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Valuing people and work in work and organisational psychology:
A critical perspective on the paradoxes of meaningful work

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If I may, I ask you, dear reader, with untellable gratitude to split the dedication of this dissertation four ways with my parents S.P. and P.T., and my friends G.T. and G.M.G.

The earth teaches us more about ourselves than any book. Because it resists us. Humans discovers themselves when they measure themselves against the obstacle. But to reach it, they need a tool. They need a planer, a plough. The farmer, ploughing, little by little tears some secret from nature, and the truth he draws from it is universal. [...] it makes human to confront all the old problems.[1]

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Preface to 'Terre des hommes', 1939.

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[1] Unfortunately, I have not been able to find an English version of this Preface to the Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Terre des hommes*. The book has been translated into English but proposing a distinct version in 1939 with the title *Wind, Sand and the Stars.* The extract, which is present in the Italian edition of the book, is my translation from the Italian. Here is the original Italian extract: 'La terra ci insegna, su di noi, molto più di qualunque libro. Perché ci oppone resistenza. L'uomo scopre se stesso quando si misure con l'ostacolo. Ma per raggiungerlo gli serve un attrezzo. Gli serve una pialla, un aratro. Il contadino, arando, strappo poco per volta qualche segreto alla natura, e la verità che ne trae è universale. […] fa sì che l'uomo si confronti con tutti gli antichi problemi.'

ABSTRACT

In these current times of labour transformation and worldwide changes, one of the most significant discussions in work and organisational psychology centres on the ways in which individuals can satisfy their wish for meaning. In respect to this, the phenomenon of meaningful work, which refers to the individual experience and perception of work as holding significant value individually, socially, and/or independently, gains momentum. As such, meaningful work represents a positive phenomenon that people wish to have and organisations wish to provide. In the last decades, scholars devoted to the study of the individual, work, and organisations have witnessed the growing interest and efforts into its exploration. As a result, multiple perspectives have been raised from within various disciplines. While this demonstrates the importance of meaningful work, it also renders meaningful work a contested topic that raises more questions than it answers. In particular, three main paradoxes on the nature and process of meaningful work lie at the heart of the current gaps in the literature on the phenomenon of meaningful work.

The aim of this dissertation is the advancement of theory and evidence about the nature and processes of meaningful work via a psychological critical perspective in order for the value of people and work to be recognised. To reach these aims, the present dissertation consists of four main chapters reporting the four studies conducted. Each of these will be presented in the general introduction chapter, where we will explain the imperatives that led to the realisation of the dissertation and the rationale for a psychological critical perspective within the context of valuing people and work.

Chapter 1 presents a literature review covering the conceptual uncertainty represented in Paradox 1, that is, on the nature of meaningful work through its temporal view. Here, we conducted a broad literature review in order to answer questions on how to define meaningful work. We tried to understand to what extent meaningful work can be considered as a subjective stable/permanent or an episodic/state experience of meaningfulness.

Chapters 2 and 3 represent the empirical part of the dissertation and will cover Paradoxes 1 and 2. The uncertainty around meaningful work in work and organisational psychology regards the tension between (a) meaningful work as a

purely subjective evaluation and (b) the impact of contextual features. This unanswered question is mainly due to the lack of empirical knowledge capable of offering indications on the distinctions between the two contraposing elements. Chapter 2 will present the cross-sectional study for the validation of a novel inventory aimed at the assessment of meaningful work and its facets, the MEaning in Work Inventory (ME-Work). The study presents the psychometrical properties of the scale and advances knowledge on the contextual features of meaningful work. Chapter 3 will extend this knowledge by investigating what makes a workday meaningful given the exploration of the variations and fluctuations of meaningful work on a daily basis. A Daily Diary Study has been conducted with the aim to comprehend the role of daily work and the psychological conditions for the episodic experience of meaningful work. Moreover, cross-level analysis has been applied to investigate the role of subjective meaningful work.

Chapter 4 will cover the intricate knot regarding the proposition of a normative and emancipatory ideal of what is work in the context of work and organisational psychology (i.e. Paradox 3). The study of meaningful work occurs in a context that lacks the comprehension of what it is and what represents work that could be considered as a source of meaning. Given these questions, a literary analysis of a fictional narrative has been conducted. The chapter will shed light on what work means from a subjective stance by presenting the conditions for meaningful work and linked experience.

The last part of the dissertation will present the narrative results. Given the interdisciplinary and pluralistic nature of the research, the dissertation will narratively propose an initial understanding of what is meaningful work through a critical work and organisational perspective.

SOMMARIO

In questi ultimi anni, le complesse dinamiche delle trasformazioni del lavoro e delle pressioni economiche e finanziarie hanno avuto notevoli riflessi nel campo della psicologia del lavoro e delle organizzazioni in relazione al bisogno dell'individuo di soddisfare il proprio bisogno di senso. Proprio sul bisogno di senso, la psicologia del lavoro e delle organizzazioni si è quindi concentrata sul cosiddetto fenomeno del meaningful work, o dell'esperienza e percezione del lavoro come portatore di un valore significativo che può essere individualmente costruito, socialmente determinato o significativo indipendentemente dalle rispettive rappresentazioni. Come tale il fenomeno del meaningful work rappresenta oggi un fenomeno meramente positivo verso le quali sia il lavoratore che le organizzazioni riflettono la propria attenzione (si pensi al bisogno di senso da parte di un lavoratore nello svolgere un compito lavorativo o al potenziale performativo associato ad un gruppo di lavoratori motivato dal senso del proprio lavoro).

I riflessi contestuali e la messa in parola di tali dinamiche personali hanno portato gli studiosi devoti allo studio del lavoro e delle organizzazioni ad assistere ad una crescita notevole dell'interesse e degli impegni di ricerca sul tema del meaningful work negli ultimi 20 anni. Non sorprende dunque la presenza di numerose prospettive dalla natura disciplinare varie sul tema. Ciò fa si che risuoni l'importanza del fenomeno in oggetto ma ha reso e lo rende tuttora un fenomeno *contestato* attorno al quale le domande di ricerca non hanno fatto altro che aumentare anziché ridurre. Secondo la letteratura, alla base di tali domande stanno tre dilemmi teorici, *paradossi* di ricerca, che comprendono quelli che sono i *vuoti* della conoscenza attorno al fenomeno del meaningful work.

Il presente lavoro ha l'obiettivo di proporre un tentativo di avanzamento della teoria e dell'evidenza relativa alla natura e ai processi sottostanti del fenomeno del meaningful work secondo una prospettiva psicologia critica nel presupposto di svolgere un lavoro di ricerca che valorizzi la persona e il lavoro. Quattro macrocapitoli costituiscono le riflessioni e le investigazioni centrali del presente lavoro dove vengono prese in considerazione i paradossi di ricerca evidenziati nell'introduzione. Infatti, i tre paradossi di ricercar relative al fenomeno del meaningful work verranno enucleati e presentati all'inizio della tesi focalizzandosi anche sugli

apporti della letteratura scientifica sin qui prodotta e gli imperativi per la conduzione di un lavoro critico e multidisciplinare.

Il Capitolo 1 affronterà il primo paradosso relativo alla natura temporale del fenomeno, ovvero analizzando le condizioni entro cui considerare il fenomeno come prettamente personale e stabile o come occasionale e situazionale. Per fare questo, il Capitolo 1 riporta una vasta rassegna della letteratura narrative con la quale si è tentato di proporre alcune risposte iniziali ed un'agenda di ricerca.

Capitolo 2 e Capitolo 3 rappresentano la parte squisitamente empirica della tesi e interesseranno i paradossi 1 e 2. Per quanto riguarda il Capitolo 2, qui si darà conto della necessità di comprendere la dimensione contestuale relativa al fenomeno del meaningful work considerandolo quindi come doppiamente definito come inerentemente soggettivo ma riflesso contestualmente. Tale paradosso è presente in letteratura per via della mancanza di un corpo empirico che sia in grado di proporre una comprensione distintiva e comprensiva. Si è condotto quindi uno studio trasversale tramite cui si è validata una scala di misura il MEaning in Work Inventory (ME-Work) in grado di evidenziare entrambe le dimensioni e le relative associazioni. Il Capitolo 3 estende sia la componente teorica sviluppata nel Capitolo 1 sia le evidenze del Capitolo 2 considerando entrambi i paradossi in un'unica investigazione empirica longitudinale basata sul metodo dei Diary Studies. Qui si darà conto dei fattori psicologici e lavorativi giornalieri in combinazione con la dimensione personale determinanti l'esperienza di significato al lavoro nel quotidiano.

Il Capitolo 4 invece tenterà di rispondere il nodo di ricerca relativo ad una concettualizzazione del lavoro che dia motivo di pensare al lavoro come fonte di senso. Infatti, un problema in letteratura riguarda l'impeto verso questo fenomeno positivo che è il meaningful work che tuttavia avviene in mancanza di una concettualizzazione del lavoro all'interno della disciplina. Si è condotta una lettura tematica di un testo narrativo nel tentativo di proporre una metodologia che, sebbene piuttosto trascurata nel campo di ricerca, fosse in grado di dare alcune risposte iniziali su un tema di ricerca difficile da esplorare.

Infine, la tesi darà voce alle maggiori conclusioni e al percorso di ricerca condotto in quella che viene definita essere una narrazione dei risultati in presenza di una sintesi di un percorso multidisciplinare e pluralistico. In tal modo, la tesi si

conclude tentando di avanzare alcune iniziali indicazioni di ricerca sul fenomeno e sulle possibilità offerte da una prospettiva di ricerca come quella della psicologia critica.

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INTRODUCTION

The well-known Italian novelist Primo Levi wrote (1978) that 'to live happily you have to have something to do' (p. 189), hereby claiming the centrality of work to the human condition. Another well-known philosopher of the second half of the XXI century, Simone Weil, appealed similarly. She suggested that 'the sense of being useful and even indispensable are vital needs of the human soul', explaining that 'a complete deprivation of this is found in the example of the unemployed, even when he [sic] is subsidised so as to allow him to eat, to dress, to pay the rent. He [sic] represents nothing' (1952, p. 14). Nowadays, these 40-plus-years old sentences echo in the contemporary debates on the topic of meaningful work, or work as source of meaning in life and daily activity, reflecting a need in today's society to value human life through work.

Work matters in contemporary society, as it did in the past, despite the fact that we, due to the ongoing globalisation, labour market changes, and digitalisation, are experiencing an era of precariousness and uncertainty around the world of work. Today, work matters because it has fulfilling aspects for individuals that are associated with these individuals' sense of calling or to a potential sense of purpose and significance in its connection to the other spheres of life. The phenomenon of meaningful work contains a broad view since it refers to the individual experience and perception of work as holding significant value – individually, socially, or independently. We talk about meaningful work when we refer to a person who views their work as having an intrinsic meaning that can be individually defined (e.g. as related to their sense of calling) or socially recognised (e.g. sense of contribution), or is inherent to the work itself (i.e. independently of the individual and social representations). The person enjoys doing their work and tends to perform responsibly and with quality. Meaningful work represents a positive phenomenon that people wish to have, and organisations wish to provide as well. People spend at least a third of their lives at work. Consequently, they want a job that feels meaningful, as profession is at the core of one's identity (Schnell, 2020). In respect to organisations and institutions, meaningful work represents one of the key potentials for

employees' job performance and organisational climate, which, in turn, positively affects the level of productivity.

In light of this, in the last decades, scholars devoted to research on the individual, work, organisations, and institutions have witnessed an increase in the exploration of the topic of meaningful work, and multiple perspectives have been raised from within various disciplines. While confirming its importance and providing evidence of the widespread quest for meaningfulness from people to organisations,[2] this endeavour has rendered meaningful work a contested topic: questions have accumulated, and a series of paradoxes lie at the heart of the knowledge on meaningful work. In the context of work and organisational psychology, such ambiguities make it difficult to understand the nature and processes of meaningful work. This is even more evident in today's context of the neoliberal economy and labour transitions, where employment becomes ever more precarious and at risk of exploitation, threatening the value of people and work and challenging the individual quest for meaningfulness in work.

Emerging critical perspectives on meaningful work have challenged existing theories and evidence by supporting the imperative for deeper investigations into the topic in view of critical and pluralistic approaches to the notion of meaningful work (Yeoman et al., 2019). Despite this growing interest, the literature is sparse around questions on the nature and processes of meaningful work. Thus, the imperatives comes from the awareness that there are still important gaps in our knowledge on 'how a sense of meaningfulness arises, persists, or is challenged' (Bailey et al., 2019, p. 481). The necessity for deeper investigations stands at the

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[2] National and international surveys have extensively reported the widespread quest for meaningful work brought forward by individuals. In their recent work, Schnell (2020) and Schnell and Hoffmann (2020) have offered a comprehensive view of these trends. Summing up, according to an international survey amongst the populations in Western Europe in 2019, an average of 55% of the 22,000 respondents reported preferring more meaningful work than earnings (XING, 2019). Similar results have been reported amongst a younger population, where employees and entrepreneurs at the beginning of their career have been reported to be in search of more meaningful occupations rather than looking for career progress or salary (Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions and St. Gallen Symposium, 2019). Other national and international surveys confirm these figures. In a large survey conducted amongst North America, Asia-Pacific regions, and European countries, 51% of the 100,000 employees surveyed reported willing to choose a job that was meaningful when able to change their work (Kelly Services, 2009).

nexus between the plethora of unanswered questions on meaningful work and the impetus for supporting the individual's quest for meaning in contemporary society.

In the present doctoral dissertation, such imperatives are acknowledged. We applied a critical perspective to the current gaps in the literature on meaningful work to identify the specific paradoxes at the basis of these gaps. Then, we conducted four critical investigations characterised by a methodological and theoretical plurality for approaching the boundaries of knowledge. Overall, we aimed at complementing the scientific literature by endeavouring to show that a critical work and organisational perspective on meaningful work can be beneficial to both scholars and practitioners who aim to recognise and support the value of people at work in today's society.

In the following sections, we will first give indications to the reader on what *meaningful work* is and what it means by distinguishing it from the meaning of work notion. We will complement this part with an overview of the theory and evidence on meaningful work in work and organisational psychology. These clarifications will offer the basis to present the paradoxes on which we built the research agenda. In conclusion, we will display the dissertation's structure by summarising the contributions of each chapter and to what extent they address the paradoxes, that is, the gaps in the literature on meaningful work in the domain of work and organisational psychology.

On meaningful work

As previously mentioned, in the last two decades, scholars within sociology, psychology, philosophy, ethics, political theory, and theology have become more closely interested in the conceptualisation, dynamics, processes, and nature of meaningful work (Michaelson et al., 2014). These endeavours are part of an expanding effort to better understand the factors that contribute to the phenomenon (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010), which can be defined as the positive experience and perception that one's own work is significant in a broader sense. It is extensively recognised that meaningful work covers a wider spectrum of factors that may benefit from workers to social systems (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017), as long as

the proliferation of reflections and explorations on this subject highlight its pragmatic and moral concern (Yeoman et al., 2019).

In contrast to these undertakings, the only thing authors agree on is that no one can agree on what meaningful work means (Bailey & Madden, 2020). When authors try to synthesise and propose a comprehensive view, they inevitably face the controversial and contested nature of meaningfulness. They are forced to highlight the contradictions and intricate knots around the multifaceted and complex character of the meaningful work phenomenon (Bailey et al., 2019; Yeoman et al., 2019).

Aiming at presenting the underlying paradoxes within the theories and linked empirical knowledge on meaningful work in work and organisational psychology, it is helpful to establish an overview at the outset of how authors discuss the phenomenon by providing a comprehensive overview of what meaningful work is in the context of work and organisational psychology. In this, two main objects of analysis are relevant: the discrimination of the terms used, and the array of perspectives on how to define meaningful work.

The meaning of meaningful work

At its core, the concept of meaningful work is terminologically complicated in itself. Although *meaning* is intuitively intelligible, the concept of meaning is difficult to present. Moreover, this complication increases when talking about *meaningful work*, *meaningfulness*, *meaning of work*, or *meaning in work*, which are terms commonly used in the literature on meaningful work. Authors present all these terms both as distinct and interconnected. Therefore, in order to present what meaningful work is, the first step is to understand what the meaning of meaningful work is terminologically.

Meaning regards the process of having made a sense of something (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Generally speaking, meaning refers to what something signifies. In the context of work, the meaning of work is the result of the individual interpretation of what their work means, which is linked to one's role and its social value. To mention a few examples: work is alienation, work is money, work is a calling. Moreover, in contrast with what meaningful work is, the meaning of work does not necessarily have a positive valence. The meaning of work can be positive, negative,

or neutral (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017) and depends on the history of an individual, their social environment, and so on. In short, the term *of* generally refers to what something signifies to one individual. Hence, using this terminology indicates the cognitive process by which an individual interprets and attaches a meaning to their work (Willner et al., 2019; Wrzesniewski, 2003), although it can have a different value (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017) pertaining to when work *per se* is at issue (Schnell et al., 2013).

Meaningful work, meaningfulness, and meaning in/at refer to significance, subjective experience, and perception of the value of work, which is, by implication, positive (Allan et al., 2018; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010; Schnell et al., 2013). As such, the fact that an individual gives a certain meaning to their work does not necessarily imply that the work can be meaningful. Meaningfulness only indicates the amount of meaning that an individual attributes to something, that is, their work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010). The amount of meaning that individual attributes can vary greatly in relation to a more general experience of their work or in reference to a single event during a workday. According to this general definition, meaningful work refers to an inherently subjective evaluation, which can also be impacted at a contextual level, and therefore by the environment, and by the working and subjective conditions during the working day. Beyond this, we speak of meaningful work when we speak of work that is experienced as particularly meaningful and positive for the individual.

Speaking of 'meaning of' and 'meaningful' can lead to various overlaps. In fact, the term 'meaningful' is also used in reference to other terminologies, such as 'meaning in work', 'meaningfulness at work', and so on. However, the use of these terms does not so much determine a different connotation of the phenomenon but rather a theoretical distinction that acts as a background. Some authors have used the term 'meaningfulness at work' to indicate the experience of meaning in the workplace, thereby distinguishing it from 'meaningfulness of work', which indicates the amount of meaning associated with a specific role or task. However, this distinction, proposed by Pratt and Ashforth (2003), has been considered far less in the research domain of work and organisations by virtue of the univocal terms 'meaningful work' or 'meaningfulness'. Other authors have used the term 'meaning

in work' to indicate an overall assessment of the elements that constitute meaningful work (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). However, even here the distinction is rather tenuous, and these distinctions are more in line with studies that associates work as a source of meaning with a more general meaning of work. Moreover, this general endeavour of terminologies has led to a lack of consensus about how to define and conceptualise meaningful work.

Consequently, authors tend to prefer the use of the term 'meaningful work' regardless of the reference trend. In this way, the faint distinctions between the terms can be traced back to the research aims and methodologies adopted. The useful and necessary differentiation concerns the delimitation between what concerns 'the meaning of' and 'meaningfulness'. Additionally, such a term is meant to cover a broad and comprehensive definition as a general subjective evaluation that can be impacted by contextual factors. In this dissertation, we have aligned ourselves with the use of the term meaningful work to determine the specificity of the phenomenon in question.

Theories on meaningful work

Despite these controversies over what meaningful work is, work and organisational psychology scholars have increasingly brought to the debate a number of investigations over meaningful work. This impetus on the exploration of meaningful work has rendered it more difficult to understand the conceptualisation and theorisations of the meaningful work phenomenon. As noted above, the area of study now includes various and different disciplines, from organisation and management studies to sociology, philosophy, and political theory. Despite the numerous efforts made by many scholars, be they critical or not, it reflects the epistemological and ontological uncertainty around the phenomenon. In turn, this makes it problematic to propose generalisable theories (Bailey & Madden, 2020).

In the context of work and organisational psychology, the problem becomes more consolidated. Although there has been a significant increase in theories relating to the phenomenon during the last twenty years, the first hints to meaningful work can be already found in the second half of the 1900s. Recently, these theories and conceptualisations have been subjected to theoretical review and discussion (Bailey et al., 2018). A comprehensive picture of this shows the classification of

the theoretical frameworks around which authors have drawn their various perspectives on meaningful work, namely, the Job Characteristic Model (JCM; Hackman & Oldlham, 1976), work engagement theory (Kahn, 1990), psychological empowerment (Li, Chen, & Kuo, 2008; Montani, Boudrias, & Pigeon, 2017), transformational leadership theory (Arnold et al., 2007), the Job Demands-Resources framework (Steger et al., 2013), positive psychology (Tummers & Knies, 2013), and the Psychology of Working Framework (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy & Dik, 2013).

In the first case, authors proposed investigations based on the JCM model. Here, meaningful work concerns one of the three psychological states that an individual can experience in their work context in the pursuit of positive outcomes for the organisation. The possibility of experiencing a certain level of meaningfulness at work is determined by three dimensions at work, that is, (a) the variety of tasks, (b) their significance, and (c) the worker's perception of identification with their tasks. Given the experience of meaningful work, workers would increase their motivation, improve job performance, and have greater job satisfaction. In addition, meaningful work would be an antecedent to minimal abstentionism and turnover risk. Therefore, the authors who considered the JCM model conducted studies based on the identification of meaningful work at the level of the worker's perception of meaning, where meaningfulness is attributed by perceiving the work as decent and meaningful from the tasks performed.

In line with this model, theoretical extensions have been proposed by authors, which have given rise to further theorisations of the phenomenon, namely, the strand concerning the theory of personal role engagement and that of psychological empowerment. Khan (1990) proposed a theorisation of the phenomenon of meaningful work within the study of personal role engagement or the level of experience of subjective work engagement. This model led to subsequent explorations of meaningful work, which were considered in parallel with the subjective conditions for a higher level of meaningful work, such as psychological safety and availability. Others have extended the JCM theory by considering meaningful work as an antecedent to the level of psychological empowerment (Li, Chen, & Kuo, 2008; Montani, Boudrias, & Pigeon, 2017). Here, the authors supported the understanding

of the meaningful work phenomenon as a motivational state or orientation towards work concerning the individual worker themselves.

As for the strand relating to transformational leadership theory, this has been used to explain how levels of meaningfulness can be increased amongst employees (e.g., Arnold et al., 2007). In this case, meaningful work is understood as a subjective personal state preceding an increased level of work motivation. These studies therefore tend to associate certain aspects of leadership with meaningful work in addition to other dimensions, such as participative or constructive management styles.

Other authors have reported their explorations based on the Job Demands-Resources model, where meaningful work is considered as a mediator between work context and individual outcomes (Steger et al., 2013). In these cases, unitarist models have been proposed, which relate to the worker's overall evaluation of their own work as holding meaning. Here, the subjective assessment of the meaningfulness of work is made to correspond to the personal assessment of the individual's life. Once again, we are talking about an assessment of a personal and stable level of meaningfulness.

Moreover, a series of studies in the field of so-called positive psychology have proposed diverse perspectives on the phenomenon of meaningful work. Here, some authors theorise meaningful work as a eudemonic psychological state that includes a subjective sense of appreciation of work arising from (a) work itself, (b) the relationship between the individual's life and work, and (c) the individual's need to contribute to something greater (Steger et al., 2012). Meaningful work thus becomes a psychological state resulting from a more general evaluation of work as a source of meaning. In addition to this, other authors in the strand of positive psychology have conceptualised meaningful work as the result of the combination of calling and work. In this case, meaningful work refers to the psychological state resulting from the positive evaluation of having found work for oneself (Bunderson & Thompposon, 2009). The latter also includes the conceptualisation of meaningful work according to the Psychology of Working Framework (Duffy & Dik, 2013), where authors have introduced the notion of decent work. In this case, work is assessed as meaningful in relation to both the vocational aspect, that is, as a calling,

and the conditions and quality of work, that is, as decent work. However, such a conceptualisation is unable to provide a comprehensive picture in the case of evidence of a low level of decent work or in the absence of a correspondence between calling and work where workers nevertheless have a high level of meaningful work.

Finally, a broader strand conceptualises the phenomenon of meaningful work from the so-called strand of workplace spirituality (Milliman et al., 2017), which concerns a more humanistic approach to the psychology of work and organisations. Here, the authors focus on the innate meaning-seeking aspect of each individual. As such, individuals would seek meaning for their existence through work. In turn, some authors have focused on work-related aspects of the context as being in line with the individual's need to cultivate their own existential meaning. In contrast to the previous strands, they consider meaningful work not so much in terms of desired work outcomes, such as job performance or organisational productivity. These authors consider work in a more precise sense in that work is part of the individual's meaning-making process, which comprises a sense of self-actualisation and self-fulfilment.

