

How to re-enchant workplaces and organizations? An introduction to the special issue

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Abstract

Enchanting work is a polysemic term that can account for multiple interpretations. It can be defined as a feeling of being connected in an affirmative way to existence. In organizational terms, enchanted workplaces are places of wonder that allow people to be active agents, who can impact on their environment, find meaning in their work, and flourish. In this context, enchantment has been operationalized in organizational and managerial literature in a variety of ways, including being resourceful, happy, resilient, passionate, motivated, or healthy at work, among others. The main purpose of this special issue was to highlight those elements that may promote enchanting work environments, and the processes through which (re-)enchantment may be achieved. Also, we were interested in understanding re-enchantment as an internal process.

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Keywords

Leadership theories, theoretical perspectives, multi-level (e.g., HLM, WABA, RCM), analysis, job design/analysis, empowerment

Since Weber's (1946) sociological essays on the expansion of rationality brought by modernity, researchers have acknowledged an emerging disenchantment with the world. Notably, Ritzer (1996, 2005) argued that rationalization leads to undesirable disenchanting effects in organizational life. Indeed, Weber's idea of incessant rationality is a crucial premise of neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), one of the most prominent schools of thought in organization studies today (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019). Rationalization, in its search for efficiency and calculability, is accompanied by increased organizational dehumanization (Ritzer, 2005) that threatens employees' sense of self and valued relationships with others (Gill, 2019) with unfavorable consequences for individuals (e.g., well-being impairments), organizations (e.g., high absenteeism rates), and the society as a whole (e.g., social pollution; Pfeffer, 2010). In this context, there is a need to better understand which factors and through which processes workplaces can be transformed from dehumanized into enchanting, meaningful, and empowering ones. In any society where work is

unavoidable and necessary, enchanted workplaces and organizations matter since they can be a catalyst for a fair society through the promotion of meaningful work and non-work experiences (Michaelson et al., 2014).

Prior contributions to the notion of enchantment come from different fields such as sociology, psychology, and philosophy (Endrissat et al., 2015). This interdisciplinary view has been relevant in better understanding why disenchantment occurs, and how re-enchantment may be accomplished. However, limited efforts have been made to translate the valuable conclusions of previous literature into organizational theory and practical applications for those managers willing to transform their organizations into enchanting places. Hence, our main intention with this

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special issue was to better integrate and advance knowledge on (re-)enchantment for organizational theory and managerial practice.

Workplace enchantment

Enchanting work is a polysemic term that can account for multiple interpretations (Endrissat et al., 2015). One of the most prominent definitions of enchantment was provided by Bennet (2001), who defined it as “a feeling of being connected in an affirmative way to existence” (p. 156). In organizational terms, enchanted workplaces are places of wonder that allow people to be active agents, who can impact on their environment, find meaning in their work, and flourish (Boje & Baskin, 2011). In this context, enchantment has been operationalized in organizational and managerial literature in a variety of ways, including being resourceful, happy, resilient, passionate, motivated, or healthy at work, among others (e.g., Fisher, 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Suddaby et al., 2017).

Boje and Baskin (2011) distinguished between “enchantment by design” and “enchantment by emergence.” Enchantment by design assumes a top-down process, where employees’ experience is formed by their organizations’ dominant narratives. If the dominant narrative is a mechanistic one that adopts the main principles of scientific management, workplaces are more likely to be characterized by high specialization, task simplification, and monotony (Campion, 1988). In such workplaces, employees are likely to feel disenchanting. In contrast, enchantment by emergence assumes that enchantment is not imposed on individuals. Rather, it concerns an internal process, where individuals feel naturally enchanted as a response to certain contextual characteristics of their work environment.

Boje and Baskin (2011) describe “enchantment by design” and “enchantment by emergence” as quite antithetical. However, it may be argued that these two typologies share some common ground since they both acknowledge the role of context in understanding when employees feel disenchanting or enchanted. The (imposed) organizational culture, the design of the organization, the way teams function, as well as the psychosocial characteristics of the work environment may be all responsible both for enchantment by design and enchantment by emergence. This is also implied in Boje and Baskin’s response to the question “how can workplace enchantment be achieved?” They propose organizations to give voice to individuals to think of ways through which organizations can be re-enchanting. In other words, they urge organizations to listen to the needs of their members and provide them with autonomy to change the dominant narratives toward re-enchantment. Similarly, Endrissat et al. (2015) proposed that workplaces can be re-enchanting if mundane work processes become more meaningful, organizations

exert less control on employees, and employees are put first in the re-enchantment process. All these studies imply that organizations that promote a participatory culture and provide resources such as autonomy, decision latitude, or support are likely to be places where employees will naturally feel enchanted. Put differently, job redesign strategies that change the environment from a mechanistic to a motivational one (Campion, 1988) may contribute to re-enchanting workplaces. In this context, the main purpose of this special issue was to highlight those elements that may promote enchanting work environments, and the processes through which (re-)enchantment may be achieved. Also, we were interested in understanding re-enchantment as an internal process. Namely, what it means and how it may be reached.

