers and, if we are lucky, have so called video-meetings in a studio. Simultaneously as the technique has improved, the technical development has shown that we have even more reasons to meet in real life. Because one simple rule still prevails: you cannot share a beer on the Internet. The new system Tandberg Telepresence T3 is designed to give the meeting participants the experience of sharing the same table. To create the best possible meeting-experience, the company has contracted a social anthropologist which has co-operated with the company’s development team and customer representatives. Together, they have investigated the importance of design, colours and the furniture for the meeting. (*Meetings International* 2008, no. 28: 84, my translation)

Quite typical is the emphasis on holistic knowledge, where unconventional knowledge in this industry, here represented by the anthropologist, signifies novelty as well as legitimates the focus on technology by recognising the importance of the “human touch” in professional meeting situations. Another mode of materialising the meeting profession is by emphasising the physics and biology of the meeting experience. Personal portraits of professionals with specific knowledge in this field – such as specialists in lighting design – represent this. One example is the interview with a professional in architectural lighting design, working as a researcher and teacher at one of the technical universities in Sweden. In the interview he talks about the two processes related to light that affects a meeting: the psychological and the physiological. He elaborates on the physiological aspects, informing about hormones which affect both sleep and stress and are related to the

type of light we are surrounded by. The reader is thus informed by his knowledge of expertise in predominantly the biological and technical aspects of lighting, but we are also informed about the multidisciplinary character of his knowledge and career and, as he tells us in the interview, the novelty of the disciplinary field he is working in. (*Meetings International* 2008, no. 25: 71-77).

The portrait of the lighting architect is merely one example of several professional portraits of technical and biological expertise. Another example is a series of articles called “Brain-check”, on how our brains work in everyday working life (see for example *Meetings International* 2008 no. 25, 27, 28). One of the articles is a portrait of a woman who has developed an expertise on the role of food in wellness and how the brain is affected by what we eat. Typical of the professionals interviewed, her career seems rather diverse but successful with a clear tone of entrepreneurial spirit:

Ten years ago Helene (...) finished working as the director of one of the largest multimedia companies in Sweden. Since then she has established two (names in original) publishing companies, written books, purchased a printing company, been educated in acupuncture in China and is just about to finish medical school at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden (*Meetings International* 2008, no. 28: 77, my translation).

The journalist continues:

It is easy to see a clear line in Helene’s (...) life and work. She has left a more stressful life to a life with more harmony. Today she focuses health and well-being in working life, which she is currently writing a book about (*ibid.*, my translation).

The article continues with Helene’s specific knowledge on food and how it affects the brain and our working capacity, and Helene has several concrete advises on what to do and not to do. Although Helene’s field of expertise seems very multifaceted and holistic considering her background, the article focuses on specific material and biological matters:

Scientific research shows that everyone who is hungry makes more mistakes in memory- and attention-tests. – Hungry people are also more irritated and some become aggressive – this concerns especially men since their amount of testosterone rises, the nerves affecting smell are activated and we are affected by colours; red stimulates hunger and blue reduces it. (*ibid.*, my translation).

The article continues with similar information and corresponding advice, related to working capacity in general, but also on how to make a good meeting environment using food as a specific meeting device.

Another example of an article in the same “brain-series” is an interview with a man who is both psychologist and architect (*Meetings International* 2008, no. 27). Typical of the professional intersection of these professionals, the emergence of a niche-product that seems tailor-made for the meeting industry is discernible. This professional has specialised in how colours affect us: “Those who choose a room with right colours may enhance creativity, fighting spirit, speed, security and many other things – but also the contrary with the wrong colours.” (*ibid.*: 85, my translation). The economic potential of this kind of knowledge is persuasive:

Colours are a natural part of our lives and they affect us whether we like or not. A modern company cannot afford to ignore it. It is not enough to reach mediocrity in the meeting industry; the company has to find the niches and reach for excellence. (ibid.: 92, my translation).

The personal portraits above express the emergence of professional niches related to specific knowledge of expertise. The kind of knowledge illustrated in these examples is oriented towards the natural sciences, and when human behaviour and interactions are mentioned, it is framed in a behaviouristic and biological oriented tradition of knowledge. This is not merely related to the fact that two of the portraits mentioned belong to a particular series about the human brain, but the positivistic aspects of human behaviour is highlighted in the magazine, that is, the observable and presumed measurable aspects of human life. One possible explanation is that the measurable is less elusive and may also have a legitimate effect on the emerging professional fields in this industry. Furthermore, there is an overarching and pressing demand within the industry, which now and then is articulated as one of the greatest challenges in the sector, which is to find the adequate means to measure the economic effects of meetings. Return on investment, shortened ROI in the magazine, is the overarching rationale for the industry. Thus, the measurable, in all aspects, is portrayed as a positive loaded value, which is closely connected to the observable materialities of meetings.