It is therefore not surprising that the most agreed upon aspect in the literature on meaningful work is that no one knows how to come up with a precise definition or theory. Current views on meaningful work face certain dilemmas over the meaning and salient dimensions of meaningfulness, all of which led to a stalemate on the comprehension of the phenomenon itself. Moreover, the tendency to restrict the study of the phenomenon to specific organisational outcomes (e.g., job performance) has led to making mainstream instrumental and coercive research for organisational productivity (Bailey et al., 2017). Work and organisational psychologists have considered processes and conditions for the experience of meaningful work 'rather than whether or why work can be meaningful or not' (Michaelson, 2019, p. 9) or what happens if individuals fail to find meaning in their work (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Whether meaningful work is defined as a subjective evaluation or an episodic experience, authors identified a variety of individual and organisational factors (e.g., task significance, job crafting, and psychological affects) according to which meaningful work can be malleable (Lysova et al., 2019) for potential positive proximal and distal outcomes, such as employees' well-being, job performance, and

organisational productivity (Allan et al., 2019). However, the number of controversies about the unitarist and positivist models renders uncertain and questionable whether all the studies conducted about meaningful work actually have investigated the phenomenon itself (Bailey et al., 2019).

Paradoxes on meaningful work

This overview highlights how the phenomenon of meaningful work is inherently tensional. The tension lies in it being a contested topic, that is, none can agree on what meaningful work is in the negotiation and opposition between meanings and theories. For example, is meaningful work a motivational attitude towards work or an episodic experience at work (Mitra & Buzzanell, 2017)? As such, these tensions are ongoing practical dilemmas in the search for what constitutes and entails the phenomenon of meaningful work (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016), which can be viewed into the so-called notion of theoretical paradoxes (Smith et al., 2017).

In the presence of theoretical tensions in the literature, paradoxical thinking allows researchers to problematise and address challenging or controversial questions around a topic that remain unanswered when framed within existing thinking. Indeed, a paradox denotes a persistent tension between interdependent elements. The focus is on understanding the tensions – the elements that seem logical in isolation but inconsistent when juxtaposed – and responses that embrace the tensions, that is, between two mutually opposing, interdependent, and complementary dimensions. For example, is meaningful work a personal motivational phenomenon or an occasional psychological state during the workday? Is it a personal, intrinsic state or a generalised state due to its context? If authors consider work as a source of meaning, then what is the emancipatory and normative conceptualisation of work?

These last three questions correspond to the three paradoxes that lie at the basis of the gaps and controversies in the literature on meaningful work. The overview of the definitions, theorisations, and trends in research on the topic of meaningful work in work and organisational psychology have raised a series of questions that remain unanswered. However, they point towards a rich agenda for research. In the plethora of contributions within the literature on meaningful work, critical scholars have made several significant advances by extending, expanding on, or

challenging the existing theories and empirical evidence. This is of particular concern to the three core paradoxes that are at the heart of the debate. These paradoxes represent neglected topics in meaningful work literature and have directed the studies contained in the present doctoral dissertation.

Paradox 1. Meaningful work is a potential motivational attitude and relates to a sense of the value of one's work, yet it is also temporally dynamic, partial, or episodic.

The phenomenon of meaningful work refers to a pervasive sense of the value of one's work (Rosso et al., 2010; Tablan, 2019). However, 'it may be temporary, partial or episodic' (Bailey et al., 2019, p. 495). As seen in the overview of theories on meaningful work within work and organisational psychology, authors have proposed diverse perspectives by which meaningful work sometimes appears as a stable subjective evaluation and sometimes as an episodic state at work. In the second case, some authors have insisted on the episodic nature of meaningful work, for example by suggesting that it occurs when 'work events, work encounters, or work contexts gain significance, or spiritual value that transform the meaning of work itself' (Yeoman et al., 2019, p. 152). This is also the case for contributions on meaningful work and self-transcendental experiences. Self-transcendence suggests that an irregular and unusual experience of human potential exists, which is related to the episodic experience of spiritual and social connections between the individual's inner and outer lives at work (Bailey & Madden, 2017). Likewise, there are authors who insist on defining meaningful work as a state of flux that is linked to specific events and conditions of work (Mitra & Buzzanell, 2017). Again, other authors have defined meaningful work in terms of a permanent, or steady, mindset construct, or as the result of a match between a person and specific contents of work and context (Allan et al., 2019; May et al., 2004; Rosso et al., 2010). Although these contributions suggest that there are conceptual issues that need to be incorporated in definitions of meaningful work, questions remain unanswered on whether meaningful work is a personal subjective assessment or a mere episodic experience.

Taken together, this paradoxical question on the temporal nature of meaningful work, that is, its static or episodic nature, exposes core conceptual tensions

and opens the possibility for a broader comprehension of meaningful work. The literature nevertheless lacks comprehension on how an individual's sense of meaningfulness is raised or persists. Solving such a paradox can provide pieces of knowledge to help work and organisational psychology with its theory building, research conducting, and training practice. For example, a perspective on what meaningful work is in terms of its temporal nature could simply offer authors the possibility to identify the limits and conditions of meaningful work in the context of work and organisational psychology. Moreover, the assumption of this distinction, as well as its inclusion in empirical investigation, can offer initial insights on how and to what extent individual differences can play a role in the experience of meaningful work during a workday. Ultimately, such an understanding could indicate whether organisational interventions should be focused on job quality or on the employee's experience of the work.

Paradox 2. Meaningfulness is a subjective assessment, yet it is also context-dependent and grounded in an external, objective context that shapes why and when meaningfulness arises.

By viewing the current critical scrutiny of the literature on meaningful work, one of the assumptions of studies on meaningful work 'is that it is a sustained, pervasive positive attitude towards one's job' (Bailey et al., 2019, p. 495). However, that attitude can be impacted by the context, which occasionally occurs when related to specific psychological and work conditions (Bailey et al., 2019; Tommasi et al., 2020). Accordingly, the overview presented above showed how separate individual and organisational factors can interact and influence the presence of meaningful work. In light of this, a sole focus on individual experience leaves questions about the sources and processes behind it unanswered. Likewise, when the focus is exclusively on contextual factors, the individual subjective experience is minimised (Rosso et al., 2010). Additionally, meaningful work is intended as a positive experience that responds to the individual's quest for meaning in their work and life. However, empirical evidence of the extent to which work is experienced as meaningless are unclear and not yet examined (Bailey & Madden, 2020; Groeneveld et

al., 2011; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Likewise, the role of individual differences behind working conditions is still unclear, since current empirical examinations rarely address how personal and organisational characteristics might affect meaningful work experiences. A significant lack amongst the theoretical and empirical knowledge on meaningful work concerns the overall open question on what matters for the experience of meaningful work: the individual subjective assessment, the context, or both (Allan, 2017; Lysova et al., 2019)?

Such a thorough understanding of the psychological and contextual nature of meaningful work is meant to support the adoption of a lens adequate to the comprehension of factors that are subsumed and present within the meaningful work phenomenon (Bailey et al., 2018; Fletcher & Schofield, 2019). Theoretically, addressing this paradox offers opportunities for specifying the features that will foster meaningfulness on an organisational and individual level. Pragmatically, in terms of research conducting, the presence of non-specific items or items that conflate meaningful work with other constructs has raised doubts amongst scholars about the measures' criterion validity. Besides, in quantitative approaches, some authors have neglected factors that can ensure a meaningful work experience, that is, organisational and societal factors, which calls for comprehensive measures of the working conditions for meaningful work (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Rosso et al., 2010). Moreover, pointing out possible distinctions amongst individual and organisational aspects can help practitioners to specify targets and the classes of agents to be addressed when devising interventions.

Paradox 3. Meaningful work theories assume that work leads to meaningfulness, yet they lack an emancipatory and normative ideal of work, namely, what it is and what represents work that could be considered as a source of meaning.

The concept of meaningful work is always characterised by a positive valence and much empirical evidence has been produced to evaluate the outcomes. Moreover, 'meaningful work' management strategies have been devised and proposed for performative intent. This happens despite the uncertainty about the precise conceptual definition of meaningful work and how it can be distinguished from

other positive concepts of work. This reminds us to concern ourselves with the need to identify a concept of work in work and organisational psychology that expresses at its core an emancipatory and normative ideal of work by asking how it can be meaningful, why work is a source of meaning, why it matters psychologically, and how employees find meaningfulness. Work and organisational psychology tends to focus more on the positive valence of specific work dimensions (i.e., meaningful work), neglecting relevant issues linked to the world of work itself (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). It appears that current views and related empirical research tend to exclude the incorporation of the attribution of the meaning of work (Bailey & Madden, 2020). In contrast, initial understandings on the concept of work and its role for human life can shed light on the tensions around contested topics in the literature, such as the phenomenon of meaningful work itself.

National and international surveys have extensively reported the widespread quest for meaning in work brought forward by individuals. People spend at least one-third of their life at work, and, consequently, they want a job that feels meaningful, as profession stands at the core of their identity (Schnell, 2020). Meaningful work has become a pragmatic and moral concern (Yeoman et al., 2019). However, uncertainty remains over the meaning and features that render work meaningful (Bailey et al., 2019) under a neoliberal economy that instrumentalises practices for organisations' performative intents (Bal & Dóci, 2018). In this context, that of a neoliberal economy and neoclassical managerial and political strategies, employment becomes ever more precarious and at risk of exploitation, which challenges the quest for meaningfulness. Despite these controversies, work and organisational scholars have witnessed a growing number of investigations into meaningful work. However, the lack of an emancipatory and normative ideal of what work is renders uncertain and questionable whether all those studies conducted about meaningful work have investigated the actual phenomenon itself (Bailey et al., 2019). Emerging perspectives on meaningful work using a critical lens have challenged existing assumptions within the literature of work and organisational studies by echoing the imperative for conducting research to explore the meaning of work and the conditions that make, or not make, work meaningful (Bailey et al., 2019; Yeoman et al., 2019).

Aim of the dissertation and overview of the contributions

The overall aim of this dissertation is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of, and processes concerning, meaningful work. It aims to investigate current gaps in the literature and the current paradoxes lying at their heart through a critical work and organisational psychology lens. Therefore, the three paradoxes reported above will be addressed in the following chapters. Here, we will present the studies we have conducted using a critical lens and a pluralistic approach that resulted in different research designs, that is, a systematic literature review, a cross-sectional study, a Daily Diary Study, and a literary analysis.

Figure 1 shows how and to what extent each chapter will address one or more paradoxes concerning the nature and processes of meaningful work. The present introduction is aimed at reporting the rationale behind the doctoral dissertation and its *research meaning*. As seen, the centrality of work in human life goes from its pervasive aspect in the individual's life to the possibility that work can be a source of meaning. All in all, it led authors to question what makes work meaningful. Theoretical, empirical, and applied perspectives in work and organisational psychology have raised questions during the last two decades, despite of which these theoretical tensions, that is, paradoxes, remain unresolved.

Figure 1. A graphical depiction of the overall research model of the dissertation

Introduction
Core components: paradoxes on meaningful work

Connection line

Chapter 1
Literature Review

Chapter 2
Validation

Chapter 3
Daily Diary Study

Chapter 4
Literary Analisys

On Paradox 1
Conceptual exploration on the nature of meanignful work.

On Paradox 2
Evaluation of the contextual facets of meaningful work.

On Paradoxes 1 & 2
Multilevel analysis on variations and fluctuations of meaningful work.

On Paradox 3
Exploration of the concept of work linked to meaningful work.

Point of inference

Conclusion
Results narrative

Chapter 1 will cover Paradox 1, on the nature of meaningful work through its temporal view. Given the uncertainty around the meaning of meaningful work, Tommasi, Ceschi, and Sartori (2020) conducted a broad literature review in order to answer questions on *how to define meaningful work*. Here, we tried to understand to what extent meaningful work can be considered as a subjective stable/permanent or an episodic/state experience of meaningfulness. The intricate knots that will be presented in Chapter 1 cover three main dimensions of analysis. Firstly, Tommasi and colleagues will show how authors have failed to address the ambiguity around the meaning of meaningful work and present the limitations of the current literature in terms of its temporal nature. Secondly, the authors will take into account the definitions proposed up until when the literature review was conducted, from March 2019 to September 2019. Here, the authors will propose an initial definition of meaningful work that will shed light on the dimensions subsumed under the experience of meaningful work. Thirdly, these dimensions will be presented in order to offer indications and implications to both theory building, research conducting, and applied perspectives.

Chapters 2 and 3 represent the empirical part of the dissertation and will cover Paradoxes 1 and 2. As seen, the uncertainty around meaningful work in work and organisational psychology regards the tension between (a) meaningful work as a purely subjective evaluation and (b) the impact of contextual features. This unanswered question is mainly due to the lack of empirical knowledge able to offer indications on the distinctions between the two contraposing elements. In particular, in the presence of unitarist models of analysis and non-specific items, it has rendered empirical knowledge on meaningful work uncertain. In Chapter 2, Tommasi, Sartori, Ceschi, and Schnell (2021) will present the cross-sectional study for the validation of a novel inventory aimed at the assessment of meaningful work and its facets, the MEaning in Work Inventory (ME-Work). This scale has been developed in order to provide an overall comprehension of the dimensions underpinning the subjective evaluation of meaningful work. The study has been conducted on a large Italian sample ($N = 624$) and was the object of an international collaboration between the Department of Human Sciences of the University of Verona and the

Institute of Psychology of the University of Innsbruck, which lasted eight months in 2020.

In Chapter 3, Tommasi, Sartori, Dickert & Ceschi, (under review) will extend this knowledge by investigating what makes a workday meaningful. Here, the chapter will cover both Paradoxes 1 and 2 given the exploration of the variations and fluctuations of meaningful work on a daily basis. Indeed, a Daily Diary Study has been conducted with the aim to comprehend the role of daily work and the psychological conditions for the episodic experience of meaningful work. Moreover, cross-level analysis has been applied to investigate the role of subjective meaningful work. Accordingly, the authors applied the method of the Diary Study design to shed light both on the temporal nature of meaningful work and the individual and contextual features underpinning meaningful work.

Chapter 4 will cover the proposition of a normative and emancipatory ideal of what is work in the context of work and organisational psychology. As seen previously, work and organisational psychologists are inclined to the perpetuation of positive concepts of work, such as meaningful work. This occurs in a context that lacks the comprehension of what is and what represents work that could be considered as a source of meaning. Given these questions and the external resources present at the time the research was conducted (from January 2021 to May 2021), Tommasi, Degen, Sartori, Bal (*submitted*) will address Paradox 3 by use of literary analysis. The analysis of fiction as it is applied in the study of work – as it explores the possibilities to analyse organisational and psychological phenomena – is based on the assumption that fiction offers a unique form of knowledge, similar to academic forms of knowledge. Tommasi and colleagues will present the potential of such a method following the push for a critical approach on the rise within the current literature of work and organisational psychology. Then, the authors will shed light on what work means from a subjective stance by presenting the conditions for meaningful work and linked experience.

Thanks to the pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach this critical lens offers, the contributions of the dissertation will give initial insights into a psychology of meaningful work. These will be presented and largely discussed in the last part of the dissertation, the conclusion. Here, the results will be narratively presented

given the diverse methodologies used. After a discussion on the limitations that characterise the present three-year research project, the conclusion will then bring forth the initial insights and advance the scenery for a psychology of meaningful work. Ultimately, as an example of pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach, we, the authors of the present critical investigation on meaningful work, hope to offer a means to address current theoretical tensions and paradoxes that might lead to the neglecting of the value of people and work (Bal, 2020; Symon & Cassell, 2006). The critical work and organisational psychology lens has been proposed by acknowledging the need in the conducting of critical reflections on theory and research on meaningful work phenomenon. Accordingly, we tried to do research that could help provide a novel understanding of working phenomena; we pursued an epistemological and pragmatic improvement of research for the benefit of people and work in the field of work and organisational psychology.

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CHAPTER 1

Viewing Meaningful Work Through the Lens of Time

- Authors have paid considerable attention to how to define the meaningful work construct. This has led to providing comprehensive definitions in the light of different theoretical frameworks that reflect a degree of contestation within the field.

- Several of them have proposed definitions linked to the individuals' pervasive sense of the value of their work. Others have offered descriptions centred on their temporal, episodic nature and emphasizing the individual's occasional work experience. Together, these elements cover paradox 1 on the nature and processes of meaningful work.

- This paper conducted a broad literature review to analyse works that have adopted a temporal framework or supported a time-based definition of the construct.

- The analysis indicates two different conceptualizations of the construct: as a permanent/steady mindset and as a changeable/episodic experience.

- It reports a critical review on the matter that develops an overall framework for views and theories on meaningful work.

*"It is sadly true that many jobs are not lovable […]
We can and must fight to see that the fruit of labour
remains in the hands of those who work, and that
work does not turn into punishment; but love or, con-
versely, hatred of work is an inner, original heritage,
which depends greatly on the story of the individual
and less than is believed on the productive structures
within which the work is done."*

Levi (1978).

Introduction

The current turbulent times for the global economy have witnessed in-
creased interest among scholars and authors in the construct meaningful work and
linked factors. In the wake of the fourth industrial revolution, the pressure on the
working status and the constant transformation of labour (Eurofound, 2014) bring
the prospect of uncertain and negative consequences for workers as well as for or-
ganizations and systems (Schnell et al., 2013). As the most recent research suggests,
meaningful work represents a moral and pragmatic concern for all those—individ-
uals, organizations, and systems—who hope to prosper within this plethora of
changes and renewed works (Yeoman et al., 2019).

In the field of work and organizational studies, authors aiming to develop
theory and to offer practically applicable interventions have tried to find a link be-
tween people's meaningful work and their working and financial conditions. The
existing literature, however, renders these aims extremely difficult to achieve.
Range of different essential insights have been proposed, suggesting that meaning-
ful work is affected by a multiplicity of factors and conditions, one of which is
temporal agency (Bailey and Madden, 2017). We must, therefore, regard meaning-
ful work as a complex phenomenon (Rosso et al., 2010; Dik et al., 2013; Bailey et
al., 2019). Furthermore, there is still little agreement on the definition and opera-
tionalization of the construct among the scientific communities, and no agreed un-
derlying framework for the development of descriptions of its dimensions (Rosso
et al., 2010; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017; Bailey et al., 2018).

In their introduction to the special issue of the Journal of Management Studies on meaningful work, Bailey et al. (2019) evoked the theory of paradox to report a possible dual nature of meaningful work linked to spatial and temporal agents. According to these authors, the meaningful work construct refers to a pervasive sense of the value of one's work (Rosso et al., 2010; Tablan, 2019); however, "it may be temporary, partial or episodic" (Bailey et al., 2019). In this vein, there are some examples of definitions of meaningful work characterized by underlying time perspectives. Some authors have insisted on the episodic nature of meaningful work, for example, suggesting that it occurs when "work events, work encounters, or work contexts gain significance, or spiritual value that transform the meaning of work itself" (Madden and Bailey, 2019, p. 152). It is the case of contributions on meaningful work and self-transcendental experience. The self-transcendence concept suggests that an irregular and unusual experience of human potential exists, related to the episodic experience at work of spiritual and social connections between the individual's inner and the outer lives (Bailey and Madden, 2017). Likewise, there are authors that insisted on the definition of meaningful work as a state of flux and linked to specific events and conditions of work (Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017). Other authors have defined meaningful work in terms of a permanent, or steady, mindset construct, or as the result of the match between a person and specific contents of work and context (May et al., 2004; Rosso et al., 2010; Allan et al., 2019). In this term, authors considered meaningful work as the personal significance when a job provides a sense of self-actualization, self-development, self-connection, and social identity (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010; Michaelson et al., 2014).

Although these contributions suggest that there are underlying time-related issues that need to be incorporated in definitions of meaningful work, many questions remain unanswered on the role of time and temporal agency in meaningful work. For example, how can time be included in the definition of the construct? What is the current position of time in the theory of, and empirical research on, meaningful work? To avoid ambiguities over the meaningful work definitions and the various use of time perspectives, this paper intends to organize the literature by means of classifications of studies and seminal review papers deriving from the

conventions of the social and human sciences (Lee, 2015; Lepisto and Pratt, 2017). Following others (Sartori et al., 2018), the present contribution aims to conduct a critical review of the literature to elevate the understanding on meaningful work by the definition of a novel framework and proposing a preliminary model of factors subsumed by the construct toward a time-based approach.

Aims of the Contribution

As noted, authors differentiated aspects of meaningful work into changeable/episodic experience and permanent/steady mindset; thus, respectively, one is considered as a more transient experience to a situation, and the other as a more stable worker's attribute in experiencing their work. By explicitly approaching meaningful work through the lens of time, the present contribution aims at discussing the nature of this construct.

This is to say that time has been a neglected topic in the study of work, although it is a promising lens for discussing and comprehending work phenomena. In fact, temporal lens and time-based analysis offer an essential framework for "explaining and understanding organizational behaviors (constructs)" and "it focuses our attention on new classes of independent and dependent variables" (Ancona et al., 2001, p. 646). Other, similar, contributions suggest that this unique framework can "sharpen the lens" for theory and research building within work and organizational research (Bakker, 2010; Sonnentag, 2012; Navarro et al., 2015; Cole et al., 2016; Eldor et al., 2017; Pinto, 2017). Indeed, this view seems to enable us not only to avoid uncertainty around the conceptualizations of work phenomena but also (a) to revise a number of perspectives, (b) to place them in a common framework, and (c) to understand the objects of study as well as the relations between the variables. For example, classes of variables would be categorized differently in the wake of their modification and trajectories over time, hence revealing opportunities and new directions for research. It affects not only the definition, classification, and operationalization of variables but also our thinking about understanding psychological and working phenomena (Ancona et al., 2001; Roe, 2008).

In the case of meaningful work, it can be noted that this approach can help to understand the situational conditions (i.e., changeable and stable) of meaning in work (Tummers and Dulk, 2011; Tummers and Knies, 2013; Bailey and Madden,

2017). Moreover, it can serve as a framework to comprehend how psychological, working, and environmental factors interact, both per se and with regard to the experience and presence of meaning (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Bakker, 2014; Yeoman, 2014a; Bailey et al., 2017a; Fletcher et al., 2018). Accordingly, the critical review intends to discuss in depth why, when, and how meaningful work is defined and in particular what defines it as a personal characteristic of an individual's sense of value. This can be, for example, in one's own narration of one's self at work (Manuti et al., 2016) or a general characteristic of the individual, similar to a personal trait (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003; Lysova et al., 2019). Likewise, why, when, and how meaningful work is defined and what defines it in terms of the personal and episodic state of meaning relate to the intra-individual fluctuations associated with daily experiences at work (Muzzetto, 2006; Thompson and Bunderson, 2007; Ruswahida, 2014).

Given these possibilities, this article addresses the research questions on meaningful work taking into account a time-based approach. After presenting a broad body of literature, the two distinct natures of meaningful work construct are presented, i.e., steady mindset and episodic, by outlining the existing classifications and discussions on meaningful work research within the social sciences. As follows, the contribution discusses the dual nature of meaningful work providing a critical review of factors that influence meaningful work toward the lens of time. Implications for research and practice are latter presented.

Meaningful Work and Time

Definitions of Meaningful Work

In the literature, there is no broad consensus about the definition of meaningful work, so, in order to obtain a comprehensive view of the role of time, and to conduct further exploration of the separate topics and subtopics, it is helpful at the outset to establish an overview of how authors discussed the construct. In this, two main objects of analysis are relevant: the discrimination of the terms used and the array of perspectives on how to define and measure meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010; Lepisto and Pratt, 2017).

"Meaning of" and "Meaningfulness"

Rosso et al. (2010) noted that meaningful work has been defined and operationalized in various ways and using interchangeable terms (Rosso et al., 2010; Allan et al., 2019). Therefore, the authors distinguish accurately between the following terms: meaning of, meaningful, meaningfulness, and meaning in/at. The term "of" generally refers to what something signifies to one individual. Hence, using this terminology indicates the cognitive process by which an individual interprets and attaches a meaning to their work (Wrzesniewski, 2003; Willner et al., 2019), although it can have a different value (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017) pertaining to when work per se is at issue (Schnell et al., 2013). Meaningful work, meaningfulness, and meaning in/at refer to significance, subjective experience, and perception of the value of work (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010; Schnell et al., 2013; Allan et al., 2019).