Contributions to the special issue

The articles presented in this special issue expand our understanding on enchanted workplaces and present novel ideas in this debate. We present four empirical articles and one theoretical article, drawing from different theoretical perspectives, research methodologies, and units (i.e., individual, team, organization) of analysis.

The first three papers by Salas-Vallina et al. (2021), Kaltiainen and Hakanen (2020), and Sarmah et al. (2021) address the issue of what makes enchanted workplaces and how. They do so by focusing on the role of teams and leaders, and by unraveling the processes through which specific team characteristics and specific leadership styles may promote enchanted teams and individuals. First, Salas-Vallina et al. investigate the role that shared leadership (i.e., an informal interactive process where team members influence one another with the aim to attain team goals; Pearce & Conger, 2003) and passion at work play in re-enchanting public health organizations. Based on self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), their study revealed that shared leadership facilitates the re-enchantment of highly demanding workplaces, by fostering individuals’ basic and innate psychological needs, which provides a sense of meaning and fulfillment from work (Endrissat et al., 2015). Their results, based on a time-lagged multilevel model, provide statistical support for the mediating role of team passion at work in the positive relationship between shared leadership and both resilience and performance at the team- and the individual level of analysis. This article highlights the relevance of teams to humanize workplaces, as well as the crucial role that each team member may play in the process. Thus, it may be concluded that team members’ involvement in tasks that are usually assigned to formal leaders may contribute to re-enchant workplaces (Boje & Baskin, 2011).

In the second paper, Kaltiainen and Hakanen explore the potential of servant leadership to create meaningful

and enchanted workplaces in a two-wave study among Finnish municipal employees undergoing organizational change. Servant leadership concerns leaders' willingness to serve their followers and put their well-being in the first place. They do so by acting with humility and concern toward their subordinates and by trying constantly to empower them (Greenleaf, 2002). The authors explore the extent to which perceptions of servant leadership can determine employee task and adaptive performance via its positive relationship with work engagement and its negative relationship with burnout. Drawing from servant leadership theory (van Dierendonck, 2011), broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998), and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Kaltainen and Hakanen revealed that perceptions of servant leadership related to increased engagement and reduced burnout. In turn, work engagement related positively to both types of performance, while reduced burnout associated only with improved task performance. These findings indicate that servant leadership may promote workplace re-enchantment by fostering employee well-being and by preventing well-being impairments. In addition, this article adds to prior literature by analyzing the proposed relationships in the context of organizational change, and by suggesting that organizations may benefit from selecting and developing servant leaders in turbulent times.

In the third paper of this special issue, Sarmah et al. go a step further and investigate how leaders design enchanting workplaces that in turn promote employee well-being. Based on the main tenets of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the authors distinguished between autonomy supportive and controlling leaders and tested how these different leadership styles relate to work design (i.e., job demands and resources) and in turn employee well-being (i.e., burnout and work engagement). In line with SDT, autonomy supportive leaders were defined as those who promote autonomous motivation among their subordinates by showing respect and providing autonomy and opportunities for development. In sheer contrast, controlling leaders are those who exert social influence and expect their subordinates to comply with their requests. To achieve this, controlling leaders extrinsically motivate employees by setting strict rules and punishments and by restricting their locus of control. Considering the characteristics of these two leadership styles, and in line with the work design literature (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Nahrgang et al., 2011), Sarmah and colleagues hypothesized that autonomous supportive leaders will promote employee well-being (i.e., enhanced work engagement and reduced burnout) through the enrichment of the work environment with more job resources (i.e., autonomy and skills use). In contrast, controlling leaders will impair employee well-being in the form of increased burnout because they make work environments more emotionally demanding. Hypotheses were tested with a cross-sectional ($N=501$) and a diary study

($N=91$ individuals and $N=358$ observations). In this way, it was possible to capture both between- and within-person variations in the proposed processes. The indirect relationship of autonomy supportive leadership with reduced burnout and increased work engagement through increased job resources was supported both at the between- and the within-person level of analysis. However, the positive indirect relationship of controlling leadership with burnout via increased demands was supported only at the between-person level. These results suggest that the way leaders motivate employees may result in enchantment or disenchantment through the different ways in which leaders design workplaces. These findings are in line with the enchantment literature (Boje & Baskin, 2011) since they suggest that imposing rules—as controlling leaders do—leads to disenchantment because workplaces become more demanding and stressful, while promoting autonomous motivation in employees—as autonomy supportive leaders do—leads to (re-)enchantment because workplaces become more resourceful.