### **Interaction and Being**

I have argued that the “black box” of interactions and processes – the meeting itself – is increasingly being illuminated through the emerging meeting profession. The meeting itself has turned into a professional field and a new knowledge area, wherein the materialities and measurable practices of the meeting professionals are highlighted. However, there is a seemingly opposite direction in the enactment of the meeting as valuable in itself, which is rather concerned with norms and morals of being, in private life as well as professionally.

The cultural norms and ideals conveyed in the magazine, seems to encourage a transgression between the personal and professional self, between the private sphere and working life. Indeed, as mentioned previously, the logo of the magazine was until no. 23 in 2007 titled *Meetings International – your first lifestyle meetings magazine*. Several of the personal portraits of professionals in this field convey an image of people whose professional careers are directed by their personal interests and lifestyles. The portraits often show how these people have reached a junction in life, and how existential quests of choosing direction has paved the way for a new professional career. They often seem self-determined and creative as well, with a clear entrepreneurial spirit, crossing traditional professional fields.

The notion of creativity is thus a highly regarded value in the emerging meeting culture. The professionals are portrayed as innovative, introducing a new spirit to the meeting industry, and their multifaceted careers and their flexible approach to

life are regarded as an important means to creativity. One professional who runs a consultant company called The Idea Laboratory describes himself:

I am a person who thinks you become creative by mixing. I started (my career) as a student in literature, then I entered the Drama Institute to become a film director, now I study for a Master at the School of economics, and I also work as a sport journalist on the side while running my own company. I think it keeps my head clear. This may not be a recipe for everybody, but it works for me, so I won't be bored... (Meetings International 2007, no. 23: 28, my translation).

Not merely the meeting professionals, but the products, the meetings themselves, have to be staged and choreographed in order to enhance creativity. The word "creativity" is used repeatedly, both as a naturalised, taken for granted personal asset among the professionals or as a self evident buzz-word in commercials, or as a scientific quest, represented by portraits of professionals who are researching the topic, for example the connection between place and creativity. Successful leadership is presumed to enhance the meeting participants' creativity. The following statement is from a guest article written by Jan Rollof, an academic who is the author of several books on the topic of creativity. Facilitating creativity is not only desirable, but even framed as a moral imperative, according to Jan Rollof:

Is it possible to plan creative meetings? Yes – you *can* and you *should* do it. You can be even more explicit and say that you have a *responsibility* and *obligation* to do it (emphasis in original). Meetings take time and effort and cost money. In the long run you cannot afford not to use the energy that good meetings may evoke. (Meetings International, 2007, no. 21: 45, my translation)

Being creative is often mentioned in line with notions of personal development and individual responsibility, implying that the ideal of being creative may act as a moral imperative as well. The three notions of creativity, personal development and individual responsibility are a complex whole that is presumed to benefit the organisation as well as personal relationships. In the personal portraits as well as in other type of articles, this complex whole is emerging not merely as instrumental assets for making meetings more efficient and thus more profitable, but as ideal ways of being and relating to others as a human being. The ideal of personal development is intimately connected to individual responsibility through the ideal of reflexivity. An ideal meeting should encourage reflexivity as well as your whole way of being. The blurred distinction between professional and personal relationships is discernible throughout the magazine by the use of a discourse recognisable in the therapeutic professions but generalised in a common and popular discourse on self-development, in line with what Chris Rojek calls "the labour of leisure" (2010). For instance, one columnist, the professional psychologist Hans Gordon, compares meetings in professional life with personal encounters in almost every issue of the magazine. Another example is the following statement under the heading "The personal meeting – *what a possibility*" by the editor in chief:

In the personal meeting you communicate with all your senses. It is the meeting that provides you with an image of a person, it is the meeting that provide you with new contacts and make relationships grow. We share common experiences. It is when people meet that new ideas are arise, and isn't that right that when ideas come true we grow as human beings? (Meetings International 2005, no. 6: 9, my translation).