Conceptualizations of Meaningful Work

The recent work of Bailey et al. (2018) suggests a substantial way for classifying the conceptualizations of meaningful work literature. These authors have proposed a review of the existing empirical evidence on meaningful work, in which they discussed an original viewpoint on the boundaries of current knowledge. They scrutinized the perspectives of 71 articles and argued that the underlying theoretical framework of the collected empirical studies generally referred to positive psychology (i.e., Oldham and Hackman, 1981) and the literature on spirituality and "calling." As they indicated, some authors proposed definitions within the job characteristic model and conceptualized meaningful work as a core psychological state of work motivation. Others looked at studies that examined models around "workplace spirituality" in which the emphasis is on the role of organizations to enable human flourishing by sustaining people's need for an inner life (Milliman et al., 2017; Bailey et al., 2018). Bailey et al. (2018) grouped all the approaches to meaningful work in a third strand of research, the humanistic perspective, to classify those contributions that principally define meaningful work as inherently subjective. In this class, some authors discuss meaningful work as the effect of the human ontological will for meaning (e.g., in reference to the classical works in the humanistic perspective, as Jung, 1933; Frankl, 1985). Others define it as a eudemonic psychological state as the result of the individual's broad judgment on their life and work.

Bailey et al. (2018) proposed a useful framework for classification of the numerous definitions of meaningful work and offered a comprehensive view of the current research strands; however, how a time-based approach could be included in these classifications remains uncertain. Moreover, in the literature, there are other seminal works, in which overreaching viewpoints and theories are proposed. Although they offer an essential view to comprehend the literature on meaningful work, they do not support the treatment of the research in terms of time-based definition.

Meaningful Work Through the Lens of Time

A broad exploration of the literature has been made referring to the time-based approach. According to the aim of the study, this review explored meaningful work through the lens of time by incorporating different sources (e.g., research papers, book chapters) and various research fields (e.g., psychology, sociology, organizational studies). Thus, time is present in separate meanings within the contributions on meaningful work collected (see Table 1). It emerged as an underlying factor in the definition of the construct, both in everyday work and in atypical work contexts as well as in precarious employment and long-term jobs. In fact, time and temporality are discussed concerning jobs inherently meaningful and not and there is an ambiguous condition that concerns whether meaningful work consists in episodic experiences or in a pervasive sense of the value of one's work, i.e., whether it occurs in the course of time, or whether a degree of stability is present or absent (Bailey et al., 2017b; Lavy and Bocker, 2018; Bailey et al., 2019). For example, some authors examine the episodic occurrences of meaningful work in relation to specific contexts and conditions (e.g., liminal experiences, Toraldo et al., 2019). Among them, such authors

present the episodic nature as flux experiences (Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017) or by reference to the working and psychological conditions at work, which predict the occasional experience (Scott, 2019). Others explicitly report meaningful work as a stable characteristic of the subject, as a specific subjective concern of individuals, which is different from the experience of meaningful work experiences (e.g., psychological perception vs. significance, Lavy and Bocker, 2018; global meaning vs. situational, Park and Folkman, 1997).

Table 1, *Meaningful work through a time-based lens.*

Time-based interpretations	Authors	Definitions
Steady mind-set	Pratt and Ashforth (2003, p. 311)	"[…] work and/or its context are perceived by its practitioners to be, at minimum, purposeful and significant. […] This perception may derive from the intrinsic qualities of the work itself, the goals, values, and beliefs that the work is thought to serve, or the organizational community within the work is embedded"
	Barrett and Dailey (2018, p. 284)	"[…] constructions of meaningful work are constituted in emergent moments of interaction, produced by historical acts, and derived from a wide array of cultural discourses (Kuhn et al., 2008; Wieland, 2011)."
	Chalofsky and Krishna (2009, p. 197)	"Meaningful work is not just about the meaning of the paid work we perform; it is about the way we live our lives. It is the alignment of purpose, values, and the relationships and activities we pursue in life"
	Allan et al. (2019, p. 16)	"Without stable job characteristics, people's sense of meaningful work may be the thread that runs between temporary positions"
	Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009, p. 505)	"[…] meaningful living requires paying attention to both "doing and being" and both "self and other""

	Cheney et al. (2008, p. 144)	"meaningful work may be conceptualized as a job, a coherent set of tasks, or any endeavour requiring mental and/or physical exertion that an individual interprets as having a purpose (see also Pratt and Ashforth, 2003)"
	Michaelson et al. (2014, p. 79)	"[…] how an individual view him or herself (i.e., her or his identity) strongly influences how she or he views his or her work. Alternatively, the more task-centered and more objective focus on meaningfulness explores job characteristics in work that are perceived to be meaningful or that support the individual pursuit of meaningfulness at work"
	Mainemelis (2002, p. 235)	"[…] timelessness is facilitated, among other factors, by intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and meaningful work, and is hindered by extreme pressures and distractions in the work environment"
Episodic	Bailey and Madden (2017, p. 2)	"meaningfulness arose episodically through work experiences that were shared, autonomous and temporally complex. Schutz's notion of the "vivid present" emerged as relevant to understanding how work is rendered meaningful within an individual's personal and social system of relevance"
	De Boeck et al. (2019, p. 530)	"untapped potential as a subjective temporal experience that can make work more, or less, meaningful from the perspective of the individual employee by

	functioning as a cognitive bridge be-tween the present and the future"
Fletcher and Schofield (2019, p. 23)	"the way in which meaningfulness 'emerges from an appreciative or reflec-tive act in which the significance of the moment is perceived within a wider timescape"
Matz-Costa et al. (2019, p. 1127)	"Exploring such within-person changes enables an examination of proximal (i.e., state-like as opposed to trait-like) predic-tors of perceived meaningfulness, such as person-specific states or situational features that are present at a certain point in the day. Such research is needed to in-vestigate the full phenomenological ex-perience of work meaning and to clarify the underlying dynamics of deriving meaning from one's work"
Mitra and Buzzanell (2017, p. 70)	"meaning-making of work [is] con-stantly in flux, rather than a static frame, shaped by the constraints facing them"
Scott (2019, p. 17)	"participants […] reported a sense of meaningfulness about their work, and stories about mastery, having an impact on others, reaching potential – stories of agency – characterized their responses"
Madden and Bailey (2019, p. 155)	Further empirical research supports this temporal aspect of meaningfulness, to show that it is not a steady or sustained experience but is experienced "in trans-cendent moments in time"

	May et al. (2019, p. 364)	"Experiencing meaning is inherently less than stable or constant and can be seen to involve natural tensions"
	Toraldo et al. (2019, p. 648)	"new work forms invoke meaningfulness beyond traditional economic incentives while not excluding instrumental motives. […] by linking voluntarism with the temporary nature of festivals, we contribute to understanding how such events shape meaningfulness […] acknowledging the micro-emancipatory moments"
Steady mindset vs. Episodic	Lavy and Bocker (2018, p. 1494)	"the sense of meaning at work is not a completely stable, permanent condition, but rather a frequent occurrence, which can be renewed daily (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003), and may, therefore, be affected by events and experiences at work (Clausen and Borg, 2011)"
	Bailey et al. (2019, p. 495)	"meaningfulness is a pervasive sense of the value of one's work, yet it is also linked with spatial, temporal and material contexts which may be temporary, partial or episodic"
	Bailey et al. (2017b, p. 427)	"whether meaningfulness is momentary and similar in functioning to such experiences as flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), linked with longer-term fluctuations depending on work conditions, akin to engagement (Kahn, 1990), or whether it is a relatively stable, subjective state"

| Park and Folkman (1997, p. 116) | "Global meaning encompasses a person's enduring beliefs and valued goals. […] meaning as "the cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment" [: : :] situational meaning as the meaning that is formed in the interaction between a person's global meaning and the circumstances of a person-environment transaction" |

The Dual Nature of Meaningful Work

By the interpretation of definitions of meaningful work through the lens of time and a time-based synthesis approach, two main categories of meaningful work emerge, namely, as a stable subjective mindset of a worker and as an experience that can occur in specific psychological and working conditions. These categories related both to the subjective experiences of time and the objective nature and facets of time (e.g., the passage of clock time or the time needed for particular tasks). Meaningful work as a stable/permanent mindset or as changeable/episodic experience appear in the structuration of the continuous axis of time, on which events and conditions are arranged—following the proposition of real-time in the Aristotelian view as a "physical and quantifiable entity" (Aristotele. 4AD, 1991).

On the one hand, the internal significance of meaningful work would shape the quality of time and work experience. As such, meaningful work as a steady mindset refers to the worker general significance attached to a job that is meaningful per se, e.g., when a job is a source of meaningfulness, as a pervasive sense of the value of one's work (Mainemelis, 2002; Cheney et al., 2008; Michaelson et al., 2014; Barrett and Dailey, 2018). For example, Allan et al. (2019) suggested that "without stable job characteristics, people's sense of meaningful work may be the thread that runs between temporary positions" p. 16. This general significance attached to work itself would be gained by the retrospective and cognitive judgments of the inner individual experience and knowledge (Kahneman et al., 2006). The resulting global meaning in work would be a factor in the stable characteristics of individuals that affect both the individual's work behavior and perceptions of work experiences and aspects of the job and its organization (Park and Folkman, 1997; Mainemelis, 2002; Allan et al., 2019). In line with this thesis, meaningful work is discussed to be as a steady mindset by other authors, e.g., Bailey et al. (2017b), who show how the presence of a global judgment of meaningful work would be predictive of psychological states at work (e.g., job satisfaction, Barrett and Dailey, 2018). These authors agree with the theoretical framework discussed by Rosso et al. (2010), comprising significance, beliefs, definitions, and value attached to work by individuals—where work is a significant component of human activity and lives

(Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lavy and Bocker, 2018).

On the other hand, experiences of meaningful work consist in episodic experiences as referred to the individual's daily work experiences in which different events and conditions take place. For example, following the definition of time by Aristotle, events occur along an axis by which individuals allocate their (working and) psychological conditions that influence their meaning (in/at work) experience (Bailey and Madden, 2017; Lavy and Bocker, 2018; Matz-Costa et al., 2019). Authors who discuss the state and episodic nature of work argue that meaningful work could be experienced as a temporary embedded subjective experience where past, present, and future coexist. This can occur in a sort state of a constant flux (Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017), between time and space, outside the common working norms (Toraldo et al., 2019), or it can be linked to specific, isolatable working and psychological conditions (Bailey and Madden, 2017; Lavy and Bocker, 2018; Fletcher and Schofield, 2019;Matz-Costa et al., 2019; Scott, 2019; Yeoman et al., 2019). Moreover, such authors define meaningful work as episodic experience as if it occurs in the course of time or it unfolds over time. In fact, meaningful work has been considered as the end of the meaning-making process by which meaningfulness can unfold through the real physical and quantifiable time. In this vein, the tensions occurring over time between one individual and his/her job, organization, and socio-political context can result in different states, such as meaningful work. Therefore, there can be fluctuations of the degree of meaningful work experience as well as variations of the presence/absence of meaning in reference to the past, present, or to the being stuck in an eternal present (De Boeck et al., 2019) or pointless conditions (Yeoman et al., 2019).

In general, the construct of meaningful work has been characterized by using a variety of time perspectives ranging from the steady mindset/permanent conceptualizations to episodic/occasional definitions. As seen, time represents the continuous axis on which the phenomena of life and work appear within different contexts and situations. Onto this objective, physical and measurable agency individuals attach subjective meaning and have personal experiences. Therefore, meaningful work may be shortly defined, and considered, as a positive "subjective

experience of existential significance" (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017, p. 7) that results in, or is fostered and maintained by, central main pathways comprehending individual, organizational, and socio-political factors (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017). This experience may be a steady mindset when a work is experienced and perceived as meaningful as it responds to the individual's quests for meaning in their work and life, and it provides a sense of self-actualization, self-development, self-connection, and social identity (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010; Michaelson et al., 2014; Lepisto and Pratt, 2017; Martela and Pessi, 2018). Likewise, episodic experience of meaningfulness regards the existential experience that can occur in a specific time "such as person-specific states or situational features that are present at a certain point in the day" (Matz-Costa et al., 2019, p. 70), "which can be renewed daily (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003), and may, therefore, be affected by events and experiences at work" (Lavy and Bocker, 2018, p. 144).

Toward The Dual Nature of Meaningful Work

In the reviewed literature, authors discussed meaningful work by explicitly referring to identifiable factors that can affect the way work can be meaningful both as a steady mindset or as an episodic experience. These factors appear to be differentiated at three levels, namely, (a) individual level (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Allan et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2019), (b) working and organizational level (Schnell et al., 2013; Bailey et al., 2017b; Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017; Lysova et al., 2019), and (c) cultural and socio-political level (Yeoman, 2014a; Lepisto and Pratt, 2017; Bendassolli and Tateo, 2018; Yeoman et al., 2019). This result pointed out the fact that, although authors have adopted separate time-based definitions of the construct, meaningful work should be considered by looking at the various factors that can contribute to its presence. This evidence initiates a deeper reflection suggesting a possible novel framework of meaningful work toward the lens of time (see Figure 1).

According to the comprehension of the dual nature of meaningful work, the following sections advance the propositions for future explorations of the factors subsumed by meaningful work with a deeper focus on time as a full frame for theory-building. This proposal constitutes a preliminary working model of factors that

contribute to the presence of meaningful work. Moreover, the aim is to present a conceptual framework on the dual nature of meaningful work that will help both authors and practitioners in identifying the variety of aspects that this construct subsumes. Thus, the contribution examines meaningful work as permanent/steady mindset and meaningful work as a changeable/episodic experience by looking at the macro-levels of factors identified, succinctly: individual, organizational, and contextual levels. Beside the theoretical implications, this framework supports a different focus on work and workers' aspects on which practitioners and researchers can focus on.
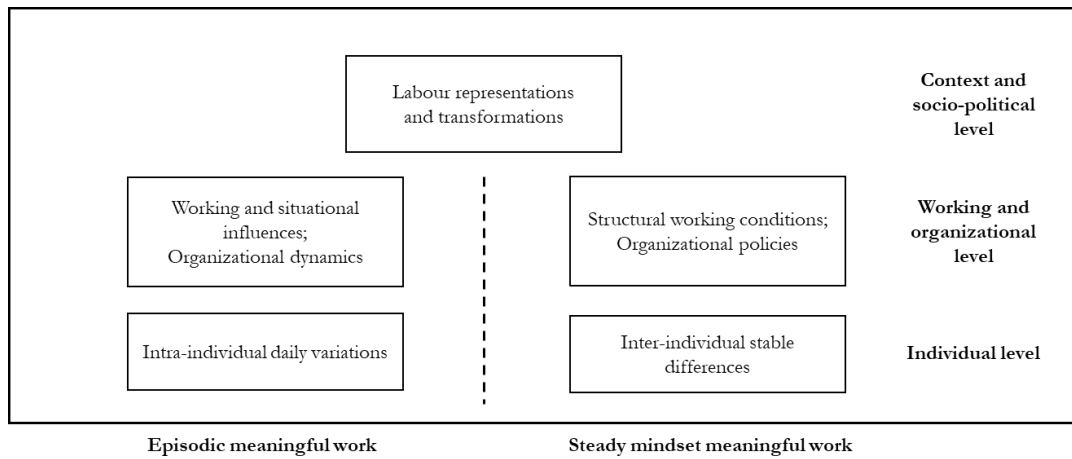
Figure 1, A preliminary model of meaningful work and the three levels of factors toward the lens of time

Individual Level

Meaningful work can be referred to a transient experience as a positive subjective experience of existential significance that will depend on the daily intraindividual and environmental conditions. Likewise, meaningful work can be a more stable worker's attribute in experiencing their work where individual differences play an important role in the creation of stable significance attribution. Firstly, meaningful work is, then, conceptualized assuming its episodic nature and linked intraindividual daily variations (Oldham and Hackman, 1981; Tims et al., 2016; Lepisto and Pratt, 2017; Vogel et al., 2019). This concept has been discussed in both qualitative and quantitative studies. For example, the qualitative research by

Bailey and Madden (2017) showed how the participants had specific experiences of connection with others and their jobs, reporting episodic experiences of self-transcendental experience suggesting an episodic occasion of meaningful work. In their longitudinal research using diary studies, Matz-Costa et al. (2019) found that the daily perception of meaningful work was related to the emotional states and behavior at work as the job crafting behavior. In particular, the job crafting behavior regards the individual ability to enact organizational behavior by which they can change their thoughts about their job and their working experiences (Tims et al., 2016; Costantini et al., 2017b, 2019; Lavy and Bocker, 2018). Moreover, Allan (2017) found that task significance prompted the experience of meaningful work in a longitudinal setting, which highlights the insights of Kahn (1990), for whom the fluctuations of meaning depended on the perceived work conditions (Fletcher et al., 2018). Similarly, in the recent studies on work engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Bakker, 2014; Bailey et al., 2017b; Fletcher et al., 2018), the episodic experience of meaningful work is seen to show daily fluctuations during the working day due to the ambient psychological and working conditions, which makes it a different phenomenon from the steady mindset explored above.

Secondly, from the humanistic perspective (based on the seminal classical works of Frankl, 1985, and Jung, 1933), it is universal in human beings to search for and attribute meaning. The analysis of the subjective meaning of work revealed that it can be evaluated as a steady mindset in terms of both presence and absence and the degree of its stability (Steger et al., 2006; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Devivere, 2018; Martela and Pessi, 2018; Allan et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2019; Yeoman et al., 2019). The level of stability links to a work that is experienced and perceived as meaningful as it responds to the individual's quests for meaning in their work and life. Therefore, it is linked to the inter-individual stable differences (Rothmann et al., 2019) as the dispositional signature (Lysova et al., 2019), cultural belongingness (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017; Bendassolli and Tateo, 2018), work values (Consiglio et al., 2017), work orientation, and work narratives (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Scott, 2019). Generally, authors writing in this area have discussed one individual's seeking for meaning as positive (Rosso et al., 2010), a eudemonic state (Steger et al., 2012), and an inherently human quest: "a condition of being human

to make meaning" (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009). According to the humanistic perspective, the quest for meaning cannot be supplied by organizations or context, although it is ostensibly linked to the socio-political context (Tummers and Dulk, 2011; Yeoman, 2014b). In this vein, meaningful work can vary between each person as well as be permanent along the axis of objective time, in a way that lasts for a long time.

Working and Organizational Level

From the point of view of the working and organizational features, meaningful work is still discussed in terms of its dual nature, stable and episodic. At the individual level, steady meaningful work is linked to the organization's sources of meaning and to the particular features of the job. Type, quality, and amount of work are relatively stable characteristics of a job and organizations, namely, working structural conditions (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Bakker, 2010, 2014). The meanings that a person attached to their job links to their internal dispositions, and the characteristics of an organization, as organizational policies, can prompt a sense of value at work, e.g., belonging, significance, coherence, and direction, which are core components of meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010; Schnell et al., 2013). Moreover, on a daily basis, the features of the job can vary and show different sources of meanings, depending on both the working and situational influences, e.g., daily demands and resources (Martela and Riekki, 2018), and organizational dynamics. The sense of autonomy and relatedness, for instance, can be different from 1 day to another and from one task to another, Similarly, the significance of the tasks at work (Allan, 2017) can prompt differences in the experience of meaningfulness, i.e., episodic (Wellman and Spreitzer, 2011). In this case, working and situational variations and organizational dynamics may foster or inhibit daily significant experiences.

At the organizational level, the sources of meaning relate to the stable characteristics of the organization's culture, policies, and practices. The style of leadership can shape the emotional atmosphere and hence the experience of positive emotion and meaningful work (Tummers and Knies, 2013; Carton, 2018). Workplace spirituality and organizational democracy can foster a sense of belonging and can shape meaningful work experience (Yeoman, 2014b; Schnell et al., 2019; Weber et

al., 2019), but episodic meaningfulness and meaninglessness can also be associated with the low-quality leader–member exchange relationships (Tummers and Knies, 2013; Bailey et al., 2017b; Bendassolli, 2017a), which can prompt a sense of inter-individual solidarity and, consequently, the sense of meaning. State affects, affective events, and discrete emotions in the workplace, as reported in the study of Matz-Costa et al. (2019), can also determine fluctuations in the meaningfulness of work. Emotions in the workplace have received much attention in the field of organizational psychology and organizational behavior (Ashkanasy et al., 2002). Recent works have reported evidence of the links between the personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels (Ashkanasy et al., 2002; Ashkanasy and Humphrey, 2011). Since the multi-level model of emotion in organizations explains how different organizational dynamics have their effect on the worker, at all levels from the within-person variations (i.e., affective events) up to broad environmental changes (i.e., the emotional climate), variations of meaningful work as a mediator of positive behavioral outcomes can be measured and observed (Matz-Costa et al., 2019).

Context and Socio-Political Level

In the literature, several authors discussed conditions of and transformation of work – all of which were difficult to assess – context and socio-political influences as important categories in studying meaningful work. The socio-political context includes various factors such as the access to decent work (Duffy et al., 2017), culture (Bendassolli and Tateo, 2018), and political reforms, and labor transformations and representations (Schwartz, 1982; Gill, 1999; Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017; Barrett and Dailey, 2018; Yeoman et al., 2019; Tommasi et al., 2020). The combination of these factors shapes the way individuals attach meaning to their work. In the current context of temporary and difficult jobs and socio-political changes, some authors hypothesized that individuals can find a meaning crafting their experience to gain an experience of meaningful work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Rosso et al., 2010; Berg et al., 2013; Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017). Existing literature reports how the economy and society structure jobs and organizations in a top-down manner, with a focus on the stable characteristics of labor conditions that highlight the need for future research on the experience of meaningful work

within a more substantial temporal lens (MOW International Research Team, 1987; Willner et al., 2019). As noted by Thompson (2019), the literature in the field mostly overlooks the relevance of macro-aspects of the institutions on shaping the opportunities for meaningful work. While pointing out the consequences of a meaningful work (e.g., spillover effects on civic participation), he argues that three paths of arrangements in terms of labor representations and labor transformations can be taken for promoting meaningful work at the institutional level. These are: (a) encouraging social actors to cooperate with the state in creating meaningful work; (b) renewing the balance of power, straightening the role for labor representations; and (c) beginning to reframe the social discourse on meaningful work. Although Thompson remarks the complexity of studying work and organization (Friedman, 1946/1955), empirical findings have shown how individuals regularly deal with socio-political conditions, i.e., labor representations and transformations, during the meaningmaking process (Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017) and enact behavior (i.e., job crafting) that changes their work conditions, mindset, and organizational behaviors (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Spencer, 2015; Ward and King, 2017).

Mitra and Buzzanell (2017) support the use of the "continuous axis of time" when discussing political implications for meaningful work. They regard as socio-political context those pressures that foster the internalization of preferred self by workers who negotiate their control on the meaning-making process. Since these factors occur in a temporal tension—during the meaning-making process—meaningful (as meaningless) work reflects its temporal nature. Meaningfulness and meaninglessness unfold in time, time that is closely related to the (complementary) objective time in which workers make their work and life experiences. This suggests two strands of research. Firstly, authors could seek to understand how meaningful work historically changes in the light of the sociopolitical changes that take place among the factors that contribute to the account-making of work (Shantz et al., 2015; Allan et al., 2017; Bendassolli, 2017b; Lepisto and Pratt, 2017). Secondly, in the current economic times, authors can consider different kinds of work (e.g., precarious employments, Patulny et al., 2020) to explore further the assessment of account-making the presence of the four significant sources of meaning in work (Twenge et al., 2010; Yeoman et al., 2019).

The authors who suggested a temporal lens referring to the socio-political level have also explored organizational behavior in conditions of (not) decent work (Duffy et al., 2006; Di Fabio and Kenny, 2016). Future research may examine how individuals deal with temporary jobs, precarious employments, and uncertain working conditions due to the economic changes, and how individuals enact behavioral changes in order to experience meaningful work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Berg et al., 2013; Demerouti and Bakker, 2014; Allan et al., 2020; Patulny et al., 2020). Indeed, examining these issues would enlarge our knowledge of the dual nature of meaningful work, establishing evidence that the construct can be conceptualized as inherently distinct from other psychological dimensions (Chalofsky and Krishna, 2009; Berkman et al., 2017).

Further Considerations

Fundamental questions about time have been part of a long story in philosophy and more widely in the human sciences. Only a few authors – in and out of the field of meaningful work – have included time in theoretical or empirical studies. Time is now, however, receiving more attention within psychology and the social sciences (Roe, 2008; Sonnentag, 2012; Navarro et al., 2015; Cole et al., 2016; Pinto, 2017; Tommasi, 2020). Researchers are arguing for the use of time in theory and practice, seeking resolutions to the disagreements about the phenomena of work (Ancona et al., 2001; Cunliffe et al., 2004). Indeed, time and the order of time are significant concerns within the study of people's lives and their work (Eldor et al., 2017).