The last two papers by Griep et al. (2021) and Pessi et al. (2021) focus on enchantment as an internal process and how this process develops. Griep and colleagues, in their daily diary study, provide an illustrative view of how employees, who experience active emotions (regardless of whether they are positive or negative), may achieve a better person–job fit and feel re-enchanting. Specifically, these authors argue that active (positive and negative) emotions motivate employees to engage in proactive behaviors (i.e., job crafting) that help them find meaning in their work (i.e., person–job fit). Moreover, they investigated whether personal growth initiative (PGI; a state-like characteristic that captures intentional engagement in cognitions and behaviors that facilitate growth in all life domains; Robitschek, 1998) fuels daily job crafting behaviors, and whether it boosts the positive indirect relationship of active emotion to job–person fit via job crafting. These hypotheses were tested in a diary study among 166 employees from three health care organizations during five consecutive workdays ($N=341$ observations). Results showed that both positive and negative active emotions relate positively with job crafting. PGI was found to moderate these relationships but in the opposite to the hypothesized direction. Namely, PGI was found to buffer (instead of boosting) the impact of active emotions implying that daily active emotions matter for job crafting mainly for those low in PGI. Also, results showed that negative (but not positive) active emotions and PGI related indirectly and positively to daily person–job fit via job crafting. These findings contribute to the literature of enchanting workplaces (Boje & Baskin, 2011) since they suggest that employees, who experience active emotions irrespective of their valence, are motivated to engage in proactive behaviors and take initiative to create a better workplace for themselves. In other words, both positive and negative

emotions of high activation may initiate a proactive process toward enchantment.

In the last paper of this special issue, Pessi and colleagues introduce the concept of copassion that taps into the intersubjectivity idea of enchanting workplaces. In their theoretical analysis, they define copassion as the process of responding to the positive emotion of a fellow human being. With this new concept, Pessi and colleagues aim to advance the conceptualization of enchantment by arguing that enchantment is not just an internal process. Rather, it may also be a result of interpersonal interactions. Copassion involves noticing the joy of the other, sharing this emotion, and even increasing it through actions that demonstrate to the other that one feels with them and shares their joy. To develop this concept and support its validity, authors focus on the philosophical framework of intersubjectivity and mutual recognition. They also depart from the concept of compassion (i.e., an interpersonal process involving the noticing, feeling, sensemaking, and acting that alleviates the suffering of another person; Dutton et al., 2014) to define copassion and explain that both concepts are complementary in understanding the process from disenchantment to re-enchantment. Compassion is the active response to alleviate others suffering or negative emotions, whereas copassion is the active response to share and celebrate the others joy or positive emotions. Pessi et al. further differentiate copassion from other related concepts such as positive empathy, or empathic joy by explaining that copassion requires not only an empathic feeling but also a concrete action or behavior to share others' joy. Therefore, copassion fits into the idea of workplace enchantment since it represents a new way of celebrating others joy, happiness or successes instead of competing with others. Importantly, the authors argue that—through copassion—individual employees may influence organizational culture by promoting copassionate norms that may even lead to beneficial societal and cultural phenomena such as generalized trust and social capital (Putnam, 2001). Hence, in their paper, Pessi et al., challenge contemporary frameworks and approaches in what feeling enchanted means by emphasizing a more other-interest (instead of self-interest approach), ethical, and sustainable approach. In this way, they open new avenues toward a better understanding of the complexity of workplace re-enchantment.

Concluding remarks

It is evident that the papers included in this special issue respond to our initial aims. Namely, to understand what makes enchanted workplaces and how, as well as what it means to feel enchanted and how this state may be achieved by individuals. As concerns the former issue, the studies included in this special issue mainly focus on leadership and highlight how different leadership styles (e.g., servant

or autonomous supportive leadership; Kaltainen & Hakanen, 2020; Sarmah et al., 2021) or ways that leadership may be executed or shared (Salas-Vallina et al., 2021) may facilitate workplace enchantment. With regard to the latter, the studies of Griep et al. and Pessi et al. emphasize how intra-individual and inter-individual emotional experiences motivate employees to engage in behaviors that may not only help them make their own work more meaningful but also the work of others. This may create a positive re-enchantment cycle, where enchanted employees reinforce enchanted organizations and vice versa.