The quote above implies that the previous type of meeting, in the "old" meeting industry, was *not* personal, and therefore, less efficient. Thus, *being there* as a person, involved with all your senses and not merely a distant professional in the conventional sense, may lead to professional as well as personal growth. *Being there with all your senses* is a formulation known from the experience discourse in leisure travel as well, common in marketing of tourist destinations and attractions, illustrated in the following advertisement by a conference organiser:

Important meeting! With yourself.

In the forest, you are closer to everything. To yourself and to life. Here you and your colleagues will have the time to reflect and absorb the majestic sighing in a hundred years old tree-top. Discover that you are able to manage several days without mobile phone, red light or café latte. Instead you will absorb the smells of lingonberry and chanterelle... (Meetings International 2005, no. 6: 35, my translation).

The notion of "being there with all your senses" is closely related to the notion of authenticity, which in tourism is often represented by more or less essentialistic aspects of the physical surroundings, such as originality, history, localness, sometimes transferred to primitivistic aspects of the local population (see Andersson Cederholm 1999). However, being there with all your senses rather indicate an existential dimension of authenticity, a sense of wholeness and presence (Andersson Cederholm 1999; Wang 1999; Taylor 2000; Hom Cary 2004; Steiner & Reisinger 2005).

Furthermore, the dimension of authenticity that is articulated and promoted by the meeting profession corresponds quite well with Ning Wang's (1999) notion of inter-relational existential authenticity. Inter-relational authenticity implies an intellectual and/or emotional intimacy with others, whom in leisure tourism may be either your travel companion such as your partner, family member or friend, or people you meet on your journey, for example locals or other travellers. Although the corporate meeting context is professional, intimacy is an implicit dimension in the notion of a "personal" meeting, where we meet with open senses, with no pre-determined hierarchical order or hidden agenda: "it is only a self-conscious and present person that is capable of leading a meeting without hidden agendas. The authenticity of the leader evokes the authenticity of the participants" (Hörberg, Meetings International 2008, no. 25: 82, my translation). This author, Per Hörberg, has presented a series of articles in the magazine on the topic of authenticity in meetings, and he has also written a book on the same topic called "To Really Meet" (Hörberg 2007, my translation). Being present in the meeting, with your intellectual as well as emotional self, is crucial for a successful meeting, according to Hörberg: "The meeting that we find interesting, in our personal life or

at work, is about the same thing. That those who meet really meet. It is not until we are totally present and able to show our emotions simultaneously as we talk about something, that we can achieve this.” (Hörberg, *Meetings International* 2008, no. 25: 82, my translation) and “The secret of a meeting is that you and I always departure from ourselves when we meet others... To dissolve you own obstacles are like coming home to yourself. It is not until I am close to myself, that I can be present in a meeting. To be present means to be close”. (Kellerman, quoting Hörberg’s book, *Meetings International* 2007, no. 22: 40, my translation). Again, the blurred distinction between life and work is highlighted. Roger Kellerman, who is the publisher of *Meetings International*, continues his review of the book:

Per Hörberg is the leader of meetings that develop people as well as companies. He is coaching organizations, management and individuals to focus on essentials. To the company and the management group this may lead to more involvement with the common goals. To the individual, it may lead to a more meaningful life with a better balance between efficient work and a relaxing leisure time. (*ibid.*, my translation)

The ideals of existential authenticity, and the ideals of being and interacting as a professional in general and in the meeting industry in particular, thus highlights specific ideals of being as a person - a creative and reflecting individual striving for personal growth, preferably with an entrepreneurial spirit of transgressing conventional boundaries while pursuing your personal interests. This is in line with Foucault’s (1991) notion of governmentality, which Nigel Thrift discusses in relations to management ideologies and practices in the corporate cultures of the new economy (2001, 2002) and Karen Lisa Goldschmidt Salamon’s discussion of the “logic of the inside-out management” (2005: 53). According to Salamon, this logic implies the development of a new positive self that operates by forms of subjectification, where the individual is encouraged to “take ownership” of his/her own “path to success” (2005: 54). This type of management ideology attacks routine processes of work that are assumed to be outdated and mechanical, instead emphasising on notions of authenticity and emotional intensity.

Through Hörberg’s book and the articles by him or about his book, the existential dimension of authenticity is articulated and shaped in an intellectual discussion. Nevertheless, this type of authenticity has an elusive character and in contrast with more essentialistic images of authenticity, often related to nature, this type of authenticity is more often articulated, and particularly in commercials, in words and phrases such as “magic” and “something just happens when people meet”. This elusive and magical aspect of meetings seems quite far from the technical and measurable dimensions I presented earlier. However, although the elusive character of existential authenticity may be articulated in intellectual reflections or as emotional triggers in commercials, when it comes to more practical matters, that is, how to design a good meeting, the elusiveness is quickly transformed into specific techniques, or “performative spaces” (Thrift 2002). In the following section, I have called these “the practices of being”. They are seemingly

very simple, practical methods of meeting in the “right” way - or implicitly - being in the “right” way.