In 1911, Taylor published his book on the organization of working hours and workers, *The Principles of the Scientific Management*, in which he proposes a view of time as objective and measurable and where he discusses the industrial process as an "hegemonic discourse centering on precision, control, and discipline" (Taylor, 1911/1970; Hassard, 2000, cited in Bailey and Madden, 2017, p. 4). Indeed, the industrialization process "arose out of the measurement of work. It's when work can be measured, when you can hitch a man to the job, when you can put a harness on him, and measure his output in terms of a single piece and pay him by the piece or by the hour, that you have got modern industrialization" (Bell

inMarcuse, 1964/1991, p. 32). In this vein, following the Aristotelian argument, time is seen as essentially objective, physical and quantifiable (Rämö, 2004). Individuals make actions on a continuous, linear, physical axis that is independent of humans. This is distinct from the subjective view of time, in which the themes of past, present, and future are seen in the experience and meanings of individuals (Hassard, 2001; Eldor et al., 2017). Although this common distinction is part of extensive discussions within different disciplines, we can say that subjective and objective time can be seen as complementary (Ancona et al., 2001). Subjective time inevitably relates to the perception of objective time. However, some aspects of the subjective experience of time (e.g., the passage of the clock time, working hours, etc.) could give time different meanings and perceptions (Eldor et al., 2017). For example, during working hours, the speed of time may depend on whether experience at work is seen as meaningful (Bailey and Madden, 2017) or not (Hassard, 2001; Cunliffe et al., 2004; Eldor et al., 2017).

The present paper aimed to propose a critical perspective on meaningful work through a time-based definition approach. Although the existing literature has made significant steps in the field, the neglected role of time in the conceptualization of meaningful work represents a challenge for the current research. This paper has tried to respond to the call for a wider model of the construct, building on the need to conceptualize meaningful work according to the time view (Bailey et al., 2019). Moreover, since the model of a dual nature of meaningful work reveals a different focus on work and workers aspects based on the different levels on which focus on, research and applied implications must be discussed.

Implications of the Contribution

Considering that most of the people have to spend at least 40h per week, for 40+ weeks per year, for 40+ years of their life, at work, the presence of meaningful work becomes fundamentally essential for workers, organizations, and systems. Likewise, it is relevant for researchers and practitioners to understand how and to what extent the temporal conditions of the construct occur in order to propose applied interventions for individuals and organizations.

Most people search for meaning in a job (Frankl, 1985; Devivere, 2018), for something more than a job "where you go home and maybe go by a year later and

you don't know what you've done" (Terkel, 1972, p. 32). The attribution of meaning, its quality and contents, is mainly subjective, as is one's orientation to one's work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003; Lepisto and Pratt, 2017), but sources of meaningful work are reliably correlated with the workplace and the working activities (Michaelson et al., 2014; Weber et al., 2019; Yeoman et al., 2019). Viewing meaningful work through the lens of time leads to consider its dual nature. The broad literature review has considered conceptualization underlying a temporal framework or supporting a time-based definition of the construct. The analysis indicated two different conceptualizations of the construct: as a permanent/steady mindset and as a changeable/episodic experience. As discussed above, the characteristics of meaningful work can be either stable or changeable and subsume the presence of three classes of factors that contribute to its presence. In this vein, a preliminary model of the dual nature of meaningful work and related factors has been proposed with the intention to support further exploration of these initial prepositions.

Applied Implications: Meaningful Work Interventions

These conclusion can yield possible interventions for workers and organizations. Indeed, taking stock of time in the definition of meaningfulness and establishing evidence of stable and episodic experiences suggests possible applied implications. How to understand the possible twists and turns of training interventions is a crucial question for practitioners attempting to improve organizational conditions (e.g., workers' well-being or motivations and personal improvement, Ceschi et al., 2017; Sartori and Tacconi, 2017). Through the lens of time, environmental and individual variables show a more profound complexity (Navarro et al., 2015; Tommasi, 2020). Using the distinction advanced here, within the frame of the three groups of factors suggested, would offer an essential contribution in devising applied research programs and training interventions. Indeed, the studies analyzed suggest that the ways in which meaningfulness can arise depend on several factors (Chalofsky and Krishna, 2009; Lee, 2015; Costantini et al., 2017a; Bailey et al., 2018). By adopting the framework of the three levels of analysis (i.e., individual, organizational, and contextual), practitioners can deal with any possible discrepancies between interventions' intentions and workforce expectations by approaching

the phenomenon more innovatively, in particular by specifying both the intervention targets and the classes of agents to be addressed.

Firstly, focusing on the permanent aspects of meaningful work will lead practitioners to consider interventions intended to align workers' expectations with the environmental context at the individual level. For example, discussions on existential indifference as presented by Schnell (2010) in the study of meaning in life, showed that not all individuals are interested in the attribution of meaning to their lives. If considered in the workplace, the presence of existential indifference within workers can reflect a discrepancy at work when planning meaningful work interventions. Indeed, the details of the intervention should be planned by reference to the individual's characteristics, assessed in pre-training conditions. This discrepancy may show the challenges of meaningful work intervention in which workers have no interests in receiving a training intervention. Nowadays, the literature on how workers respond to meaningful interventions is generally silent (Fletcher and Schofield, 2019). Therefore, a pre-intervention analysis of the participants' needs is helpful to tailor training.

Secondly, the focus on the job and the organization suggests that, to be appropriate and meaningful, interventions should consider those working and organizational factors that are permanent and not-easily changeable. The rhetoric of meaningful work intervention may be misunderstood by workers when job quality and organizational conditions cannot be addressed. Ideally, training intervention should focus on this distinction between the more stable working conditions and the changeable. For instance, the quality of a job seen through a temporal lens is changeable in the medium or long term (Roe, 2008). Job quality is a more stable aspect of one individual's context than team climate and leadership, so programs to create specific interventions intended to foster meaningful work will be more effective if they include attention to the stable and changeable characteristics of both job and organization.

Thirdly, practitioners devising interventions should also consider the broader societal context and how individuals reflect and process meanings in their working conditions. Socio-political factors play a crucial role in shaping meaningful work. Poor work conditions (e.g., precarious jobs) and complex societal

dynamics (e.g., labor transformations) are of course difficult to address. For example, Fletcher and Schofield (2019) have detailed the effects of interventions for meaningful work, analyzing and reporting the influence of the broader socio-political context and working environment. They discussed how the results of Brexit during the period of training had significantly and negatively impacted on participants. On the basis of their findings, they advocate for a broader-based reflection on meaningful work interventions, linking them with all aspects of the context of the work: individual, organizational and socio-political context. In those programs that do not take this on board, there is the risk of abusing the rhetoric of meaningful work, avoiding the reality of the working environment and, consequently, running ineffective intervention programs.

According to the dual nature concept of meaningful work and the proposed model of factors subsumed, it can be suggested that researchers and practitioners should adopt a wide-open lens for tailoring training (Eodice et al., 2019) that takes full account of the views of the individuals involved and of the relevant organizational and contextual factors (Bailey et al., 2018; Fletcher and Schofield, 2019; Yeoman et al., 2019).

Conclusion

It is apparent that the proliferation of technology changes and globalization coupled with labor market deregulation, precarious employment, and profit maximization will increase in the future, affecting workers, organizations, and systems. Thus, the constant labor and economic transformation call scholars and authors for putting effort in sustaining the quest for meaningful work. As with all the literature in the field, the present contribution hopes that the proposed preliminary model would help researchers and practitioners to improve job quality and support individual lives and well-being. Although the contribution is no more than a critical calling for several studies to examine these ideas in more theoretical and empirical detail, it does have some inevitable limitations. The focus on a temporal framework reflects a limitation in itself because there are undoubtedly several relevant classes of agents in the spatial context. Therefore, future research synthesis might examine

together both the temporal lens and spatial agents, examining the interactions between the two.

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CHAPTER 2

The Meaning in Work Inventory: Validation of the Italian Version and its Association with Sociodemographic Variables

This chapter is based on:

Tommasi, F., Sartori, R., Ceschi, A. & Schnell T. (2021). The Meaning in Work Inventory: Validation of the Italian Version and its As-sociation with Sociodemographic Variables. *BPA Applied Psychology Bulletin*, (in press).

- Meaningful work is an inherently subjective evaluation that, yet, is impacted the external context, i.e., paradox 2 on the nature and processes of meaningful work.

- This paper introduces the Meaning in Work Inventory (ME-Work), a psychometric scale formed by examining meaningful work and its contextual facets.

- The ME-Work is a modular questionnaire aimed to assess three independent aspects of meaningful work, i.e., work as a source meaning (module 1), meaningful and meaningless work (module 2), and facets of meaning in work, namely, coherence, significance, purpose and belonging (module 3).

- An Italian sample of 624 participants completed a survey regarding personal and organizational characteristics in addition to the ME-Work.

- Both confirmatory analysis and structural equation modelling have been used to respectively assess psychometric properties of the Italian version of the ME-Work and the associations of the three modules. A series of MANOVAs examined socio-demographic differences in ME-Work dimensions.

- The contribution expands the knowledge on the contextual elements that serve for the overall evaluation of work as meaningful.

Keywords: meaningful work, meaning in work, validation.

Introduction

Several authors have paid considerable attention to meaningful work which has emerged as a popular, powerful and influential construct within the science and practice of work and organizational studies. In turn, empirical studies dealing with meaningful work have been accumulated and a large amount of knowledge has been prompted by the application of several different approaches. In this respect, meaningful work is intended as a core construct which reflects its importance both at the individual, organizational and societal level (Lysova et al., 2019). On the one side, work occupies a central position in human life, as primary source of meaning (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016), linked to living one's calling (Duffy, England & Dik, 2019a) and sense of individuation, purpose and contribution (Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2019). On the other side, employers and organizations consider the relevance of meaningful work as a source that serves for employee commitment and well-being (Michaelson et al., 2014).

Recent investigations within the psychology of working framework (Duffy et al., 2016; Blustein, 2006; Blustein, 2013) have largely presented meaningful work as a potential consequence of socioeconomic or cultural issue related to work and an indicator of securing decent work conditions (e.g., Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016; Duffy et al., 2019b; Blustein et al., 2019). In this case, burgeoning number of authors have proposed meaningful work as a eudemonic psychological state and scientific evidence showed how it relates to multiple positive individual and organizational dimensions (Allan et al., 2019), such as meaning in life (Allan, Duffy, & Douglass, 2015; Steger & Dik, 2013), psychophysical health (Steger et al., 2012), work volition, career adaptability, social connection, self-determination (Duffy et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2017), work–life enrichment (Allan, Autin & Duffy, 2016a; Lysova et al., 2019), proactive personality, work engagement (Allan et al., 2019), job performance (Allan, Duffy & Collisson, 2016b), organizational citizenship behaviours (Steger et al., 2012), and withdrawal intentions (Duffy et al., 2016). Therefore, an impetus to critically evaluate and develop empirical tools to assess meaningful work constructs arose within many academic fields (e.g., management studies, positive psychology, business ethics), resulting in the need for understanding

about the best way to assess this construct (Bailey et al., 2019a; Bailey et al., 2019b; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017; Steger & Dik, 2013).

Bailey et al. (2019b) reviewed the current empirical literature about meaningful work which reveals that there are some principal complications in the contemporary measures of this construct. The presence of nonspecific items or items that conflate meaningful work with other constructs raised doubts among scholars about the measures' criterion validity. Besides, in quantitative approaches, some authors neglected factors that can ensure meaningful work experience, i.e., organizational and societal, calling for comprehensive measures of the working conditions for meaningful work (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Rosso et al., 2010). In fact, where authors focused solely on the individual experience, questions about sources and processes behind it remain unanswered. Likewise, where the focus is exclusively on the contextual factors, the individual subjective experience is minimized (Rosso et al., 2010). Additionally, meaningful work is intended as a positive experience that responds to the individual's quests for meaning in their work and life. However, empirical evidence of the extent to which work is experienced as meaningless are unclear and not yet examined (Bailey & Madden, 2019; Groeneveld et al., 2011; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Likewise, the role of individual differences behind the working conditions is still not clear, since the current empirical examinations have rarely addressed how personal and organizational characteristics might affect meaningful work experiences (Hofmeister, 2019).

By contrast, according to Bailey et al. (2019b), the recent research within the humanistic perspective, has largely tried to consider a comprehensive framework covering both theories on meaning in work in managerial studies (i.e., Rosso et al., 2010) and findings from empirical research on meaning in life (Schnell, 2009; Schnell et al., 2013). By viewing meaning in work in analogy with meaning in life, the latter model suggests a multidimensional measure of meaningful work and sources of meaning, as operationalised by the Meaning in Work Inventory (ME-Work Inventory, German name, SIBE, Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). ME-Work consists of three main modules through which it is possible to evaluate both working conditions for meaning in work, and the experience of meaningful work; (a) *facets of meaning*, or the perceived working conditions for meaning in work; (b)

meaningful and *meaningless work* experiences, measured independently of the facets; (c) if work is a source of meaning per se, i.e., *work as source of meaning*.

Given the extensive application of meaningful work in organizational science and practice, it is pivotal to have a clear conceptualization of this construct, and reliable and valid instrument to measure it. The present contribution intends to introduce the Italian version of the ME-Work Inventory by evaluating its psychometric proprieties with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and testing the hypothesized structures proposed by Schnell and Hoffmann (2020); the four facets of meaning serves as an indicator of one latent factor (H1), which successively predict the three dimensions of work as source of meaning (H2), meaningful and meaningless work (H3-4). On this basis, the overall structure (H5) of the three modules is in turn tested in order to provide evidence of the modular structure of the ME-Work.

This approach will be tested by analysing the case of Italian workers and observing the relative impact of personal and organizational characteristics on the dimensions of the ME-Work. Since the ME-Work is intended as a useable tool for researchers and practitioners, it becomes useful to understand its associations with personal and organizational characteristics. Results and implications for research are discussed, further avenues for practical use of the ME-Work as modular questionnaire are presented.

Measures of meaning in work

Meaningful work measures can be classified into two main classes, namely, unidimensional and multidimensional scales – according to the authors' pre-operationalizations. Altogether, these scales have been showing some theoretical limitations (Bailey et al., 2019a; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Although their large use in different empirical settings and strong psychometrical properties, they do not answer the current call for insights on (a) the associations between meaning in work and meaning in life (Michaelson et al., 2014; Steger & Dik, 2013; Yeoman et al., 2019), (b) the role of other factors that are not taken into account in empirical investigations, e.g., self-connection (Rosso et al., 2010), social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), sense of belonging (Schnell, Höge, & Weber, 2019), and personal and organizational characteristics (Rothmann, Weiss,

Redelinghuys, 2019). Additionally, despite the positive impacts of meaningful work, work may be experienced as meaningless and individuals may suffer the lack of valuable, worthwhile, and dignified work. However, questions about the extent to which work is experienced as meaningless are vague and not properly explored despite the large literature on meaningless work (Bailey et al., 2017; Groeneveld et al., 2011; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Yeoman et al., 2019).

The unidimensional strand aims at assessing the presence of meaningful work, whatever the sources and attributes of meaning are. In this approach, authors mainly consider the general model of Hackman and Oldman (1976) for a direct measure of the construct concerning its causes and effects. These scales do not distinguish facets and dimensions of meaningful work and use nonspecific items or items that cover other similar constructs (Bailey et al., 2019a; Bailey et al., 2019b; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017). Conversely, within the multidimensional strand, authors of different fields of research have engaged efforts to identify and validate measures able to capture both facets of meaning and dimensions of meaningful work experience. The main problem with multidimensional models is that of finding the right combination of measures to evaluate all the different aspects of meaningful work, in terms of facets of meaning and meaningful work features, and meaningful work appraisal.

For example, the Work And Meaning Inventory (WAMI) is a survey tool developed on the basis of the three-dimensional model by Steger et al. (2012) and aims at measuring meaningful work experience per se. These authors identified three dimensions: positive meaning, meaning making through work, and greater good motivation. These three dimensions are proposed to function together in the pursuit of meaningful work experiences and perceptions. However, although the WAMI has been considered as one of the sufficiently validated measures of meaningful work dimensions, the composed three-factor structure has proved limited replicability (Harzer & Steger, 2012; Puchalska-Kamińska, Czerw & Roczniewska, 2019). Moreover, the WAMI seems to show a lack in the comprehension of the individual and working conditions for meaningful work (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017).

By contrast, Lips-Wiersma et al. (2012) developed the comprehensive meaningful work scale (CMWS). This scale focuses on a four-dimensional model comprising *developing* the inner *self*, *expressing full potential*, *unity with others*, and *service to others* which are based on three existential dimensions: *individual - others*, *doing* and *being*, and *reality* and *inspiration*. When balanced, these dimensions could lead to the experience of meaningful work. Although the CMWS aligns with the evaluation of features of work and individual contributions to the fit between the individual and work, it lacks an evaluation of the subjective experience of meaningful work (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017).

In the view of a deeper analysis of the meaningful work, the new developed German questionnaire MEaning in Work inventory (ME-Work, Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020) captures a broad spectrum of meaning components in the context of work. The ME-Work is an expansion of the already existing meaningful work scale (German: Berufliche Sinnerfüllung, in Höge & Schnell, 2012; Schnell et al., 2013). In contrast to existing scales, the ME-Work offers both dimensional and direct measures of meaningful work by assessing perceived working conditions for meaningful and meaningless work, as well as the evaluation of the extent to which work is experienced as a source of meaning per se. As noted, it embraces a dual theoretical justification. Firstly, the multidimensional model finds its basis in extensive research on meaning in life in relation to meaning in work. Authors have identified the facets of meaning in work in analogy with the facets of meaning in life and addressed the call for empirical insights on the relation between meaning in work and life satisfaction, life meaning and general health (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). Secondly, these facets are posited in reference to widely accepted and adopted theories of meaning in work in managerial studies (i.e., Rosso et al., 2010), thus stressing the theoretical framework underpinning the questionnaire.

The MEaning in Work Inventory

As noted, the ME-Work aims at assessing (a) the presence of four facets of meaning in work, (b) the subjective experience of meaningfulness and meaninglessness in work, and (c) work as source of meaning per se. This questionnaire has been developed with reference to the largely acknowledged theoretical model of

Rosso et al. (2010) and the evidence produced in empirical research on meaning in life (Schnell, 2020).

On the one hand, Rosso et al. (2010), in their integrative review, offered a theoretical conception of what meaning in work is and what makes work meaningful, the *mechanisms* and *pathways*. The authors argued that the strikingly different things that work can mean for each worker are rooted in four core sources: self, other persons, the work context, and spiritual life. Accordingly, the authors identified pathways by which work is made and maintained meaningful. As for psychological and social mechanisms underlying the sense of value of one's work, they suggested authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, cultural and interpersonal sense-making. Then, Rosso et al. (2010) proposed four central pathways emerging from the encounter of two core dimensions of self-others, and agency-communion. First, the intersection between self and agency reflects the *individuation* path which represents self-efficacy and self-esteem as indicators of a valuable and worthy self. Second, the match between agency and others reflects the pathway named *contribution* which refers to the significance and the perceived impact of workers' actions and to the sense of interconnection or rather doing something in service of something greater than the self – transcendence. Moreover, linking others with communion represents the third pathway, namely s*elf-connection* or the sense of self created by the coherence between self and work role. The combination of self and communion indicates the last path, namely, *unification* which reflects a sense of belongingness and harmony with other beings and principles.

On the other hand, the literature on meaning in life suggests that the experience of meaning can be further understood by distinguishing several facets. By introducing the Sources of Meaning and Meaning in Life Questionnaire (SoMe), Schnell (2009, 2014) proposed that the subjective experience of meaningfulness is based on evaluation processes with regards to four criteria: coherence, significance, purpose, and belonging. George and Park (2016) proposed a tripartite view, including comprehension, purpose, and mattering. Both models overlap largely, since mattering and significance as well as purpose and purpose denote similar constructs, and coherence refers to both consistency and comprehensibility (Schnell,

2020). The fourth facet in Schnell's model, belonging, is not part of George and Park's model, but has been identified as a crucial fourth facet in concepts of meaning in work (Rosso et al., 2010; Schnell, Höge, & Pollet, 2013; Bailey et al., 2017). The experience of meaningful work is thus suggested to result from the perception of one's work as enabling coherence, significance, purpose, and belonging.

More specifically, the facet *coherence* is intended as consistency regarding the individual self-concept and the work role assigned. When both match, there is an interconnection between one's identity and purpose, and the work-role itself (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). A sense of *significance* matches the pathway of contribution (Rosso et al., 2010). It refers to the perceived impact of one's actions as well as to transcendence. Moreover, the sense of *purpose* denotes a general sense of orientation, or purpose, which, ideally, is manifest in an organization's mission, vision, and ethos (Beadle & Knight, 2012). The fourth facet, a sense of *belonging,* describes a sense of unification, being part of something greater than the self. It is based on a corporate culture that emphasises cohesion and care for one another (Bailey et al., 2017), also known as socio-moral climate (Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2015).

A subjective experience of these four facets contributes to a general sense of work being meaningful. Similarly, when the four facets (or some of them) are perceived as lacking, work is perceived as meaningless (Schnell et al., 2013, 2019). Finally, and beyond the experience of meaningfulness, work can serve as a source of meaning too. The ME-Work also measures this additional dimension. It can be experienced when working conditions not only enable a sense of coherence, significance, purpose, and belonging, but also allow for realising personal potential and values (Schnell, 2020). According to the theoretical model of Rosso et al. (2010), work is a source of meaning when a job corresponds to how individuals view themselves and their orientations to work, regardless to the working condition: Thus, the focus is on the self in reference to a job that provides a sense of self-actualization, self-development, self-connection and social identity (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Martela & Pessi, 2018; Michaelson et al., 2014; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010).

As noted, only a few contributions have considered both facets of meaning and its subjective experience (Bailey et al. 2019b; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017). While some authors included specific measures of meaningful work mapping comprehensive facets, others focused on the degree of experienced meaning in work, and relationships with behavioural and organizational outcomes. The ME-Work, in contrast, is characterized by a modular nature. The three modules, i.e., module 1 – coherence, significance, purpose and belonging – named facets of meaning, module 2 – experience of meaningful and meaningless work –, and module 3 – work as source of meaning – allow to capture both conditions of meaning and subjective experiences. Accordingly, the modular nature has been tested via CFA to empirically confirm the theoretical differentiation which has shown good fit indices, $\chi^2(223) = 452.58$, $p < .001$ CFI = .950, RMSEA = .061, SRMR = .050. Moreover, by a psychometrical point of view, Schnell & Hoffmann (2020) study on ME-Work has largely presented evidence of its use by examining both linked construct and incremental validity. On the one hand, convergent validity examinations reported significant correlations at $p < .01$, between ME-Work scales and related measures, precisely; life meaningfulness (r = .53), job satisfaction (r = .44), socio-moral climate scales (r = .32), WAMI (r = .79) and professional efficacy (r = .44). Likewise, during discriminant validity examinations, substantial negative correlations at $p < .01$ were found between ME-Work scales and crisis of meaning (r = -.38), general mental distress (r = -.37), emotional exhaustion (-.31) and cynicism (-.53). On the other hand, Schnell & Hoffmann (2020) examined the incremental validity by analysing the predictive power of ME-Work of general mental distress and professional efficacy in addition to the work-related characteristics. They found that ME-Work modules substantially further explained the variance of the outcome variables. Besides, the predictive power of the ME-Work was compared with the WAMI. Here, the authors found that the ME-Work scales of meaningful work, work as a source of meaning, significance purpose and belonging dimensions highly overlapped with WAMI total score. According to Schnell & Hoffmann, this is mostly due to the fact that the WAMI comprehends similar dimensions to ME-Work's meaningful work, work as source of meaning and significance although they are not easily

distinguishable in structural analysis while the ME-Work shows a higher degree of differentiation.

The present contribution

The present contribution reports the Italian adapted version of the ME-Work Inventory, showing its psychometric properties on a large sample of $N = 624$ participants of different jobs. The ME-Work consists of 22 items and two parallel versions are available; one for employees (version A) and one for freelancers (version B). In version B, the total number of items is reduced to $N = 16$, as for people who are self-employed, they may have a different experience of *belonging* and *purpose* which cannot be applied here. As first step, the factor structure and reliability of the ME-Work are determined. The second part of the study provides evidence of the theoretical framework scale by testing the factorial model of the ME-Work. According to the theoretical framework (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020), the three modules are connected as follows: facets of meaning in work serve as indicators of a latent construct (H1) which predicts the dimension of work as source of meaning (H2), meaningful work (H3), and meaningless work (H4). After testing each model individually, the all-comprehensive model is tested (H5).