The findings reported in this special issue have diverse implications for organizational theory, research, and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the studies in the special issue indicate that it is of relevance to integrate the theoretical assumptions of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and resource theories (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Hobfoll, 1989) in the enchantment literature. These theories help further our understanding of the psychological processes that explain workplace re-enchantment since they indicate how and why enriched work environments may facilitate the satisfaction of employees' basic psychological needs that in turn may help them experience enchantment and engage in behaviors that will change disenchanted to enchanted workplaces. Beyond advancing well-known theories of organizational psychology or management, this special issue contributes to linking the conceptualization of enchantment that comes from a sociological-philosophical area with research on organizational psychology and management (Endrissat et al., 2015).

By advancing knowledge on what re-enchantment is and how it may be promoted, the studies included in this special issue have important empirical implications that open new avenues for future research. For instance, the analysis of Pessi and colleagues suggests that re-enchantment is not only an internal, emotional process but may also involve interpersonal emotional contagion processes that are yet to be tested. With regard to what enchantment is, it would be relevant for future studies to also look in more detail at the validity of the construct to determine its core components. Next, the findings of Griep et al. suggest that the road to re-enchantment may be initiated even from a negative—yet active—state. To this end, it would be interesting for future research to examine whether disenchanted workplaces elicit active negative emotions in employees that may trigger proactive behaviors that help change disenchanted to enchanted workplaces. Moreover, the studies on the role of leadership (i.e., Kaltainen & Hakanen, 2020; Salas-Vallina et al., 2021; Sarmah et al., 2021) raise questions about other leadership styles or team processes that may facilitate workplace re-enchantment. To this end, ethical leadership (Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014) could be a concept that seems relevant since ethical leaders through their *telos* (i.e., ethical behaviors and strategies) and *ethos* (i.e., personal attitudes and characteristics

that are based on strong ethical foundations; Mitropoulou et al., 2019) may promote ethical cultures that facilitate workplace re-enchantment. Finally, it would be interesting to test whether there is a “dark side” of enchantment, in the form of the creation of over-commitment or workaholic cultures.

In addition, the findings presented in this special issue (e.g., Griep et al., 2021; Salas-Vallina et al., 2021; Sarmah et al., 2021) suggest that the factors that are relevant for the study of re-enchantment may be found at different (organizational-, team-, individual-) yet related levels of analysis. Therefore, to fully understand workplace re-enchantment one should account for the multilevel nature of the phenomenon (Xanthopoulou & Bakker, 2021). Importantly, the processes that explain workplace re-enchantment are dynamic and may develop across different levels of analysis both top-down and bottom-up. Thus, we hope that this special issue will stimulate future multilevel studies that will advance our understanding of workplace re-enchantment as a dynamic phenomenon that develops across different levels of analysis.

Last but not least, the new knowledge presented in this special issue helps us to make better use of the tools and management practices (e.g., job redesign, job crafting, leadership, culture change) that may be helpful to enhance enchantment in organizations. From the findings reported it becomes evident that in order for re-enchantment to occur, workplaces should turn from mechanistic to motivational ones (Campion, 1988), which implies that more resources (e.g., autonomy, control, and support) should be allocated to employees who will help them feel re-enchanted and will facilitate proactive actions that may contribute to more meaningful workplaces. Even when re-enchantment is approached from an “enchantment by emergence” perspective (Boje & Baskin, 2011) that views it as internal, emotional process (e.g., Griep et al., 2021), we should keep in mind that the occupational context is highly responsible for employees’ emotional experiences (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Hence, top-down and bottom-up job redesign strategies that aim at creating meaningful workplaces may facilitate a virtuous circle of enchantment. In this way, we also highlight the need to change from self-interested and utilitarian firms toward more humanized organizations, which is the key to developing enchanting workplaces.

To conclude, the papers presented in this special issue offer different views and answer relevant questions regarding re-enchantment in organizations, but there is still a long way to go on this topic. There are still important research questions that need to be addressed to broaden the knowledge of this novel concept in management and organizational psychology fields. With this special we tried to set a starting point on the discussion of enchanting workplaces. We do hope that this attempt will constitute an inspiring context to guide future research on

the conceptualization, antecedents, and consequences of workplace re-enchantment.

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