### **The Practices of Being**

One type of technique used in order to interact in an idealised way is to change the conventional staging of the meeting room. In a portrait of the former therapist and now meeting coach Tom MacDonald who is currently working on a book entitled “Big heart, big profits – unlocking the power of love at work”, he says in the interview that he is surprised that so many meeting organisers still use the setting of a classroom, where the participants sit by desks which they put their papers on:

If you are going to talk to each other, you can't sit in a row, next to one or another. If you want to be creative you must have a round-table discussion. Personally, I think it gives the participants opportunity to hide behind the desks, so I usually suggest they take them away.” (Meetings International 2008, no. 27: 70, my translation).

These simple means are not only used in staging the meeting, but also in the meeting process itself. The methods used in the process are often structured according to different stages of the interactive and analytical process. Two consultants, introduced in the magazine, who have developed two methods now widely used among companies all over Europe, say that they think that their methods are actually very basic. It is about “to release common energy in an organisation or a meeting” (Meetings International 2005, no. 10: 43, my translation). They describe one of their methods as divided into five stages; in the first stage the participants are encouraged to individually think about a specific question, a stage called “spontaneous thinking”. The next step is to discuss the issue in pairs. In the third step the thoughts from all participants are openly exposed, in the fourth step these are ranked according to what is closest to the aim of the meeting, and in the last stage all the discussions are categorised according to various themes (ibid.: 44). This method is an example of many techniques that in similar ways are compartmentalised in stages, and the entire meeting process is framed in a specific temporal and spatial frame, often according to a very strict time schedule and led by a consultant/instructor.

Other types of techniques, less formalised, are oriented towards the individual's presumed tacit skills and competence in social interaction. Such is the art of networking. In the personal portrait of Patrick Delaney, the owner and manager of a large Irish event company, he states three concrete advises on how to network: be different, give more than you try to receive, and think ROI in your networking. He continues with many concrete details on the art of networking, thus articulating a presumed tacit knowledge:

... move around the room, talk to many people, repeat the names on those you meet, try hard to remember them. Leave your business cards, write notes on the ones you receive so that you don't mix them up when you are back in the office ... make sure that you have open questions which make the answers longer ... Then it is all about

giving instead of taking. Listen to his needs. Follow up and do what you have promised. Otherwise you have created an enemy, not a friend. (Meetings International 2007, no. 19: 77-79, my translation).

What is significant with all these techniques of interaction is their astonishing simplicity. The detailed compartmentalisation and specification in time and space is an effort to transfer the elusiveness of social interaction into a comprehensible and technical “know-how”. Simultaneously and more implicitly, there is an effort in framing the *ideals* of being with others in professional meetings – such as authenticity and reciprocity – into formalised codes of conduct. Thus, the practices of being enacted by the meeting profession illustrate the tension between different and seemingly contradictory ideals in the meeting profession: the measurable positivistic aspects of social interaction on the one hand, and the egalitarian playfulness of sociability evoking a sense of existential authenticity and emotional intensity on the other. This tension is even more accentuated by the fact that the overall and explicit aims of all the techniques presented above are quite simply economic: to create efficient meetings that may give a return on investment. Through these techniques, energy and creativity are expected to be released, as they are important aspects of efficiency. Furthermore, the egalitarian non-hierarchical and reciprocal meeting situation is supposed to evoke reflexivity, encouraging growth in the company as well as for the individual employee. Hence, the practices of being manifest the notion of effective emotions. Economic rationality and emotional intensity are two ideals and rationales that are being distinguished, as well as intertwined, in the performative practice of “know-how”. Effective emotions illuminate, enact and legitimise values related to specific ways of being as a person as well: you should be creative and innovative, constantly reflect upon yourself, your life and work – and thus be prepared to be flexible – and exhibit personal growth, preferably accomplished through social and emotional skills.