As noted above, Schnell & Hoffmann (2020)'s study provided evidence of the construct and incremental validity of the ME-Work inventory. However, although the main interest in meaningful work is in how it influences individuals' work behaviour, and proximal and distal outcomes (Allan et al., 2019), a few studies have considered other potential aspects related such as individual and organizational characteristics that contribute to meaningful work and its components (Duffy et al., 2016; Lysova et al., 2019; Tommasi, Ceschi & Sartori, 2020). As Bailey et al. (2019b) argued, there is a relative paucity of research on the relationship between meaningful work and sociodemographic variables such as personal and organizational characteristics. These refer to demographic differences like gender, age, and religious orientation, and to work and organizational differences, such as work orientation (job, career and calling), tenure, and professional role (Yeoman et al., 2019). Therefore, evidence of appropriate psychometric properties allows to test associations between ME-Work and personal and organizational characteristics. In

fact, the ME-Work approach was tested by analysing the Italian case with the examination of how the ME-Work dimensions and scales resemble or differ based on personal and organizational characteristics. Then, the preliminary results of both exploratory and inferential studies are discussed. These provide initial insights on the applications of the ME-Work inventory offering significant contributions for theoretical reflections, research-building, and practical implications.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants are 624 Italian workers (62.3% females, average age 39.84, SD = 12.44, 19-71 years, average of years of work 13.75, SD = 12.83, 0-48). They were invited via emails to voluntary fill in the online questionnaire. In the email text, they were informed about the study and asked to contribute. A link to access the online survey was reported allowing participation at a time convenient to them. After reading the description of the study, and privacy rules, they were asked to sign the informed consent in order to use the data for the purpose of the study. Completion of the questionnaire took about five minutes. Lastly, participants reported whether they were interested in completing the questionnaire a second time after four weeks. Altogether, 11.22% (N = 70) filled in the questionnaire a second time. All data were anonymized right after collection and a unique numerical ID was assigned to each completed questionnaire.

The study has been evaluated and approved by the ethical committee of the Department of Human Sciences of Verona University (n. 201930) in accordance to the declaration of Helsinki.

Instruments

Personal and organizational characteristics

In addition to common demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, education, and nationality), participants were asked to report also specific socio-demographic characteristics. These included religion (1 = atheist, 2 = agnostic, 3 = believer, and 4 = religion indifferent; cf. Steger, 2019), generational cohorts (born 1946-1964 = baby boomers, born 1965-1981 = generation X, and born 1982-2002 = generation

Y; cf. Lips-Wiersma, et al., 2019; Twenge, 2010; Weeks & Schaffert, 2019) psycho-physical health (1 = bad health to 5 = excellent; cf. Allan et al., 2019).

For organizational characteristics, after indicating their contract, weekly working hours, and years of work, they reported their perceived remuneration (1 = adequate, 2 = inadequate) and information about their specific job (i.e., type of job, job activities and job sector). Finally, respondents were asked to report their work orientation. By using the scale by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidle, & Tipton (1986), three descriptions of work orientation were presented, i.e., job, career and calling. This classification was included according to the large discussed role played by individual work orientation for meaningful work experiences (Steger et al., 2012). Participants indicated on a 4-point scale the extent to which each orientation represented them (1 = not at all like me, 4 = very much). The scores were obtained with the method proposed by Wrzesniewski et al. (1997). Following these guidelines, after deleting the data of participants who misunderstood the instructions and rated only one paragraph, the presence of the three groups was assessed statistically by the *k*-means cluster analysis, i.e., job, career, and calling.

Meaning in Work Inventory

The ME-Work for employees consists of 22 items to measure seven scales altogether. Thirteen items operationalize the four facets identified in the theoretical model previously proposed: *coherence* (e.g., "My job corresponds to my interests"), *significance* (e.g., "My work makes the world a little bit better"), *purpose* (e.g., "My employer cares about the welfare of society"), and *belonging* (e.g., "We are a great team at work"). The remaining ten items make up the scales to measure *meaningful work* (3-items, e.g., "My work seems meaningful to me"), *meaningless work* (3-items, e.g., "My professional activities seem meaningless to me"), and *work as source of meaning* (4-items, e.g., "My work activity gives meaning to my life"). As noted above, the original scale involves a unique version for freelancers that includes only two facets of meaning, i.e., coherence and significance (16 items).

Responses are given on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). However, in the Italian data collection responses were given on 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). In contrast to the

original instructions, and in line with another early investigation on meaning in work in Italy (Di Fabio et al., 2016), this decision was made in order to allow participants to have a neutral option. In fact, a midpoint can indicate indifference, ambivalence and many other positions (Yorke, 2001). During a preliminary assessment it is important to establish whether participant have a formal way to indicate when an item cannot be applied to them via odd-points Likert scale. By contrast, adding an even-points Likert scale could have produced a biased opinion due to a general acquiescence bias for the willingness to be on the positive side rather than accurate (Brancato et al., 2006).

According to the modular nature of the ME-Work, the first module assesses the four facets of meaningful work; module two assesses the degree of experienced meaningful and meaningless work. Work as source of meaning constitutes the third module. These three modules cover different facets of meaning in work and can be used independently. Module 1 and 2 can be combined to assess the experience of work as meaningful and meaningless. Work as source of meaning, module 3, assesses an additional aspect, i.e. the degree to which work contributes to a person's meaning in life.

Since the ME-Work has originally been developed in German, it has been translated by back-translation into Italian for the current ME-Work validation study.

Data analysis

The validation of the scale involved both assessment of consistency and confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). The factorial structures have been evaluated based on χ^2 and fit indices, i.e. Standardized Root Mean-square Residual (SRMR), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Parsimony unbiased Goodness-of-fit Index (PGFI), Parsimony Normed-fit Index (PNFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (Hu & Bentler, 1998). For a structural evaluation of the ME-Work inventory, a structural equation model (SEM) was used to test the degree to which the four facets of meaning relate to the three scales of work as source of meaning, meaningful work and meaningless work, namely, the overall theoretical model. As a first step the associations between facets of meaning (H1) and, work as source of meaning (H2), meaningful work (H3), and meaningless work (H4) were tested. Then, four models were involved during the model testing procedure of the

theoretical model underpinning the ME-Work (H5). Model 1 included the paths from facets of meaning in work to work as source of meaning and meaningful work. Model 2 tested the paths from facets of meaning in work to work as source of meaning and meaningless work. Model 3 comprised all the paths included in models 1 and 2. This model tested whether facets of meaning in work positively predicted work as source of meaning and meaningful work, but negatively meaningless work. Model 4 included meaningful work as a mediator between facets and work as source of meaning as a possible explanation of the relation between working conditions for meaningful appraisals and work as source of meaning in life. Moreover, a χ^2 difference test and established fit indices, including RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), were used to evaluate and compare the different models.). 2,000 bootstrap resamples have been used to obtain p-values and confidence intervals for indirect effects.

Finally, the associations between dimensions and personal and organizational characteristics have been tested with multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs). The factor means for the seven dimensions have been considered in separate MANOVAs for each characteristic, controlling for the effects of the other characteristics.

Analyses have been conducted using SPSS (version 22) and the additional module for analysis of moment structure (AMOS).

Results

ME-Work Structural Models and consistency

As a preliminary step, descriptive statistics of the Me-Work inventory were calculated. The skewness (range: -1.24-1.22) and kurtosis (range: -.978-3.146) values for each item were tested to not exceed +/- 2, thus supporting normality assumptions (Trochim & Donnelly, 2010).

As a second step, confirmatory factor analyses have been carried out to test the theoretical models. Firstly, the module of the hypothesized (H1) second-order structure of the four facets of meaning was tested with three comparative models (see table 1); a one-factor model (A.1), a four-factors model treating all the facets of meaning in work as separate factors (A.2), and one model with a second order

factor and four first-order factors (A.3). During the CFA, by the examination of item loadings, no items were discarded except one of the items in the purpose dimension, i.e., "At my workplace, profit comes before humanity" showed that be loaded too weakly on the factor purpose as in the others. After discarding this item, the latter CFA showed acceptable fit indices. Then, the three models were tested. Model A.1 did not show acceptable fit indexes, while fit indices of both model A.2 and A.3 were acceptable. According to the range of indices, Model A.2 was considered as the final model for facets of meaning.

Regarding the scales of meaningful and meaningless work, a 2-factor model has been tested (see table 1, model B.1). The model was acceptable with a negative covariance between the scales ($\beta = -.59$). Likewise, the 1-factor model for the scale of work of source meaning showed good fit (model C.1 in table 1). Then, internal consistency of each dimension was calculated with the Cronbach's alpha test showing a good level of reliability; work as source of meaning $\alpha = .86$; meaningful work $\alpha = .88$; meaningless work $\alpha = .89$; coherence $\alpha = .79$; significance $\alpha = .86$; purpose $\alpha = .77$; belonging $\alpha = .78$. Besides, scales and dimensions showed a high short-term stability (4-weeks test-retest stability coefficients average .55 for the scales, .58 for dimensions).

Associations between Facets of meaning and Work as source of meaning

With the purpose of testing the associations between the four facets of meaning and work as source of meaning (H2), the initial phase of the analysis evaluated the covariance of the latent factors. Given the affirmative evidence of the structures, the analysis of a unique model revealed that each facet of meaning was positively related with work as source of meaning (see table 2) which led to test the predictive model of the dimension of work as source of meaning. According to the model, taken together into a single second-order factor, the four dimensions positively predicted work as source of meaning, ($\chi^2(99) = 328.511$; CFI = .953, RMSEA = .061, TLI = .943, SRMR = .059, $\beta = .97$).

Associations between Facets of meaning and meaningful and meaningless work

Following the predicted model, the latter's associations (H3-4) were tested. Firstly, each path was considered separately in order to test if facets of meaning positively predicted meaningful work (path 1), negatively predicted meaningless work (path 2). Following the previous analysis, after testing the covariance between meaningful work and facets of meaning (table 2), the path from the second order factor of the four facets also predicted meaningful work; $\chi^2(85) = 276.136$; CFI = .957, RMSEA = .060, TLI = .943, SRMR = .057, β = .79. Likewise, meaningless work showed to have a strong negative covariance with the four facets (table 2), as shown by a significant predictive path model from facets to meaningless work: $\chi^2(85) = 254.244$; CFI = .962, RMSEA = .057, TLI = .953, SRMR = .056, β = -.67.

Model Testing

At the third stage, the degree to which the facets of meaning in work predicted the overall experiences of meaningful work and meaningless work as well as the degree of work as source of meaning (H5, see Figure 1) were assessed. During the model testing, covariates, i.e., gender and age were considered but no significant effects have been found. Thus, covariates were not included during the final model testing.

Table 1, Model testing of ME-Work dimensions and scales.

Model	chi-squared	df	CFI	PGFI	PNFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Facets of meaning							
A.1	1652.26	65	.505	-	.37	.20	.14
A.2	162.70	48	.963	.59	.70	.06	.047
A.3	219.16	61	.951	.61	.71	.07	.059
Meaningful and Meaningless work							
B.1	55.26	19	.989	.38	.53	.06	.02
Work as source of meaning							
C.1	22.104	2	.983	.20	.19	.13	.03

Note. Model A.1, 1-factor solution, model A.2, 4-factor solution, model A.3, second-order factor solution.

Table 2, Mean of item factor loadings of ME-Work dimensions, reliabilities and latent factor covariances.

| Personal variables	Work as source of meaning	Meaningful work	Meaningless work	Coherence	Significance	Purpose	Belonging
Factor Loadings							
N. Items	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
M(SD)	.78(.10)	.80(.03)	.81(.06)	.78(.10)	.74(.22)	.71(.16)	.70(.09)
Latent factor Covariance							
1. Work as source of meaning							
2. Meaningful work	.65***						
3. Meaningless work	-.54***	-.60***					
4. Coherence	.82***	.63***	-.55***				
5. Significance	.63***	.53***	-.37***	.52***			
6. Purpose	.48***	.38***	-.36***	.36***	.42***		
7. Belonging	.35***	.31***	-.34***	.34***	.21***	.35***	

Note. Significance *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
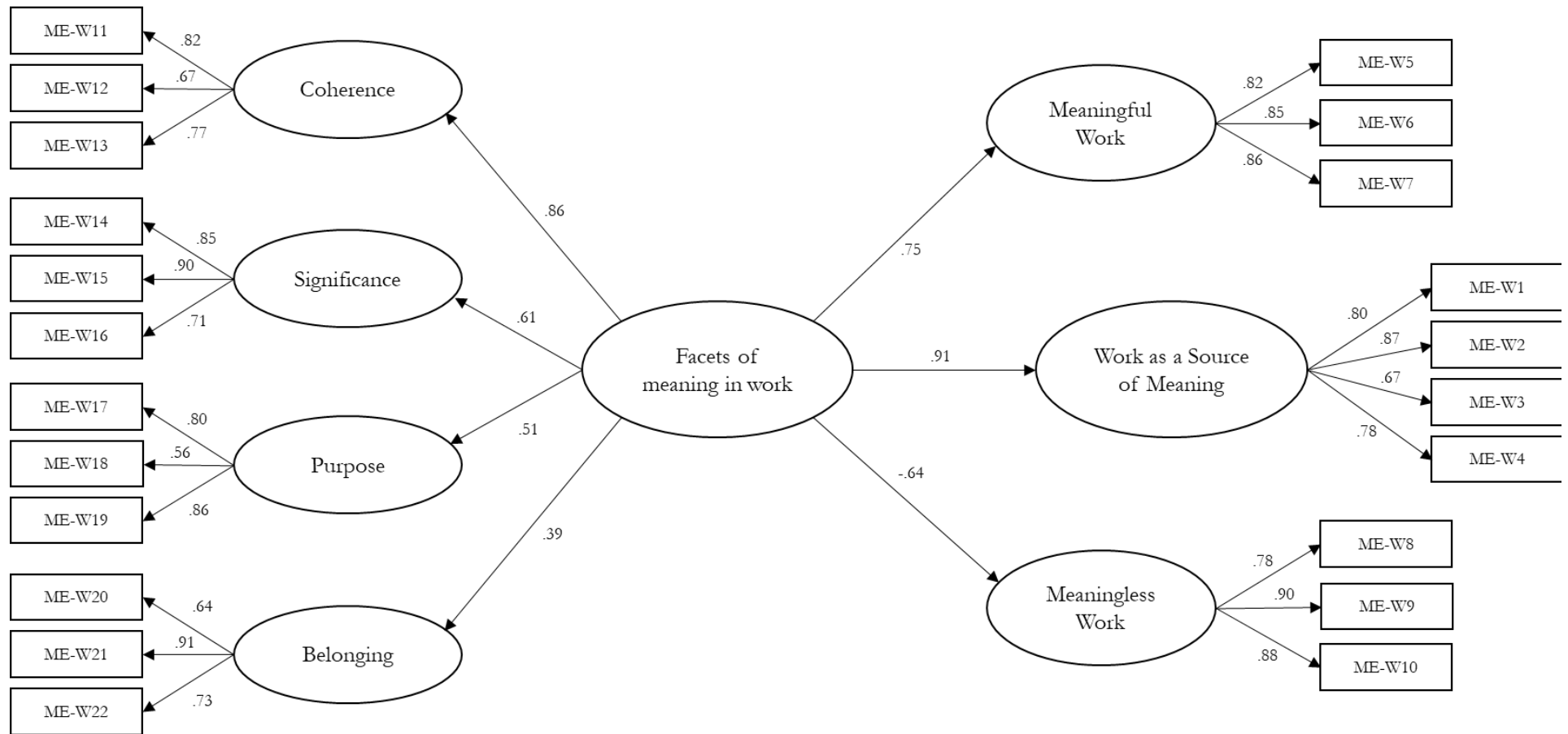
Figure 1, Final path model with latent factors with the second order factor of the four sources predicting work as source of meaning, meaningful work and meaningless work: $\chi^2(202) = 591.38$; CFI = .950, RMSEA = .056, TLI = .942, SRMR = .056.

Firstly, a model with meaningful work and work as source of meaning (1) was tested separately from the model with meaningless work and work as source of meaning (2). Both models were acceptable; model 1: $\chi^2(146) = 455.255$; CFI = .951, RMSEA = .058, TLI = .943, SRMR = .056, $\beta_{work\ as\ source\ of\ meaning} = .94$, $\beta_{meaningful\ work} = .72$; model 2: $\chi^2(146) = 433.66$; CFI = .954, RMSEA = .056, TLI = .946, SRMR = .059, $\beta_{work\ as\ source\ of\ meaning} = .94$, $\beta_{meaningless\ work} = -.60$. In order to test the hypothesis of possible mediation, meaningful work was included as a mediator in model 1. Coefficients suggested multicollinearity between the second order factor of the facets of meaning and work as source of meaning ($\beta = 1.19$), as also indicated by an ensuing negative association between meaningful work and work as source of meaning ($\beta = -.27$). Therefore, and following the theoretical model (figure 1), model 1 and 2 were combined to test the modular character of the ME-Work inventory that resulted to be significant with acceptable fit indices.

Associations of Me-Work Inventory with Personal and Organizational Characteristics

Table 3 reports the 6 panels of the associations between mean scores of the ME-Work and the subgroups of gender, generational cohorts, marital status, religion, and education. At the top panels, this table shows that for gender and generational cohorts there were not significant differences. For marital status, those who reported to be divorced or widowed, showed respectively lower and higher levels for work as source of meaning, meaningful work, meaningless work, coherence, purpose and significance, while partnered participants had the highest score in the dimension of belonging. For religious orientation, the group of believers yielded the highest levels on each dimension and scale, except for meaningless work. Agnostics reported the highest score in meaningless work, by contrast, and significantly lower levels in the other mean scores. The fifth panel reports the significant differences for education. Those who reported high school diploma degree or less, significantly differed from other participants concerning their levels of work as source of meaning and coherence. By contrast, despite the higher level for work as source of meaning, participants with a PhD showed the highest level of meaningless work experience, and the lowest level of meaningful work, significance, purpose,

and belonging. All in all, participants with a master's degree reported to have the highest levels in the ME-Work mean scores.

Moreover, associations between ME-Work and organizational characteristics were considered (see table 4). The top panel reports the significant differences for collar in which pink-collars showed significant higher levels for each dimension and scale, except for meaningless work that was significantly lower, and belonging, where the highest level was reported by blue collars. Conversely, blue collars had lower levels for work as source of meaning, meaningful work, and coherence. Regarding job contract, only one significant difference was established: meaningless work was higher for short-term contract employees. Besides, regarding differences in perceived remuneration, participants who perceived their remuneration as high showed significant lower levels of work as source of meaning and meaningful work, and higher levels of meaningless work. Regarding the facets of meaning, they showed significant lower levels for purpose and belonging in comparison with respondents with low perceived remuneration. The fourth panel reports differences pertaining to work orientations (i.e., job, career, calling). Respondents who saw their work as a calling had significantly higher levels in all scales apart from meaningless work, which was significantly lower. Participants who reported a job orientation, conversely, had the highest levels of meaningless work and significantly lower levels in all other ME-Work dimensions.

Table 3, Mean of the seven dimensions of the Me-Work Inventory in subgroups of gender, generational cohorts, marital status, religion and education

Personal variables	Work as source of meaning	Meaningful work	Meaningless work	Coherence	Significance	Purpose	Belonging	Wilks λ
Gender (F)	.03	.53	.54	1.09	.38	.42	.06	$L=.995$ $F=.401$
Female (n = 389)	3.43	3.97	2.06	3.43	3.51	3.27	3.85	
Male (n = 235)	3.42	3.93	2.11	3.35	3.47	3.23	3.87	
Generational Cohorts (F)	1.14	0.82	2.13	0.82	0.81	0.82	0.17	
1946-1964 (n = 73)	3.49	3.99	2.16	3.45	3.50	3.29	3.87	$L=.964$ $F=1.590$
1965-1981 (n = 230)	3.38	3.93	2.01	3.35	3.47	3.21	3.84	
1982-2002 (n = 304)	3.38	3.90	1.99	3.38	3.62	3.33	3.83	
Marital status (F)	2.85**	1.88**	1.39**	3.69**	1.59**	1.96**	1.85**	
Single (n = 295)	3.42	3.93	2.15	3.34	3.45	3.21	3.85	
Partnered (n = 261)	3.49	4.00	2.03	3.50	3.55	3.32	3.91_a	$L=.943$ $F=1.73$
Divorced (n= 50)	3.10_b	3.79_b	1.91_b	3.10_b	3.35_b	3.07_b	3.66_b	
Widower (n= 18)	3.60_a	4.13_a	2.17_a	3.63_a	3.80_a	3.50_a	3.74	
Religion (F)	0.77	1.292*	3.070*	1.238	4.427**	0.482	4.322**	
Atheist (n = 137)	3.40	3.96	2.12	3.40	3.42	3.21	3.83	$L=.961$ $F=1.501$
Agnostic (n = 77)	3.35	3.79_b	2.30_a	3.26	3.32_b	3.20	3.65_b	
Believer (n = 312)	3.48	4.00_a	2.01_b	3.43	3.60_a	3.28	3.91_a	
Education (F)	4.816***	1.341	5.065***	5.026***	3.146**	2.079	5.429***	
Secondary school (n = 64)	3.27_b	3.95	2.09	3.29_c	3.61	3.29	3.90	
High school (n = 284)	3.28_c	3.91	2.05_c	3.23_b	3.32_b	3.23	3.89	$L=.824$ $F=3.432$
Bachelor (n =74)	3.57	4.09_a	2.07	3.57	3.73	3.21	3.86	
Master (n = 86)	3.76_a	4.05	1.91	3.66_a	3.74_a	3.45	3.94	
PhD (n = 69)	3.53	3.83_b	2.47_a	3.60	3.54	3.10	3.48_b	
Other (n = 40)	3.58	4.08	1.94_b	3.49	3.55	3.24	4.03_a	

Note. Total amount of participants $N = 624$. Each cell reports the mean of the subgroup per each of the Me-Work inventory dimension. Mean with subscripts indicate a significant difference that is labelled in alphabetic order to indicate the highest score. *Significant differences are indicated by the stars, i.e., *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*

Table 4, Mean of the seven dimensions of the Me-Work Inventory in subgroups of collar, contract, perceived remuneration, and work orientation.

Personal variables	Work as source of meaning	Meaningful work	Meaningless work	Coherence	Significance	Purpose	Belonging	Wilks λ
Collar (F)	11.103***	7.387***	4.462**	12.134***	26.847***	1.35	2.17	
White (n = 246)	3.42_a	3.93	2.19	3.49	3.33_b	3.21	3.78	L=.856
Blue (n = 245)	3.28_b	3.87	2.07	3.19_b	3.40	3.25	3.92	F=7.122
Pink (n = 133)	3.72	4.14_a	1.89_a	3.60_a	3.97_a	3.36	3.87	
Contract (F)	2.82	1.82	4.889*	1.20	0.00	1.78	3.30	L=.958
Long term (n =453)	3.39	3.97	2.03	3.37	3.49	3.23	3.89	F=3.903
Short term (n = 171)	3.52	3.89	2.21_a	3.46	3.50	3.33	3.77	
Perceived remuneration (F)	12.340***	1.926*	17.421***	3.403	0.855	44.420***	8.727**	L=.910
Low (n = 256)	3.55_a	4.02_a	1.89	3.48	3.55	3.50_a	3.96_a	F=7.998
High (n = 319)	3.29	3.90	2.21_a	3.34	3.48	3.03	3.78	
Work Orientation	37.889***	10.624***	22.458***	25.204***	8.798***	7.420***	5.933**	
Calling (n = 112)	3.94_a	4.27_a	1.54_b	3.93_a	3.88_a	3.49_a	4.02_a	L=.651
Career (n = 226)	3.40	3.87	2.05	3.27_b	3.50	3.20	3.86	F=7.68
Job (n = 71)	2.65_b	3.61_b	2.74_a	2.03_c	3.06_b	2.90_b	3.53_b	

Note. Total amount of participants $N = 624$. Each cell reports the mean of the subgroup per each of the Me-Work inventory dimension. Mean with subscripts indicate a significant difference that is labelled in alphabetic order to indicate the highest score. *Significant differences are indicated by the stars, i.e., *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*

Discussion

The current study aimed at providing and presenting support for the use of the Italian version of the Meaning in Work inventory. Based on an extensive theoretical background, the ME-Work is a modular questionnaire relevant both for research and practice, consisting of three different modules: facets of meaning (1), meaningful and meaningless work (2), and work as source of meaning (3). Module 1 considers four different facets of meaning; coherence, significance, purpose and belonging. When supported by work and organizational context, these facets are assumed to contribute to the experience of meaningful work; their non-fulfilment is assumed to create a sense of work being meaningless. Module 2 measures meaningful work and meaningless work as the subjective perception of both qualities. In line with the underlying assumptions, modules 1 and 2 were highly correlated. Regardless of facets and perception of meaning, module 3 measures the experience of work as a source of meaning per se. It operationalizes the personal experience of work providing a sense of self-actualization, self-development, and social identity.