## Concluding Remarks

I have presented the meeting profession as an agent of change, a catalyst, paving the way for new professional arenas in the service economy. New niches are created, traditional professional roles transgressed and intersections between social, psychological, technical, artistic and economic fields of knowledge emerge. New methods of social interaction are established and promoted. Furthermore, the meeting profession is a catalyst in a deeper, structural manner as well. It is one example of a new type of service profession that encourages the involvement of emotions and intimacy in professional relationships, and idealises ways of being that blur the distinction between the professional and personal self, life and work, and between the private and the public sphere. Interpersonal existential authenticity, that is, a sense of presence, mutuality and intimacy with others, is thus ascribed a social as well as an economic value, and it is promoted as an important medium in market relations. The meeting profession highlights the tension between the

measurable, tangible and instrumental on the one hand, and the elusive, intangible and playful on the other. The notion of “effective emotions” seems like an anomaly, but represents a mode of conceptualising and practising social relationships that may be increasingly common in the fuzzy intersection between the life world and the market in the service economy.

However, the meeting profession is not merely evoking change but functions as a normative regulator as well, normalising and legitimising specific ideals of being. Through the increasing tendency of focusing on the interactive process itself, and thus how you relate to others, ideals of being is performed, enacted and reinforced in the discourse of the meeting profession and through the practices of various meeting techniques. Thus, creativity, personal growth, reflexivity and flexibility are enacted as idealised personal assets as well as moral imperatives. The critical implication of this is that what we may see as “merely” ideals of a professional role, should rather be seen as ideals concerning our way of being and relating to others in all aspects of life. The discursive practices of the meeting profession, and the specific interactive form of meetings, may thus be interpreted as a means of governmentality (Foucault 1991; Miller & Rose 1990; Thrift 2002) or as a seductive “magic” typical of the corporate cultures of the so called new economy (Löfgren & Willim 2005). The combination of a ritualised, temporal and spatial framed situation, the simplicity of its techniques and emotional and interactive intensiveness, may produce the magical “effectiveness” typical of ritual enactment (Turner 1969, 1978). Hence, the notion of “effective emotions” does not merely refer to the discursive ideals of combining instrumental rationality with emotional intensity, but it also refers to the performative power of discursive practices, manifested in everyday practices such as the “practices of being” referred to above. However, a ritual enactment that is framed in a commercial setting, with an overall instrumental goal, may have both a legitimising and undermining effect. The persuasive discourses and practices of the meeting profession carry the potential of both reinforcing and undermining ideals and norms of a specific culture. On the one hand, it is legitimising in the sense that the moral imperative of specific ways of being and acting reinforces a market and work ethic that encourages creativity, personal growth, reflexivity and flexibility. In line with Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2005) study on the new spirit of capitalism, this kind of work ethic might be an expression of an ambition to overcome the perceived disenchantment of the social world and former hierarchical, overly formalised and emotionally distant working cultures. On the other hand, if the overarching instrumental goal becomes too explicit in the interactive situation itself, and if the implicit normativity in “how to do” becomes explicit enough, the intrinsic value of social interaction is undermined and the magic will disappear. The efforts of re-enchantment will turn to its opposite. Effective emotions are thus only “effective” as long as a tension between instrumental rationality and emotionality is preserved. By focusing on the manifested practices of effective emotions, their discursive contents as well as

interactive forms, the tension and dynamics of a work ethic may be brought into light.

**Erika Andersson Cederholm** is Senior Lecturer in sociology at the Department of Service Management, Lund University. Her research interests embraces the intersection between culture, economy and social life, including the commodification and organisation of intimacy and emotions in tourism and hospitality, value creation in service interactions, and lifestyle entrepreneurship in rural tourism. E-mail: [erika.andersson\\_cederholm@msm.lu.se](mailto:erika.andersson_cederholm@msm.lu.se).

## References

- Acar, Theodora; Emelie Helgius & Alexandra Keyser (2007): *Ett annorlunda möte – mötesindustrins omvandling i den nya ekonomin* [A Different Meeting – The Transformation of the Meeting Industry in the New Economy], Master thesis, Department of Service Management, Lund University.
- Anderson, Geoff (1993): “Emotions and Work in a Lifestyle Occupation”, *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 17:5, 10–15.
- Andersson Cederholm, Erika (1999): *Det extraordinäras lockelse: Luffarturismens bilder och upplevelser* [The Attraction of the Extraordinary: Images and Experiences of the Backpacker Tourist], Lund: Arkiv Förlag.
- Ashforth, Blake E. & Ronald H. Humphrey (1993): “Emotional Labour in Service Roles: The Influence of Identity”, *The Academy of Management Review*, 18:1, 88–114.
- Banks, Mark (2009): “Fit and Working Again? The Instrumental Leisure of the ‘Creative Class’”, *Environment and Planning A*, 41:3, 668–681.
- Boltanski, Luc & Eve Chiapello (2005): *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London & New York: Verso.
- du Gay, Paul & Michael Pryke (eds) (2002): *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life*, London: Sage.
- Foucault, Michel (1971/1993): *Diskursens ordning*, Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion.
- (1991): “Governmentality”, Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon & Peter Miller (eds.): *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Hemel Hempstead, U.K., Harvester, 87–104.
- Goldschmidt Salamon, Karen Lisa (2005): “Possessed by Enterprise: Values and Value-creation in Mandrake Management”, Orvar Löfgren & Robert Willim (eds): *Magic, Culture and the New Economy*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 47–55.
- Grugulis, Irena; tony Dundon & Adrian Wilkinson (2000): “Cultural Control and the ‘Culture Manager’: Employment Practices in a Consultancy”, *Work, Employment & Society*, 14:1, 97–116.
- Heelas, Paul (2002): “Work Ethics, Soft Capitalism and the ‘Turn to Life’”, Paul du Gay & Michael Pryke (eds): *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life*, London: Sage, 78–96.
- Hesmondhalgh, David & Sarah Baker (2008): “Creative Work and Emotional Labour in the Television Industry”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25: 7-8, 98–118.
- Hochschild, Arlie R. (2003): *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- (1983): *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hom Cary, Stephanie (2004): “The Tourist Moment”, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31:1, 61–77.
- Johannison, B. (2005): *Entreprenörskapets väsen [The Nature of Entrepreneurship]*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.

- Lewis, Suzan (2003): "The Integration of Paid Work and the Rest of Life. Is Post-Industrial Work the New Leisure?", *Leisure Studies*, 22:4, 343–355.
- Löfgren, Orvar & Robert Willim (eds) (2005): *Magic, Culture and the New Economy*, Oxford and New York: Berg.
- McRobbie, Angela (2002): "From Holloway to Hollywood: Happiness at Work in the New Cultural Economy?", Paul du Gay & Michael Pryke (eds): *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life*, London: Sage, 97–114.
- Meetings International (2010): [www.meetingsinternational.se](http://www.meetingsinternational.se), (10/01/14).
- Miller, Peter & Nicholas Rose (1990): "Governing Economic Life", *Economy and Society*, 19:1, 1–31.
- Pons, Pau Obrador (2003): "Being-on-Holiday. Tourist Dwelling, Bodies and Space", *Tourist Studies*, 3:1, 47–66.
- Rojek, Chris (2010): *The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time*, London, Sage.
- Ross, Andrew (2003): *No-collar: The Humane Workplace and Its Hidden Costs*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- (2008): "The New Geography of Work: Power to the Precarious?", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25:7-8, 31–49.
- Salomonsson, Karin (2005): "Flexible, Adaptable, Employable: Ethics for a New Labour Market", Orvar Löfgren & Robert Willim (eds): *Magic, Culture and the New Economy*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 117–129.
- Sennett, Richard (1999): *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, Stockholm: Atlas.
- Simmel, Georg (1949): "The Sociology of Sociability", *The American Journal of Sociology*, 55:3, 254–261
- Steiner, Carol J. & Yvette Reisinger (2005): "Understanding Existential Authenticity", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33:2, 299–318.
- Taylor, John P. (2000): "Authenticity and Sincerity in Tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28:1, 7–26.
- Thrift, Nigel (2001): "'It's the Romance, not the Finance, That Makes the Business Worth Pursuing': Disclosing a New Market Culture", *Economy and Society*, 30:4, 412–432.
- (2002): "Performing Cultures in the New Economy", Paul du Gay & Michael Pryke (eds): *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life*, London: Sage, 201–233.
- Turner, Victor (1969): *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-structure*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- (1978): "Variations on a Theme of Liminality", Sally Falk Moore & Barbara G. Myerhoff (eds): *Secular Ritual*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 36–52.
- Wang, Ning (1999): "Rethinking Authenticity in tourism Experiences", *Annals of Tourism Research* 26:2, 349–370.
- Wittel, Andreas (2001): "Toward a Network Sociality", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18:6, 51–76.
- Zelizer, Viviana A. (2005): *The Purchase of Intimacy*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- (1994): *The Social Meaning of Money – Pin Money, Paychecks, Poor Relief, and Other Currencies*, New York: Basic Books.