Results of the hypotheses testing via the CFAs offered extensive evidence of the multidimensional structure of the four facets of meaning in work module. The model with a second order factor and treating all the facets of meaning in work as four first-order factors was supported by testing the first hypothesis. Indeed, this model describes a module that measures facets of meaning in work as defined by coherence, significance, purpose and belonging. At the same time, these four facets of meaning in work showed to have higher correlations. Moreover, assumed factor structures of the scales were supported. Then, affirmative answers of the CFAs allowed to test the hypothesized associations (H2, H3-4, H5) between the ME-Work modules. The overall model of the ME-Work inventory (see Figure 1) was tested according to the fifth hypothesis, and after having considered each predictive model separately, i.e., facets of meaning to work as source of meaning (H2), meaningful work (H3) and meaningless work (H4). The results were consistent with the literature and the original German validation (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). Firstly, the subjective appraisals of work as meaningful or meaningless were highly correlated with the perception of certain work and organizational conditions, namely,

coherence, significance, purpose and belonging. The regression path from the second order factor of facets of meaning positively predicted the dimension of meaningful work, supporting the conceptualization of work as meaningful when it provides a sense of individuation, contribution, purpose and belongingness (Rosso et al., 2010). Likewise, meaningless work was negatively predicted by the four facets. This indicates that workers report their work to be meaningless when they perceive a lack of coherence, significance, purpose, or belonging. Work then turns into a frustratingly empty and pointless occupation (Schnell, et al., 2019).

Moreover, the affirmative results of the overall model have shown how the four facets of meaning in work play an important role in the experience of work as source of meaning. When a person acknowledged their job as sustaining their needs for personal growth and self-actualization, the four facets of meaning were also marked. This finding suggested an alternative path to work as source of meaning with a potential mediation by meaningful work. Therefore, a mediation was tested but discarded due to issues of multicollinearity.

Associations between ME-Work and personal and organizational characteristics

A series of MANOVAs were carried out with the aim to explicitly address individual differences with regard to gender and other demographic variables. Gender and generational differences did not show significant differences, which is consistent with the current literature on meaning in work. For example, within the literature on generational-cohorts and meaningful work, Weeks and Schaffert (2019) have made a significant effort to comprehend the different prioritization of the facets of meaning in work among generational cohorts. Their results indicated that the only significant differences were found within the cohorts and not between cohorts. Thus, the present results confirm previous research by indicating that meaning in work represents something that is common to workers of all ages and genders (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016; Weeks & Schaffert, 2019). Notwithstanding this, several other personal characteristics have shown substantial associations with meaning in work scores. We established significant differences for marital status and religious orientation, which demonstrated the linkage between work and non-work domains (Tommasi et al., 2020). To begin with, partnered participants reported higher levels

of belonging at work. Likewise, widowed or divorced participants reported lower levels in facets of meaning and meaningful work and higher levels in meaningless work (Oelberger, 2019). These findings tie in with studies that established higher degrees of meaning in life among married individuals, and higher crises of meaning among people living without a partner (Schnell, 2014, 2020). In religious orientation, agnostics reported lower levels in each dimension except for the meaningless work scale. Several studies have shown a closeness between meaning in work and religion, where work is discussed as something more than a mere survival wish for people with a religious orientation (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Martela & Pessi, 2018; Ward & King, 2017). In line with this, the agnostic orientation might be considered as a tendency of being highly sceptical or perhaps even indifferent (Schnell & Keenan, 2011) which might affect the appraisal of meaning in work.

When comparing levels of education, participants with lower education levels reported lower scores of work as source of meaning and coherence. These results seem to confirm that lower educated individuals tend to have an instrumental orientation to work (Mottaz, 1981). Respondents with higher education reported lower levels of meaningful work and higher levels of meaningless work. This is in contrast with previous studies on meaningful work. For most part of the literature, higher education is associated with high economic success which is assumed to positively influence the experience of work as meaningful (Rothmann, Weiss, and Redelinghhuys, 2019).

Analyses of organizational characteristics established differences between white, blue- and pink-collar workers confirming previous literature (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016). In the current sample, pink-collars were those who reported higher levels in all scales. When compared with the pink-collars, the blue-collars were those with lower levels in work as source of meaning, meaningful work and coherence. Additionally, within the contract subgroups there were no significant difference despite for meaningless work, which was higher in short-term workers. Not surprisingly, this result suggests that adverse and uncertain working conditions due to temporal limitations of work might curb positive experiences of work. Additionally, significant differences have been found for remuneration. Those who perceived their work as less remunerated reported high levels of significance for each

of the variables included in the ME-Work. This seems to reverberate the claim of several research studies on low-paid jobs where individuals may find a meaning beyond financial reward (Hu & Hirsh, 2017; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Further analyses on work orientation also confirmed the previous literature (Steger et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In fact, people who viewed their work as a calling reported the highest levels in each ME-Work scale, while job orientation had the highest level in meaningless work and the lowest level in the other scales.

Limitations and implications for research and practice

The current study has provided support for a use of the Italian version (see appendix) of the ME-Work inventory. However, some limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the original validation of study of the ME-Work by Schnell & Hoffman (2020) employed several measures for construct validation and only the work orientation scale was included as an additional measure in the present study. This is mostly due to the interest in the associations between meaningful work dimensions and personal and organizational variables. Moreover, because of time fatigue concerns in the primary evaluation of the meaning in work construct in the Italian context, a shorter questionnaire has been preferred to reduce the risk of fake responses. Moreover, in work and organizational studies, it is interesting to note the associations with specific behavioural and organizational outcomes. For further studies, it would be interesting to replicate the study by the application of a longitudinal design with the intention to assess ME-Work relations and its associations with these outcomes. Besides, the current classification of work orientations is turning under a renovate contestation by the scientific community. A support for two more classes of working orientation is advanced, namely: social embeddedness (belongingness), and busyness (filling idle time with activities) (Willner et al., 2020). This is to say that singular patterns in the data collected were noted. In fact, respondents in some cases categorized themselves as both career and calling orientated, thus suggesting a fourth class of orientation. In other cases, respondents showed to be surprisingly indifferent by classifying themselves as little interested in job, career and calling. Therefore, further investigation might include a different categorization for work orientation for comparison with ME-Work.

Secondly, the current study initially aimed at validating the parallel ME-Work version for freelancers, however, only $N = 68$ freelancers participated in the study which is in contrast with the convention for sample size requirements for CFA (Wolf, Harrington, Clark & Miller, 2013). Therefore, the collected freelancers' sample was not included in the analysis. Further evaluation of the ME-Work could address this issue in order to assess the factorial structure and the personal and organizational variables that might have a relevance for this kind of workers. Finally, the current study has used a 5-point Likert scale to avoid uncertainty in respondents. In the future it is suggested to consider the use of a 6-point Likert scale as recommended by the scale authors (Schnell, Höge & Pollet, 2013; Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020).

As research on meaningful work progresses in the light of many disruptive challenges within the labour market, according to the psychology of working theory (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016; Duffy et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2019b) numerous authors are trying to heighten attention on practices to help individuals yearn meaning and connection in their work. This is the case for the long burgeoning amount of studies interested in constructing decent work and decent lives (Blustein et al., 2019). Therefore, in view of the rapidly work changes, scholars' efforts are needed to foster new developments for the pursuit of meaningful work (Lysova et al., 2019) by the employment of valid and useful assessment tools. It is in this context that the ME-Work has been proposed stressing the importance on meaningful work and deriving such a measure from findings on meaning in life (Schnell, 2020) and meaning in work (Rosso et al., 2010; Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). Therefore, beside the limitations and implications for further studies, a variety of possible applications of the ME-Work in research and practice can be presented (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). When compared with other measures, the ME-Work stands out as offering both economical as well as differentiated modules, by capturing four dimensions facets of meaning as they are discussed in several theoretical contributions. Its applications in organizational and managerial settings can lead to richer interpretations and descriptions about how and to what extent workers of an organization perceive a meaning in their job. Firstly, insights from individual scores of coherence, significance, purpose and belonging can lead to practical implications as the creation of

conditions for meaningful work provision. Although meaning cannot be supplied and managed by top-down practice, and normative conditions could not reflect a subjective experience of meaning in work (Bailey et al., 2019a; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Michaelson et al., 2014), it can be supposed that meeting certain objective characteristics may lead to higher levels of meaningful work. For instance, assessment of the facets of meaning could inform career guidance in the work setting. Person-job fit, and contextual factors conditions could thus be promoted, as well as the strengthening of individual professional profiles, competences, and empowerment (Duffy et al., 2019; Schnell et al., 2013). Moreover, significance or the sense of contribution may be fostered by sustaining task varieties and the overall significance of working activities (Allan et al., 2016b), promoting their effects of prosocial impact (Martela & Riekki, 2018). Likewise, belonging represents a significant concern in organizational setting. As for purpose, managerial and organizational policies might promote a socio-moral climate, prosocial activities and practices and facilitate relatedness, trust and a sense of community (Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2020). Finally, practitioners might use the ME-Work to assess the distribution of the four facets and their absolute values in the organizational context and professional job sectors. On this basis, they could be able to devise training interventions by the adoption or adaptation of specific approaches following the evidence of facets' distribution and prevalence.

Due to its modular nature, the ME-Work inventory is likely to be a useful tool for personnel assessment and selection, human resources managerial practice and project training development. For instance, the work as source of meaning scale might help in career assessment and in personnel selection to have a rich comprehension of the subjective pursuit of to meaning and the personal meaning attributed to one's work of workers. Likewise, in devising a training project, the use of meaningful work and/or meaningless work scales can offer an examination of the risk of the existential erosion of workers as well as the workers' interests in meaning (Bailey et al., 2017).

Conclusion

As with all the literature on meaningful work, the present contribution hopes that appropriate research would help to improve job quality and support individual lives and wellbeing. It is apparent that the constant labour and economic transformation will increase in the future impacting on the individual quest for meaning in work. Since the beginning of 2020, the SARS-COV 2 pandemic has been putting all the job sectors and workers (employees, employers, freelancers) in a sudden, renovated and uncertain working state. Thus, a new avenue of questions on meaning in work will be opened for research and practice. Besides the theoretical grounds, the ME-Work is thought as a feasible and versatile assessment tool focused on the personal experience of work and organizational provisions for meaning in work. The contribution has shown its relevance for the comprehension of several conditions of work and workers in the pursuit of meaningfulness. Then, the ME-Work might be used for investigating separated aims of the research and practice, overcoming potential barriers of mobility limitations, and involving different ways of research on the psychology of workers and job quality.

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CHAPTER 3

Meaningful work as a multilevel and temporally dynamic construct… and why it matters

- Meaningful work phenomenon is the inherently subjective experience of meaningfulness at work, which can be impacted by different conditions (i.e., work context and psychological conditions) i.e., Paradox 2. Moreover, empirical studies on meaningful work remain sparse and the possible investigations of its variations and fluctuations are absent, i.e., Paradox 1.

- In the present study, we examined the role of work conditions (i.e., team climate, co-workers support, and task significance) and psychological conditions (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, competence) in the experience of meaningful work on a daily basis. Moreover, given the inherently subjective nature of meaningful work, we examined whether the level of steady meaningful work, i.e., the subjective evaluation of one's own work as holding significance per se, influence the within-persons associations.

- We collected data via a diary study for a total sample of N = 114 employees from six organizations and N = 545 observations.

- Multilevel analysis revealed that task significance and competence positively predict episodic meaningful work. Moreover, results of the cross-level analysis showed how high levels of steady meaningful work strengthened such within-person associations.

- These findings offer insights into how employees can experience meaningful work during a workday by providing initial evidence on meaningful work as a multilevel and temporally dynamic phenomenon.

Keywords: meaningful work, daily meaningful work, psychological and work conditions, diary study method.

Introduction

In the last two decades, research in work and organizational behaviour has shown an increasing interest in the dynamics and processes which lead to optimal work conditions of individuals, organizations and institutions (Michaelson et al., 2014; Nielsen et al., 2020). These endeavours are part of an expanding effort to better understand the factors that contribute to meaningful work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010), which can be defined as the experience and perception that one's own work is significant in a broader sense. This, in turn, leads to positive individual and organizational outcomes such as work engagement (Woods & Sofat, 2013) and job performance (May et al., 2004).

Meaningful work is an inherently subjective evaluation and associated with a pervasive positive attitude towards one's job, which can be stable over time as well as episodic or occasional. Thus, a critical aspect of meaningful work is the question of its temporal dynamic, namely, the intensity of the experience, the frequency with which it occurs, and the dichotomy between stability and occasionality over time (Bailey et al., 2019). Therefore, meaningful work should be considered via a dual conceptualization: (a) as a permanent steady mindset, i.e., steady meaningful work, covering the subjective evaluation of work as contributing to personal flourishing which (b) can also occur episodically, i.e., episodic meaningful work, as a temporal dynamic psychological phenomenon. However, no prior empirical studies specifically focused on this distinction and on the multilevel and temporally dynamic nature of meaningful work (Lysova et al., 2019; Tommasi et al., 2020). Questions related to how employees can experience meaningful work during a workday (i.e., episodic experience of meaningful work) and how this is influenced by steady meaningful work remain unanswered in the empirical literature.

We address this gap by using multi-level modelling, which allows insights into the stable and changeable conditions of meaningful work (Allan, 2017; Lysova et al., 2019). Focussing on the temporal-dynamic psychological and multilevel nature of the construct allows a better comprehension of factors that are assumed to be related to meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2018; Fletcher & Schofield, 2019). Ultimately, this research can help practitioners to specify targets as well as organizational and individual dimensions to be addressed by possible interventions. Our

work expands on the recent conceptualizations of meaningful work by empirically distinguishing potential dynamics and processes which can contribute to optimal conditions of individuals, organizations and institutions. We investigate (a) how daily work conditions as well as psychological conditions of the employees lead to the experience of meaningfulness during the workday and (b) how employees' levels of subjective long-term evaluation of meaningfulness affect these daily dynamics underpinning the episodic experience (Figure 1).
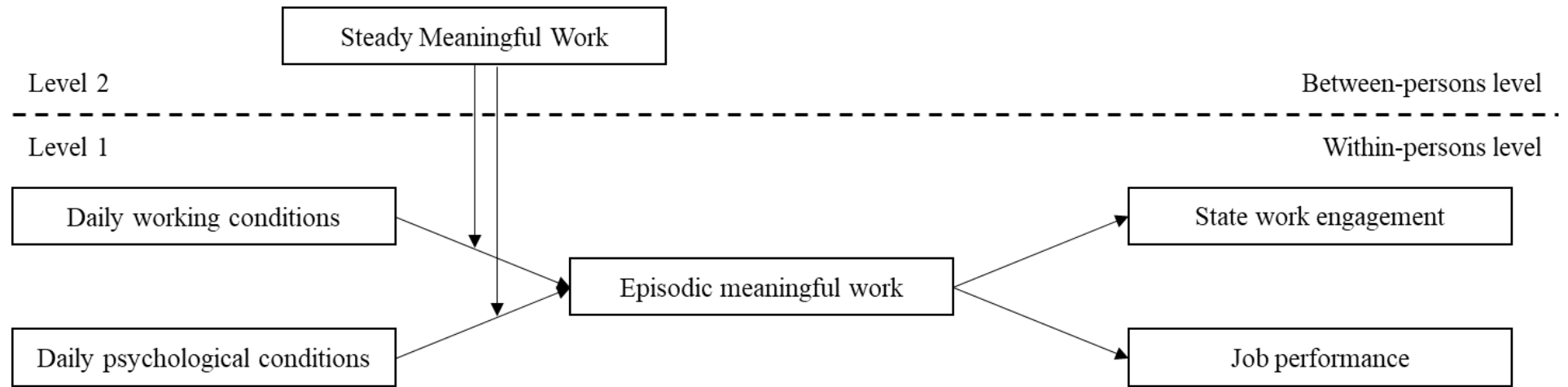
Figure 1, Graphical depiction of the hypothesized model.

Theoretical foundation of the model

Work and psychological conditions for episodic meaningful work

Situational conditions at work, as well as employee's psychological conditions, can influence the experience of meaningfulness. For example, work-related opportunities and certain work aspects can elicit occasional meaningfulness (Chalofsky, 2003; Lavy & Bocker, 2018; Harpaz & Fu, 2002; Matz-Costa et al., 2019; Vogel et al., 2019). The Job Demands and Resources (JD-R) model has been used to identify potential contextual factors related to meaningful work (Bakker, 2014; Steger et al., 2013). Accordingly, team climate, co-workers' support and task significance represent work resources capable of explaining the daily variations of meaningful work (Allan, 2017; Bakker, 2014). Team climate can lead to meaningful work experiences as an indicator of team success and team interactions while co-workers' support reflects the social resources in the pursuit of specific work tasks. Likewise, task significance represents a core work resource that can change during the day depending on the nature of the work tasks (e.g., tasks with a clear purpose versus an ambiguous purpose; Fletcher et al., 2017). Drawing on these, the following hypotheses regarding work and organizational conditions can be made:

H1a: Team climate is positively related to episodic meaningful work.

H1b: Perception of co-workers' support is positively related to episodic meaningful work.

H1c: Perception of task significance is positively related to episodic meaningful work.

Similarly, the satisfaction of psychological needs can lead to the sustained presence of positive individual states and thereby make work seem meaningful (Martela & Riekki, 2018). Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, research has shown that a small set of basic psychological needs constitutes a species-typical feature of the human experience of meaningfulness which could be considered universal across individuals and occupations (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, and competence; Baumeister et al., 2013; Martela & Riekki, 2018; Martela & Ryan, 2016; Vogel et al., 2019). Autonomy refers to actions that are performed without external

pressure and reflect an individual's true identity. Likewise, relatedness reflects the extent to which individuals are connected to others and varies as a function of the composition of, and interactions between, workgroup members. Competence (i.e., a sense of being able to do an activity) can vary depending on the employee's sense of mastery and efficacy, which can also boost the presence of meaningfulness at work. Accordingly, we predict that:

H1d: Perceived autonomy is positively related to episodic meaningful work.

H1e: Perceived relatedness is positively related to episodic meaningful work.

H1f: Perceived competence is positively related to episodic meaningful work.

Daily work outcomes: The mediating role of meaningful work

Experiencing meaningful work leads to positive individual and organizational outcomes, including temporal dynamic work engagement and job performance (Allan et al., 2019; Bakker, 2014; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009, 2014). In line with this research, we argue that episodic experiences of meaningful work mediate the association between both daily work conditions as well as psychological conditions, and (a) work engagement and (b) job performance.

In the literature, both daily work conditions as well as psychological conditions are presented as fluctuating factors that can determine employees' temporal dynamic state (e.g., work engagement) and variations in job performance (Bakker, 2014; Fletcher et al., 2017; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Employees' capability to engage in work and subsequently to have a good level of subjective job performance is enabled both by the perception of the work context and the satisfaction of personal needs. Work conditions include the physical, social and organizational aspects that can affect employees' (a) desire and capacity to engage with work goals as well as the (b) ability to achieve them. When basic psychological needs are satisfied this can foster daily work engagement and job performance (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019; Gagné, 2014). The satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence elicits individuals' broadening of the thought-action repertoire for optimal psychological functioning at the workplace (Martela & Riekki, 2018; Martela & Ryan, 2016). Conversely, the frustration of basic psychological

needs impairs the ability to engage and perform at work (Bailey et al., 2017; Schultz et al., 2015). We posit the following hypotheses:

H2a: Work conditions and psychological conditions are positively associated with work engagement.

H2b: Work conditions and psychological conditions are positively associated with daily job performance.

Moreover, a recent meta-analytical study on the positive outcomes of meaningful work revealed that it reliably and primarily leads to higher work engagement (Allan et al., 2019). Indeed, these dimensions are strongly related (Kahn, 1990), with meaningful work activating an affective-cognitive process that increases the capacity to engage employees at work. Thus, episodic meaningful work may mediate the associations between both work conditions as well as psychological conditions and work engagement (Fletcher et al., 2017). According to seminal organizational theories such as the Job Characteristics Theory (JCT; Hackman & Oldham, 1976), episodic meaningful work represents one of the key factors for employees to have higher job performance. Although recent evidence suggests that the correlation between these concepts may be only modest (i.e., 0.33; Allan et al., 2019), the direction of the relationship consistent with the literature.

H2c: Episodic meaningful work mediates the relationship between both perceived work conditions as well as psychological conditions with work engagement.

H2d: Episodic meaningful work mediates the relationship between both perceived work conditions as well as psychological conditions with daily job performance.

Moderation effects of between-persons steady meaningful work

The dual conceptualization of meaningful work (a) as a permanent steady mindset covering the experience and perception that work is contributing to personal flourishing and (b) as an episodically occurring temporal dynamic psychological phenomenon suggests that they can interrelate. Such a view led researchers to posit the "steady" nature of meaningful work as the individual subjective sense of meaningfulness covering the way individuals view themselves at work over a prolonged period of time (Michaelson et al., 2014; Tommasi et al., 2020). We argue

that steady meaningful work influences relations between both work conditions as well as psychological conditions and episodic experiences of meaningfulness. Individuals with higher levels of steady meaningful work will be psychologically capable to positively affect their experience at the workplace (Berg et al., 2015; Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Therefore, we hypothesize a moderating role of steady meaningful work:

> H3a: The positive association between work conditions and episodic meaningful work is stronger for higher levels of steady meaningful work.
>
> H3b: The positive association between psychological conditions and episodic meaningful work is stronger for higher levels of steady meaningful work.

Method

Participants and procedure

Employees (n = 130) from six Northern Italian organizations volunteered to participate in the study. A total of 140 employees have been contacted via email by one of the researchers to recruit the sample. Out of the total, n = 10 did not complete the diary pack (response rate = 96.4%), while n = 16 subjects were discarded because of missing data in the returned questionnaires for a resulting number of $n = 114$ participants with n = 545 observations.

Participants (41.98% females, 62.3% with long-term contracts, 46.15% highly educated, average age $M = 35.92$, $SD = 12.59$) were informed about the aim of the study and instructed about the study procedure by the researcher, after which they signed an informed consent form if they wished to continue. We informed about the use of the diary study as a means for collecting data on characteristics within the work environment that might fluctuate over time. Following the recommendations for the diary study method (Ohly et al., 2010), we constructed a diary pack comprising two main sections, the first assessing the between-person variables that participants had to complete before and after diary study data collection (average minutes for completing the section = 12.31, $SD = 4.44$). The second section aimed at accompanying participants in the daily compilation. We instructed participants to fill in the daily questionnaires after the respective workdays; they were

instructed to choose 5 days in four weeks which, to them, held some sort of augmented meaningfulness, as well as days which, on the contrary, displayed a perceived lack of meaning at work (average period of data collection, 22 days, *SD* = 12). Then, we tasked them to reflect on the items and compared them with their experiences at work before filling in the diaries (average minutes for completing a daily diary = 5.22, *SD* = 4.64). Moreover, we left an empty space to report any significant issues that occurred in the data collection that might affect the process. The study has been approved by the ethical committee of the Department of Human Sciences of Verona University (n. 201930) according to the declaration of Helsinki.

Instruments

Within-person measures

We included specific within-persons factors expected be related to the daily associations considered. Participants reported the day entry (1 = Monday to 7 = Sunday) in addition to the number of compilations of the diary (1 to 5) in order to control the effect of time. Moreover, we asked participants to indicate the quality of the day at work by rating 2-items for controlling for good/bad days (i.e., All things considered, I had a good day at work today, All things considered, I had a bad day at work today; Fletcher et al., 2017). We also asked participants to report their daily mood indicating if they had a 1 = good, 2 = quiet or 3 = bad day.

Then, we used the following grouped variables for daily work conditions, daily psychological conditions, episodic meaningful work and daily outcomes. Each of the variables' items was modified by adding "today, at work" in order to reflect the situational perspective which was measured on a 7-point rating scale of agreement (1 = not at all, to 7 = completely agree). To assess work conditions, we measured (a) task significance (2-items, e.g., today's tasks have given me the ability to improve the well-being of other people, α = .89-.95, Grant, 2008), (b) co-workers' support (2-items,e.g., today, the people I have worked with were competent, α = .84-.92, Gillen et al., 2001), and (c) team climate (2-items, e.g., there was a good working climate at my work, α = .79-.88, Kattenbach et al., 2010). To assess psychological conditions, we used the adapted version of the Basic Psychological Needs scale (Chen et al., 2015) comprising the dimensions of (a) autonomy (2-

items, e.g., today, I felt that I was free to choose what to do at work, α = .87-.93), (b) competence (2-items, e.g., today, I felt confident that I could do my homework well, α = .83-.92), and (c) relatedness (2-items, e.g., today, I felt interested in me from the people I care about, α = .80-.86).

To measure episodic meaningful work, we used module 2 of the Meaning in Work (Me-work) inventory (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020; Tommasi et al., 2021). The Me-work offers a multidimensional approach that has revealed better validity in German and Italian samples in capturing facets of meaning in work (module 1), in addition to the general assessments of one's own work as meaningful, meaning-less (module 2) and source of meaning (module 3). In our study, we used the scale of meaningful work of module 2 with items adapted for allowing the participants to fill in the answer according to how they felt about their workday (3-items, e.g., today, my work was meaningful to me, α = .90-.96).

Finally, to assess job outcomes, we used (a) a 3-item shortened version of the three dimensions of work engagement (e.g., today, I felt proud of what I did, α = .80-.87, Schaufeli et al., 2006), and the (b) 2-item self-rated job performance by Williams & Anderson (1991) (e.g., today, I got interested in the other employees, α = .54-.67).

Between-person measures

We measured between-persons variables of meaningful work at the start (pre) and the end of the data collection (post). We solely referred to the scale of meaningful work in module 2 of the ME-Work to capture the steady level of mean-ingful work within the participants (3-items, e.g., I see meaning in my work, α = .93-.95, on a 6-point rating scale from 1 = not at all, to 6 = completely).

Moreover, we measured the following between-persons variables; gender (1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = other, 4 = prefer not to say), age (in years), organization (i.e., 1 = private or 2 = public sector organization among the six involved in the study), contract (1 = long-term, 2 = short term).

Data analysis plan

The statistical analysis was conducted using the SPSS statistics version 22 for descriptive statistics and the RStudio program with the specific programs for

multilevel modelling of nlme (Pinheiro et al., 2020), the lme4 (Bates, 2018), and the RMediation package which computes the confidence intervals (CIs) for a non-linear function of the model parameters in both single–level and multilevel models (Tofighi & MacKinnon, 2011). Before the analysis, data were hierarchically ordered at two levels with n = 545 observations clustered within N = 114 participants. In this, we follow the suggestions for mean centring (Ohly et al., 2010) and higher-level variables were grand-mean centred, and lower-level variables were centred on the person's mean.

We conducted a multi-level analysis for testing the hypotheses. In the overall models, we controlled for between- and within-persons variables of gender, organization, contract, and day quality given the positive correlations with the dimensions considered in the study. The mediation hypotheses were tested through the asymmetric confidence limit method. We calculated confidence intervals of mediation effects based on Monte Carlo simulations for assessing mediation (Tofighi & MacKinnon, 2011). The moderation effect was tested by following the recommendations for cross-level moderations (see, Aguinis et al., 2013; Mathieu et al., 2012). Accordingly, we proceeded by testing (a) model-A, including within-person predictors; (b) model-B added within-persons predictors allowing variation in slopes; (c) model-C added the between-person predictors; and (d) model-D added the cross-level interactions. We calculated confidence intervals separately for low (mean – 1 SD) and high (mean + 1 SD) levels of moderation. Confidence intervals not including zero indicate a significant mediation.

Results

Descriptive statistics

We first examined if the proportion of the variance of meaningful work was attributed to the different levels of analysis. The intra-class correlation showed that 54.2% of variance of meaningful work was attributable to between-persons differences. A significant amount of variance is left to be explained by within-person fluctuations justifying the use of the multi-level approach. Table 1 reports the mean, standard deviation, and correlations among the between- and within- persons study variables.

Hypotheses testing

To test the first group of hypotheses (H1a-c, i.e., whether team climate, co-workers' support and task significance predict meaningful work; H1d-f, i.e., whether autonomy, relatedness and competence predict meaningful work), we examined three models separately (see Table 2): a control model (Model 1) where we controlled for gender, organization, contract, day quality and steady meaningful work; Model 2 added daily work conditions as well as psychological conditions separately by testing two sub-models, i.e., Model 2a for work conditions (H1a-c), and Model 2b for psychological conditions (H1d-f). In turn, we tested the two conditions together in Model 3 (H1a-f). Results supported hypotheses H1c and H1f as showing only task significance (for work conditions) and competence (for psychological conditions) were significantly associated with the daily experience of meaningful work.

Episodic meaningful work as a mediator

The second class of hypotheses (H2a-d) cover the mediation effects of episodic meaningful work between the associations of both work conditions as well as psychological conditions and work engagement (H2c) and job performance (H2d)[3]. Table 2 shows the results of the multilevel models. We firstly tested the hypothesized associations (H2a-b) of work conditions, psychological conditions, and

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[3]We followed Baron and Kenny (1986)'s procedure for mediation conditions. Results were similar when using the PROCESS macro for mediations (Hayes, 2013).

episodic meaningful work predicting work engagement (i.e., Model 5, H2a) and job performance (i.e., Model 6, H2b). Results of Model 5 show that higher day quality, task significance, competence, episodic meaningful work and lower autonomy predicted higher work engagement. Model 6 revealed that only higher competence and higher episodic meaningful work predicted better job performance.

In order to test the mediating role of episodic meaningful work we used the Monte Carlo method for assessing mediation (MCMAM). Accordingly, we tested H2c, (i.e., whether meaningful work mediates the associations between task significance on work engagement, and competence on work engagement) and H2d, (i.e., whether episodic meaningful work mediates the association between competence and job performance). Although the effect size was relatively small, results of H2c showed that the effects of both task significance and competence on work engagement can be explained by an indirect effect through episodic meaningful work. Similarly, results of H2d showed that competence was indirectly related to job performance via episodic meaningful work (see Table 3). Given that all of the work conditions as well as the psychological conditions were significantly correlated with work engagement and job performance (see Table 1), we also tested the mediating role of episodic meaningful work for co-worker support, team climate, and relatedness on work engagement and job performance. Results showed that the effect of co-worker support on work engagement was mediated by episodic meaningful work. Additionally, the effect of autonomy on job engagement was also mediated by episodic meaningful work. See Table 5 for the results of these mediations.

Table 1, mean, standard deviation, and correlations among the between- and within- persons variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Between-persons variables																						
1. Gender	-	-																				
2. Age	35.92	12.59	.127**																			
3. Organization	-	-	.025	.105*																		
4. Contract	-	-	.128**	.122**	.040																	
5. Work Experience	9.91	10.34	-.039	.792**	.033	.032																
6. Remuneration	-	-	-.107*	.063	.057	-.155**	.162**															
7. S-meaningful work	4.14	1.06	.048	.198**	.333**	.181**	.064	.030														
Within-persons variables																						
8. Daily Mood	1.22	.56	.068	.035	-.074	-.009	-.005	-.034	-.011													
9. Day Quality	3.81	.79	.059	.054	.146**	.029	-.022	.033	.258**	-.314**												
10. Task significance	5.06	1.14	.006	.141**	.317**	.123**	.075	.030	.349**	-.274**	.480**											
11. Team climate	5.18	1.14	.004	.147**	.186**	.117**	.029	-.008	.356**	-.213**	.506**	.634**										
12. Supervisor support	4.71	1.38	.020	-.039	.214**	.106*	-.048	.081	.173**	-.240**	.424**	.520**	.601**									
13. Co-worker support	5.29	1.08	-.001	.165**	.124**	.107*	.041	-.059	.382**	-.154**	.384**	.526**	.770**	.446**								
14. Autonomy	5.15	1.32	-.024	.128**	.188**	.104*	.040	.026	.336**	-.110**	.427**	.470**	.582**	.522**	.576**							
15. Relatedness	5.09	1.16	-.002	.114**	.237**	.151**	.029	-.029	.347**	-.255**	.438**	.554**	.649**	.496**	.601**	.617**						
16. Competence	5.23	1.22	.055	.159**	.196**	.155**	.040	-.113**	.355**	-.153**	.391**	.420**	.473**	.334**	.421**	.522**	.684**					
17. Beneficence	5.09	1.15	.044	.073	.266**	.184**	.012	-.047	.326**	-.194**	.320**	.555**	.356**	.290**	.353**	.383**	.557**	.678**				
18. E-meaningful work	4.98	1.32	.028	.152**	.209**	.172**	.083*	-.005	.441**	-.113**	.331**	.450**	.419**	.250**	.400**	.361**	.470**	.477**	.517**			
21. Work engagement	5.00	1.18	.039	.101*	.172**	.124**	.028	.014	.349**	-.229**	.372**	.438**	.389**	.246**	.352**	.287**	.491**	.593**	.670**	.745**		
22. Job performance	4.95	1.48	.081	.168**	.085*	.091*	.039	-.127**	.178**	-.102*	.202**	.202**	.227**	.076	.224**	.223**	.221**	.326**	.228**	.476**	.352**	

Note. Between-persons variable is grand mean centred while within-persons variables are person mean centred. SM-meaningful work = meaningful work steady mindset, E-meaningful work = episodic meaningful work. *p < .05, **p < .01

Table 2, Multilevel analysis for predicting episodic meaningful work, work engagement and daily job performance

Independent variable	Episodic experience of meaningful work								Work engagement		Daily job performance	
	Model 1		Model 2a		Model 2b		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Control model												
Gender	-0.10	0.16	-0.05	0.15	-0.03	0.10	-0.05	0.14	0.00	0.07	0.15	0.19
Organization	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.04	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	0.06
Contract	0.24	0.16	0.17	0.15	0.08	0.10	0.10	0.14	-0.09	0.08	0.17	0.19
Day quality	0.33***	0.06	0.19***	0.07	0.31***	0.05	0.12	0.07	0.15***	0.05	0.03	0.08
Steady meaningful work	0.43***	0.07	0.37***	0.07	0.18***	0.07	0.32***	0.06	0.02	0.04	0.10	0.09
Working conditions												
Task significance			0.16	0.06***			0.15***	0.06	0.08**	0.04	-0.03	0.07
Team Climate			0.04	0.07			0.00	0.07	-0.04	0.05	0.02	0.08
Co-workers support			0.06	0.07			0.03	0.07	0.01	0.05	0.00	0.08
Psychological conditions												
Autonomy					0.00	0.05	-0.02	0.05	-0.15***	0.03	0.02	0.06
Competence					0.23***	0.05	0.06***	0.07	0.33***	0.04	0.15***	0.06
Relatedness					0.21	0.06	0.23	0.05	0.02	0.04	-0.11	0.07
Episodic meaningful work									0.53***	0.03	0.56***	0.05
Between-person variance	0.93		0.95		0.92		0.92		0.46		0.97	
Within-person variance	0.42		0.31		0.25		0.25		0.03		0.66	
Loglikelihood	1614.25		1610.41		1588.16		1591.81		1181.49		1686.78253	
Δ Loglikelihood	86.41***		90.25***		112.50***		108.86***		453.70***		164.37	

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*

Table 3, MCMAM test for indirect effects on work engagement and job performance

	Lower bound	Upper bound	ab	Effect size
Indirect effect on work engagement				
Episodic meaningful work as mediator				
Task signifi-cance	0.165	0.275	0.219	0.028
Competence	0.228	0.319	0.272	0.023
Indirect effect on job performance				
Episodic meaningful work as mediator				
Competence	0.106	0.221	0.161	0.029

Note. ab = a(relationship between predictor and mediator) X b(relationship between mediator and dependent variable). Confidence intervals for low, i.e., mean – 1 SD and high, i.e., mean + 1 SD, levels of moderation. Confidence intervals not including zero indicate a significant mediation.

Table 4, Multilevel modelling testing cross-level moderation effects on episodic meaningful work.

	Episodic experience of meaningful work							
	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model D	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Within-person								
Day quality	0.12	0.07	0.13	0.07	0.12	0.07	0.10	0.07
Task significance	0.18***	0.06	0.17***	0.06	0.15***	0.06	0.14***	0.6
Team Climate	0.00	0.07	0.01	0.07	0.00	0.07	0.03	0.07
Co-workers support	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.04	0.07	0.07	0.07
Autonomy	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.05	-0.03	0.05	-0.01	0.05
Competence	0.26***	0.05	0.24***	0.05	0.23***	0.05	0.18***	0.05
Relatedness	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.07
Between-person								
Gender					-0.04	0.13	-0.07	0.13
Organization					0.09	0.14	0.09	0.13
Contract					0.02	0.04	0.00	0.04
Steady meaningful work					0.31***	0.06	0.79***	0.26
Cross-level interaction								
Steady meaningful work*Task Significance							0.17***	0.05
Steady meaningful work*Competence							0.19***	0.04
Between-person variance	0.91		0.95		0.92		0.89	
Within-person variance	0.30		0.31		0.25		0.15	
Loglikelihood	1603.77		1598.41		1546.95		1527.91	
Δ Loglikelihood	96.89***		102.25***		153.71***		172.75***	

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*

Table 5, MCMAM test for additional indirect effects on work engagement and job performance

	Lower bound	Upper bound	ab	Effect size
Indirect effect on work engagement				
Episodic meaningful work as mediator				
Team Climate	-0.012	0.01	0.012	0.001
Co-workers' support	0.29	0.562	0.163	0.01
Autonomy	-0.019	0.013	0.001	0.001
Relatedness	-0.011	0.001	0.013	0.001
Indirect effect on job performance				
Episodic meaningful work as mediator				
Team Climate	-0.1	0.016	0.001	0.001
Co-workers' support	-0.1	0.01	0.001	0.001
Autonomy	0.0011	0.1471	0.001	0.02
Relatedness	-0.0012	0.014	0.001	0.001

Steady meaningful work as a moderator

We tested the cross-level moderation effects of steady meaningful work on episodic meaningful work via four models (see Table 4). Model B, with respect to Model A, had a better fit supporting the assumptions that the associations between the work conditions as well as psychological conditions and episodic meaningful work varied across individuals. In turn, Model C supported the progression for moderation by including the positive association between steady meaningful work and episodic meaningfulness. Therefore, with the last model (Model D) we tested the cross-level interactions of (a) steady meaningful and task significance as well as (b) steady meaningful work and competence. This model showed better fit indices than the previous Model C, supporting the third hypotheses (H3a and H3b). Indeed, there were significant positive interactions between (a) steady meaningful work and task significance, and between (b) steady meaningful work and competence. Accordingly, the simple slopes of both interactions were significant both at low and high levels of steady meaningful work (i.e., task significance $z = 3.61$, $p = .0003$; $z = -3.99$, $p = .0001$; competence, $z = 3.81$, $p = .0001$; $z = -4.17$, $p = .001$) with a substantial effect size for each interaction. Steady meaningful work explained 23% of the between-person variance in the task significance slope, and 24% of the between-person variance in the competence slope (see the two interactions graphically plotted in Figures 2 and 3). These results indicate that the personal view of meaningfulness in work plays a central role in the associations between the daily variables. That is, the tendency to see one's work as significant (or not significant) leads to different perceptions and experiences of one's working state.
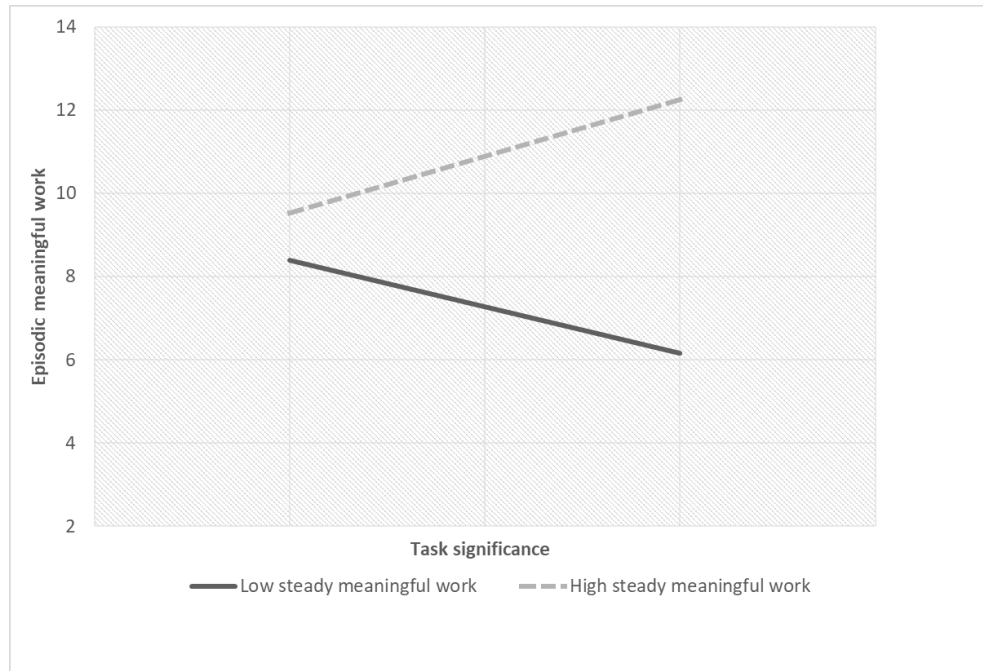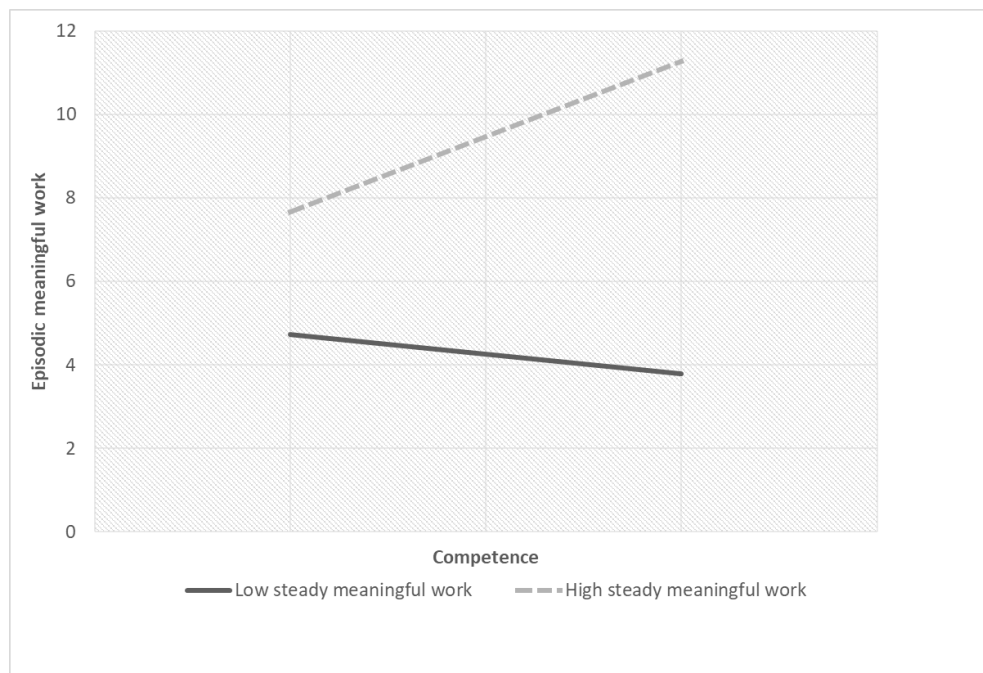
Figure 1

Figure 2

Discussion

The present study was designed to capture the dual conceptualization of meaningful work as both a steady and episodic phenomenon and examine the role that personal and contextual factors play in work engagement and job performance within that framework. The results of our diary study provided empirical evidence for the multilevel and temporally dynamic nature of meaningful work, in line with recent theorizing on the issue (Bailey et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2019; Tommasi et al., 2020). We also found that specific work conditions as well as psychological conditions (i.e., task significance and sense of competence) emerged as process variables able to explain fluctuations in reported meaningful work episodes. This means that employees are more likely to experience meaningful work on days when they see the significance and feel mastery of their tasks. Our results also indicate that episodic meaningful work mediates the associations between work and psychological conditions and daily work engagement and job performance. This finding demonstrates the motivating potential of meaningful work for job-related behaviour (Fletcher et al., 2017; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Accordingly, on days in which work seems more meaningful, employees are more capable to engage in their work and perform better. Moreover, evidence of cross-level moderation revealed a significant positive effect of steady meaningful work on the relationship between task significance and sense of competence with the daily experience of meaningful work.

Of the work and psychological factors used in our study, only task significance and sense of competence are predictive of episodic experiences of meaningful work when all predictors were used in the analysis. These results only partially support the existing literature (e.g., predictions from the JD-R model and Self-Determination Theory), as co-workers' support, team climate, autonomy, and relatedness were not significantly associated with meaningful work when considered simultaneously with other potential factors underlying meaningful work episodes. If these dimensions are examined independently, however, they appear to be directly affecting meaningful work (see, Allan, 2017; Bakker, 2014 for work conditions; see, Martela & Ryan, 2016 for psychological conditions). Our correlational analysis also provides support for this notion, as all of these constructs were positively related to

meaningful work. One possible reason why in a joint analysis only task significance and sense of competence emerge as predictors of meaningful work is that both might be more salient, evaluable, and present in people's minds during our diary study. Conversely, team climate and co-worker support (as well as autonomy and relatedness) could have emerged as more important predictors if participant responses were measured in teams or in specific occupations that rely on a high degree of cooperation within the team. Moreover, task significance and a sense of competence are conceptually different form the other predictors as they are representative of occupation-specific predictors of meaningful work: they influence the experience of meaningful work as a result of a cognitive-affective process of recognizing the objective value of a task (i.e., task significance, Lips-wiersma, 2019; Michaelson et al., 2014) or the personal value in mastering working skills (i.e., task significance, Chalofsky & Cavallero, 2019; Ciulla, 2012; Martela & Riekki, 2018).

Our results also provide an empirical answer to the proposition that an individual's steady level of meaningful work will interact with daily dimensions that underpin episodic meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2019; Tommasi et al., 2020). Steady meaningful work strengthens the associations between both feeling competent and episodic meaningful work as well as experiencing task significance and episodic meaningful work. Individuals who generally view their work as meaningful and important (i.e., with higher levels of steady meaningful work) are more likely to experience daily work as meaningful when they have the possibility to (a) evaluate their task as holding significance and (b) they are able to express themselves by the sense of mastering work skills. Furthermore, these results show that multi-level modelling is a potent tool to be used in the study of meaningful work in order to capture its multi-level nature (Allan, 2017; Lysova et al., 2019).

Applied implications

In the literature, questions on how to create and exploit opportunities within everyday work that enable employees to perceive their work as valuable and worthwhile are still largely unanswered. Our findings offer an initial reply to the call for research on how to foster and promote meaningful work as well as positive work outcomes in organizations (e.g., work engagement and job performance; Fletcher & Schofield, 2019; Lysova et al., 2019). Contextual approaches (e.g., job design)

can help to promote meaningful work (Molina-Azorín et al., 2020). Opportunities could be prompted with tasks that are – objectively and subjectively – purposeful and useful in order to foster a sense of contribution. Likewise, the creation of work opportunities during which employees feel capable and confident in their work tasks (i.e., sense of competence) could be also facilitated. Employees who view their work as generally meaningful may benefit differently compared to those who do not. Efforts to increase task significance and a sense of competence work especially well for employees who already see meaning in their work. Viewed differently, organizational interventions such as providing training on work activities as well as by enriching workers' day-to-day experience with a sense of contribution and skill mastery will not be as helpful to employees who lack a sense of general purpose and meaning in their occupation. For these employees, organizational efforts instead should be directed at a level which promotes the perception that their work is socially worthwhile in the first place (Lips-Wiersma, 2019).

Limitations

The present research provides an initial basis for understanding meaningful work as a multilevel and temporally dynamic construct. However, the findings have to be interpreted with some caution as a few limitations must be acknowledged. First, employees voluntarily participated in our study, which means that issues related to self-selection bias cannot be ruled out and may compromise the generalizability of our results. However, as participants were not compensated for their efforts, we can at least assume that participants were motivated by personal interest rather than financial incentives. Furthermore, we considered general dimensions for the daily assessment in a sample across a range of different occupations. However, the composition of our sample could have affected our results, such that coworker and team climate as well as autonomy and relatedness variables were not associated with meaningful work once the effects of task significance and sense of competence were accounted for. Given the different job characteristics of the employees in our sample, this should not necessarily be seen as an indication that these variables are never associated with meaningful work. In fact, all variables independently correlated with episodic meaningful work in our data set. Further

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investigation might tailor self-report measures according to the specific characteristics of the occupations considered (Ohly et al., 2010; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009).

Finally, we restricted our data collection to span a range of four weeks. We did so for practical reasons and to minimize participant drop out. Nonetheless, our data may not fully capture some long-term associations between and changes of the examined factors and meaningful work. This limitation does not affect the implications of our results per se, yet it may limit the extensiveness of their interpretation. Future studies could examine the temporal dynamics of the antecedents and consequences of meaningful work over a longer period of time.

Conclusion

The present study represents a first step towards broadening the focus of research to build a shared conceptual background and understand optimal human functioning in the dynamic context of work and organizations. In particular, our study offers a frame of orientation by which conceptual opportunities, critical reflections and applied practice on work and organizational phenomena can be suggested. We propose that further theorizing and empirical studies on meaningful work take its multilevel and temporally dynamic nature into account.

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CHAPTER 4

On meaningful work: a critical perspective through literary fiction analysis

> I wish to dedicate this particular chapter to your memory, and your infinite love for narrative fiction, my teacher G.T.

- The purpose of this paper is to use narrative fiction to give insights into a novel concept of work.

- The paper aims at presenting a normative and emancipatory meaning of work linked to meaningful work experience, i.e., what it is and what represents work that could be considered as a source of meaning, namely, Paradox 3.

- Using the example of Primo Levi's The Wrench (1978), a novel about work experience in everyday life and work practices, we demonstrate firstly the capabilities of accessing new knowledge by literary analysis and furthermore explore the meaning of work beyond conventional approaches.

- The Wrench is an explicit attempt at proposing a novel meaning of work and its role in human life. Through a series of extracts from the novel, we show what makes work valuable and worthy. Accordingly, work can allow people to actualize themselves, cultivate their skills (i.e., sense of competence), and satisfy their bodily and emotional needs. We present under which circumstances work can be experienced as meaningful or meaningless.

- This work represents an attempt to incorporate the rarely studied feature of literary analysis using an example of the equally marginalized conceptualization of meaningful work in work and organizational psychology studies (i.e., Paradox 3).

Keywords: literary fiction analysis, meaningful work, work and organizational psychology, critical psychology.

Introduction

Within work and organizational psychology (WOP), scholarly authors are witnessing heightened interest in meaningful work construct, i.e., the experience and perception of work as holding significance (Bailey et al., 2019). Meaningful work covers a wide spectrum of factors that may benefit employees and organizations (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017) so that the proliferation of reflections and explorations on this subject has highlighted its individual and social relevance (Yeoman et al., 2019). Accordingly, scholars in WOP have proposed positivist and unitarist models to understand meaningful work by referring to the subjective amount of experience rather than the type of experience, which is deemed to be characterized by a positive valence (Rosso et al., 2010). However, the tendency to consider processes and conditions for the experience of specific positive dimensions neglects whether or why work can be positive or not or if individuals fail to find such a psychological positive experience of their work (Michaelson, 2019). In turn, the use of WOP's unitarist and positivist models render uncertain and questionable whether all the studies conducted about meaningful work essentially investigated it (Bailey et al., 2019). What is more, in the plethora of definitions and conceptualizations of meaningful work, the only thing on which scholars agree is that no one can agree on what meaningful work means leaving the field open to the promotion of novel approaches for conceptual developments (Bailey & Madden, 2020).

In the present study, we will use the literary fiction analysis to explore the conceptualization of meaningful work construct by offering an emancipatory conception of the psychological function of work in the WOP field by referring to the very conditions of work unfolding meaning. Firstly, we will argue how literary fiction as data can offer concrete examples of abstract and conceptual definitions as proposed in the scientific literature and can serve to complement understanding of phenomena. Ultimately, we will argue that the method literary fiction analysis can serve to explore new knowledge in WOP (Phillips, 1996). Then, we will consider an exemplary novel about work by Primo Levi, The Wrench (1978) as an object of study to address fundamental questions in WOP studies that are currently of great relevance, namely, (a) how work can be meaningful and its psychological function for individuals' life, and (b) the complexity and variety of ways by which work

unfolds meaning. Following the analysis of the novel' extracts, we propose new insights in critical WOP literature by concrete indications of meaningful work conceptualization from the psychological meaning of work.

On the use of literary fiction analysis

In the dominant positivistic and hypothetico-deductive epistemological environment of research in WOP, fiction can represent access to knowledge complementing existing ways to generate scientific knowledge. Novels are generally invented rather than grounded on empirical inquiry, thus, critiques have been expressed that literary fiction analysis does not lead to theory development and/or infer relations among working phenomena (Beyes et al., 2019; Kalkman, 2020; Rhodes & Westwood, 2016). However, fiction gives access to contextual and complex descriptions adding a complementary understanding of phenomena, which positivistic approaches struggle to offer (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). While quantitative empirical research mostly aims for measurable and quantifiable truths and thus for the description of general patterns about workplaces and organizations, literary fiction may provide particularistic and comprehensive descriptions of complex 'real life' phenomena (Bruner, 1986). In providing insights into the particularistic, often focusing on a specific event or chain of events, literary fiction adds to understanding through logico-scientific thinking (Bruner, 1986). While the latter aims for empirical, testable knowledge of the world, which is consistent, reliable and non-contradictory, literary fiction allows for the existence of contradiction, ambiguity, and verisimilitude, or truth likeness (Bal et al., 2011).

Epistemological and pragmatic assumptions

There are specific epistemological and pragmatic assumptions about the knowledge that fiction can provide, to be able to use literary fiction in organizational studies (Fournier & Grey 2000; Phillips, 1995). With respect to epistemology, work and organizational studies are engaged and reframed through novels by the realm of the linguistic (Rorty, 1967; Wittgenstein, 1922), and narrative turns (Bruner, 1986; Lyotard, 1984). The former highlights the centrality of language in the human experience. The latter subverts the primacy of science over narrative fiction, re-evaluating narrative knowledge which simultaneously is the foundation

of scientific knowledge itself – given that scientific knowledge must necessarily rely on narration to be expressed and made public (Phillips, 1995). Language, underpinning thought and action, is closely linked to narration, which represents the essential and constitutive feature of the experiential dynamics of individuals and organizations. In the implicit, it plays a role in scientific knowledge creation, as introspective processes of probands answering questionnaires or as communicated narrations captured as transcripts. In the explicit as works of fiction represent a specific individual mindset, that is, a way of meaning-making and of representing personal and outer experiences (Bruner, 1986) narration is remaining in the margins as independent data. Therefore, narrative texts have been considered as a source of knowledge since they can be seen as a practice of reflective thinking that bears witness to a proper knowledge of phenomena that can boost scientific knowledge (Beyes et al. 2019).

These turns have significantly contributed to complementing scientific knowledge with the legitimacy of representing phenomena through descriptions based on fictional narratives. Accordingly, novels construct and share social meanings, give logical and temporal order to the seemingly chaotic flows of thought and experience. From this point of view, novels enter in the description of phenomena as a means of representing observed reality that manages to integrate and correct ideas of the experimental sciences. Accordingly, fiction can be seen as a way of investigating reality, rather than as a counterpoint to empirical truths; it is conducive to different and separate thought, inspiring insights, and suggesting theoretical possibilities, which may then be considered using other procedures (Hällgren & Buchanan, 2020).

As for pragmatic reasons, due to their epistemological freedom, their interdisciplinary nature, and freer language, novels offer a richer lens through which we can explore complex dynamics and phenomena otherwise hard to study. Fiction can be used to understand abstract concepts through socially co-constructed concrete examples (e.g., stories) as well as to study settings that might be difficult to take into account via common research tools, limited by the extent of time, space and style in the attempt of measurability and reliability (Gerard, 2017; Hällgren &

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Buchanan, 2020). This is also the case for qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, biographies, case studies) because the use of literary analysis lies in the possibility that novels offer a "space of representation of the life-world within which individuals can find themselves" (Phillips, 1995, p. 628). While qualitative methods are administered as a means for comprehending and describing the symbolic world of one object of study, narrative fiction is meant to create a world whose exploration can add a valuable adjunct to the current perspectives within work and organizational domains (Phillips, 1995).

Works of fiction offer the possibility to form a humanistic approach to work and organizational phenomena, which can have valuable practical implications (Symon & Cassell, 2006; Younkins, 2014). For example, referring to the works of Kafka and McCarthy, Beyes and colleagues (2019) support the idea that work and organizational studies are largely contaminated by novels and that novels are conducive to thought; accordingly, fictional narratives convey "how things are, might be, or can be thought" (p. 1787). They argue how fictional novels can serve as unique lenses to notions of work and organization since fictional narratives have been espousing an "epistemological freedom that is beyond even experimental forms of scholarly research and writing" (Beyes et al., 2019, p. 1787). In sum, fiction can be scrutinized under the assumption that it offers unique forms of knowledge providing a possible lens over work organization phenomena (Beyes et al. 2019; Huber & Munro, 2013; Michaelson, 2015; Rhodes, 2009).

Primo Levi's The Wrench

In the current paper, we use Levi's The Wrench (1978) to explore the role of work in life and its meaning from the standpoint of the subject. In The Wrench, Levi "engages with, extends and also challenges and subverts" (Antonello, 2007, p. 90) the conception of work, relying on his humanistic focus on the role of work for individuals' life, and meaningfulness.

The Wrench is articulated as an interview between the author himself and the character Libertino Faussone, an Italian ironworker who recounts his experiences to Levi. In the fourteen chapters of the book, the dialogues encompass several

aspects of Faussone's and Levi' jobs. Faussone and Levi are arranged as two complementary characters; the first is a manual worker, a rigger who constantly travels across the world for his work. Levi is an intellectual worker who, instead, aims at pursuing his desire to be a writer after having worked in the field of chemistry. From national accounts of work to organizational dynamics and the human condition, the authentic (Levi, 2013/1978) and genuine (Antonello, 2007) dialogues face features and issues of work. As such, the novel offers a representation of work by discussing its role in one's life as well as in organizational domains and the worldwide market. Given the predominance of such contents, Levi's The Wrench is an obvious example of a book that can be explored critically to understand how to account for the concept of work, offering the possibility to explore what makes work a meaningful experience and its association with individual, organizational and institutional features.

Levi's lessons on work

In the analysis, we initially refer to the concept of work as proposed in Levi's novel. In this, he expresses his emancipatory and normative view according to which a specific concept of work is fundamental for human life in concrete, philosophical and psychological terms. On this basis, we follow by identifying the diverse experience that individuals can have about work which creates Levi's vision of work. Then, we consider several extracts from the novel to treat each dimension separately according to an inductive process that aims to show the intertwined conceptualization and working conditions for the value of work for the subject.

Levi's conceptualization of work

Levi points out his account of work where he sets the complementary relation between work and individuals' existential significance. Levi advances the idea that work represents a fundamental aspect of human life as a way to reach a meaningful and in his terms 'happy' life. The term happy is used in the book, in which context it is not meant in an overjoyed and excited meaning but rather as a satisfactory purposeful, rather bearable life and a way to cope with life and its conditions as - 'a good life'. By this, he means that work can represent the closest approximation to

a decent human life. However, such a condition is rare given specific boundaries and challenges related to work. Accordingly, Levi suggests that work must be valued because of its existential significance as fundamental for human beings, their psyche (in terms of psychological well-being) and human flourishing, and this recognition of value must happen independently of the type of work (e.g., manual, intellectual, powerless, necessary) and financial returns. This is also exemplified in the quote below:

> "I realized Faussone knew it. If we except those miraculous and isolated moments fate can bestow on a man [sic], loving your work (unfortunately, the privilege of a few) represents the best, most concrete approximation of happiness on earth. […] To exalt labour, in official ceremonies an insidious rhetoric is displayed, based on the consideration that a eulogy or a medal costs much less than a pay raise, and they are also more fruitful. There also exists a rhetoric on the opposite side, however, not cynical, but profoundly stupid, which tends to denigrate labour, to depict it as base, as if labour, our own or others', were something we could do without, not only in Utopia, but here, today; as if anyone who knows how to work were, by definition, a servant, and as if, on the contrary, someone who doesn't know how to work, or knows little, or doesn't want to, were for that very reason a free man. It is sadly true that many jobs are not lovable, but it is harmful to come on to the field charged with preconceived hatred. He [sic] who does this sentences himself, for life, to hating not only work, but also himself and the world. We can and must fight to see that the fruit of labour remains in the hands of those who work, and that work does not turn into punishment; but love or, conversely, hatred of work is an inner, original heritage, which depends greatly on the story of the individual and less than is believed on the productive structures within which the work is done." (pp. 108-109)

Levi points out his account of work by setting the complementary interplay between Labor, Work, and Action (Arendt, 1958) subverting the Arendtian conception of the human condition. For Arendt (1958), labour regards the human condition of the animal *laborans*, i.e., an individual who provides for his own or others' maintenance; thus, work dissolves in the immediate consumption of the labor product itself in the eternal production-consumption cycle. The second – work – covers the homo *faber* condition, i.e., the individual who makes, works and distinguishes himself from the animal laborans: thus, the homo faber creates products to guarantee certain stability and purpose for human life and its conditions. Lastly, action is meant to consider the individuals' purpose to relate to each other, without the mediation of natural or artificial things, but it is also a manifestation of the plurality of the human world. Levi, conversely, undermines the distinction between animal laborans and homo faber by postulating the idea of the existential role of work itself as a source of meaning and in human life. Therefore, Levi sees action as the means to discover purpose, retaining its functionality as coping with life and meaningfulness via work.

Working to live 'a good life'

According to his personal experiences and literary oeuvre, Levi's complementary notion of meaningless work is represented in the dehumanized/ing labour and purposeless activities of the Lager, which invariably lead to experiences of meaninglessness (see, e.g., Levi's novels on the Lager experience, such as If This Is a Man, 1948 and The Truce, 1963). By contrast, work is the space for self-realization where subjects constitute their individual identity as a part of their existence because work is basically an individual and relational activity (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al. 2010; Tommasi et al., 2020). Moreover, work represents an opportunity to form an individual identity since it enables the subject to experience the self as capable and purposeful (Bailey & Madden, 2017; Rosso et al. 2010). In summary, Levi's work represents the basis for four main personal and social experiences connected to human flourishing: a sense of self-actualization, self-development, social identity and community, which resonates with the value of pursuing and recognizing the value of work at the individual and institutional level.

Levi follows a liberal logic of the self (Rose, 1990) locating the responsibility with the individual to care for the self due to work. Given the condition of purpose, work leads to human flourishing; thus, work is not just an answer to the individual's quest for meaning.

> "to live happily you have to have something to do, but it shouldn't
> be too easy, or else something to wish for, but not just any old wish:
> something there's a hope of achieving" (p. 189).

For Levi, a 'good and bearable life' stands inside the work itself, hidden in sufficiently ambitious tasks and daily - unpredictable - experiences that are characteristic of each job. Levi shares the concerns that to put such responsibility on the individual may appear ambiguous and insufficient, especially in the case of powerless and necessary work. Individuals must have reasons to recognize work as meaningful, which "depends greatly on the story of the individual" (p. 109) and their working experience; however, part of the responsibility of the meaning of work and link meaningful experience is endorsed at the institutional level and individuals use social accounts to experience work as meaningful and worthy.

Work as vocation

By scrutinizing his own and Faussone's stories, Levi suggests that individuals can discover the existential significance of the role of work if they have the agency to make choices with their time and credentials in order to identify their sense of direction, or calling. The notion of calling or vocation refers to a secular sense of purpose and direction toward one's work role that fosters the individual desire to pursue (Crescioni & Baumeister, 2013). Such direction is intended as a sense of passion for one's job that helps to pursue inner desire and passions or provide external contribution (Duffy & Dik, 2013). For instance, Faussone's calling refers to a sense of passion for the job itself and the task connected to his personality.

> "like I told you, it's no accident that I'm in this line of work, going
> from one construction site to another, to all the factories and ports
> of the world: it's what I wanted." (p. 2)

Hence, calling means having the possibility to satisfy ideas toward a personally (sufficiently) fulfilling everyday practice and experiencing the self as socially significant engagement through work. Likewise, Levi's calling refers to a deeper sense of being called to do something, as a sort of "feeling [of] a writer's blood in my veins" (p. 68). In this case, it seems that, for Levi, calling is something that refers both to a sense of passion and giftedness about this sort of "strange power of speech" (p. 68). Given the awareness of their passion and giftedness, Faussone and Levi have chosen their jobs as an imperative to follow their personal needs, passions and external summons to take care of their souls by practicing meaningful work (Michaelson, 2019).

Know-how: work and tacit knowledge

In Levi, nonetheless, since not all individuals have the possibility to choose their work, calling cannot represent the only path. In the absence of a vocation, a sense of competence represents the central way to pursue and discover the meaning of work. This is particularly evident in powerless jobs– for example, necessary work – whose means are not in the hands of the workers, and which might be referred to as a meaningless state and alienation (Bowie, 2019; Ciulla, 2019). However, Levi suggests that, given the existential significance of work, individuals can discover such meaningfulness by a sense of competence (Martela & Riekki, 2018) since

> "the most accessible form […], the most subjectively enjoyed, and
> the most useful to human society consists of being good at your job
> and therefore taking pleasure in doing it" (p. 198).

Both connected to propositional knowledge and practical knowledge, the sense of competence coincides with mastering working skills (Chalofsky and Cavallero, 2019). In particular, Levi privileges practical or tacit knowledge as a result of cultivating abilities for caring for souls (Antonello, 2007). Tacit knowledge is in the hands and minds of workers and

> "teach us to be whole [in our jobs]" "[with our] hands and with the
> entire body, to refuse to surrender to the negative days […]

> [P]rofessions teach us to know matter and to confront it [because]
> the profession […] grants (rarely, but it does grant) some moments
> of creation" (p.69).

In these terms, cultivating activities in work, be it manual or intellectual, represents a purposeful and meaningful experience that helps individuals achieve self-actualization and self-development. Most of the novel is rooted around what Levi presents as the professional's malice, or the tacit, embodied, knowledge arising from negative experiences of frustration and anger at work, that helps individuals to craft their jobs in a circular process of learning at work. Malice is part of the daily experience at work and conducive to pursuing meaningfulness and worker identity. Malice and tacit knowledge are always present; they are part of daily works and routine jobs and, in the presence of poor-quality jobs, lead to the discovery of the meaning of work. Levi extends these experiences in such terms that they are not confined to professionals or craftworkers but can cover all occupations (Bailey & Madden, 2017).

Ethic and aesthetic experience of work

Levi's argument presents the ethical and aesthetical accountability pathway to pursue meaningful work by referring to the concept of well-done, 'neat', work, or the honesty of the worker. In contrast with traditional assumptions on the moral conditions for meaningful work, individuals have the possibility to define the means of their labour product, at least to the extent that work is driven by the ethical and aesthetic value of the product, that is, a well-done work experience.

> "I don't give that much of a damn about the boss, so long as he pays
> me what's right and lets me do the jobs my way. No, it's for the work
> itself: setting up a machine like that, working on it with your hands
> and your head for days and days, seeing it grow like that, tall and
> straight, strong and slim as a tree; and then if it doesn't work, you
> suffer. It's like a pregnant woman whose baby comes out crippled or
> retarded (197-198)."

Individuals thus should meet conditions where they can take care of their souls, which coincides with a sense of contribution – contributing to something that transcends the self – and a sense of belonging – a sense of unification and being part of something bigger than the self as well as a sense of relatedness at work (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). Moreover, aesthetical value regards the experience and perception of the positive impact of individual working activities – that is, a sense of significance – at the level of the person, of working groups and of market society. Therefore, such ethical and aesthetical accountability of work has a circular value. On the one hand, the practice of meaningful work through ethical and aesthetical accountability represents a moral obligation for contributing to something bigger than the self. On the other hand, it is a means to the end of self-cultivation, to the extent that well-done work is conducive to the experience of meaningfulness.

Work as Distraction: access to emotional needs

In this vision, the investment underlying the experience of meaningfulness at work also gives way to the emotional connection towards work as an intimate relationship of love.

> I had put my whole heart and soul into that job. But I put my heart and soul into all my jobs, you know that, even the dumbest; or rather, the dumber they are, the more I give to them. For me, every job I undertake is like a first love.' (pp. 53-54)

"Marry her? I can't do that: first because of my job [...]" says Faussone when reporting a love story he had in the past. According to the previous extract, Faussone explains how work is also defined by access to emotions and bodily needs. It seems that there is not a dichotomy between private life and work or rather a balance between life and work. The man who sees a profound meaning in his work cannot create a loving relationship. Love for another person is too unpredictable and changeable for individuals to cultivate, and it can lead the skilled worker to be distracted and incapable at work. However, in this fictional dialogue, Levi solely wants to empower the role of work in an individual's life but at the same time being pragmatic about a topic seldomly mentioned. It would be wrong to understand the

passage as a denigration of love for the glorification of work, it rather is a pragmatic view on the options a workplace comes with. In reality, Levi wants to bring the praise of work back to an intertwined dimension. Work can be a form of self-definition and self-actualization that is usually seen only in private relationships and private relations are entangled with the options met also due to work environments. Individuals can build meaningful and purposeful relationships with their work resulting in a sense of worth and bearable life.

Valuing human life recognizing the role of work

Along with the fourteen chapters, Levi reflects on specific work aspects, suggesting lessons on the standard conditions and characteristics of work, according to which there are moral rights as well as organizational and institutional facets related to work as conducive to a meaningful life. To this account, Levi offers potential implications on the value and legitimacy of his account of work by presenting the key elements for subjective and social accounts thereof.

Levi condemns the rhetoric over work and working aspects such as financial returns, necessary works and the relation between workers, their labour and rewards of the products as conducive to meaningless work. With his epistemological and ethical concerns, Levi supports a critical view that follows similar propositions of political theory, i.e., Marxist perspectives and traditional critical perspectives (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013; Weber et al., 2020). Here, authors argue that when individuals cannot negotiate or do not have access to the means and method of their work – in the separation between the ownership of capital and the means of production (Shantz et al. 2014) – work is meaningless (Michaelson, 2019). Whatever the purpose of the work, it counts as meaningless, restricting the possibility of subjective meaningful experiences as well as a socially meaningful value of one's work. Levi acknowledges such moral conditions of work, iniquity and alienation could count as part of a meaningless work experience, which is true both for manual, servile and necessary works. Therefore, his concept of work cannot unduly restrict the consideration of ideology of work and working conditions and morally social questions: thus, negotiation is always between at least two subjects about a situated

moral in place (Gergen, 2009). Yet, Levi's account is prescriptive, since he provides institutional standards for preserving the existential significance of work.

As an ethical manifesto on work, Levi's novel supports a view that connects the ethical concern of work with that of institutional ethics – organizations and economic systems. To present ethical conditions and duties of organizations and economic systems, Levi illustrates how work is a source of community and how and to what extent specific working elements can – ethically – inform institutions. Levi condemns the ideology and rhetoric around work that does not recognize the value of it at the individual and institutional level, and that is more frequent in those who do not know the world of work since work is a "boundless region" (p. 108). According to Levi, such rhetoric is related to the capitalistic and neoliberal ideology and links – socio-cultural and market – the denigration of work as materially worthy and relegated to something that is just necessary and/or ascribed to the capital system (Rose, 1990; Gergen, 2009). In these terms, the meaning of work and its relevance for human flourishing is lost, making it necessary to call for an ethical comprehension at the level of institutions to render work socially meaningful and worthy. Moreover, such a condition calls for the creation of a community based on an ethical organization of individuals, social dimensions and materials that encompass each individual's reasons to perceive work as meaningful. In contrast to worker mistreatment, eroding communities, increasing inequalities, production systems malfeasance and general denigration of the value of work, Levi conceptualizes a kind of ethical business to institutionally cultivate and provide work as significant (Michaelson et al., 2014) and the work environment as the actual place of the negotiated moral in place which then again reaches beyond work and shapes social dynamics (Foucault, 2003).

Dignifying work

The former institutional standard covers dignity and autonomy as core aspects of work to provide the individual with the conditions to pursue meaningfulness and bear with life. Institutions must treat workers with respect in accordance with their contribution to the community rather than as "servants" (p. 109), something that

translates into giving the opportunity to individuals to (a) choose their jobs, (b) develop their capacities and (c) exercise their autonomy at work.

> "He would've liked a job like mine, even if the company makes money off you, because they don't take the result away from you: that stays there, it's yours, nobody can rob you of it. And he understood these things; you could tell by the way he stood there and looked at his stills, after he had finished them and shined them up. When the customers came to collect them, he would sort of give them a caress, and you could see he was sorry." (pp. 113-114).

Moreover, the name Libertino itself literally means "free-man." Libertino Faussone is – in the words of Philip Roth – a "Man the worker made truly free through his labour" (Capozzi, 2001, p. 16). Such a sense of freedom is related to being free by doing something, suggesting that all individuals can be free. However, for Levi, individual capacity to pursue a meaningful life through work is possible only as long as work is not degrading but enabling (i.e., dignified) and allows for the exercising of autonomy, developing of capacities and a relation with the products. If, on the one hand, Levi seems to propose a renovated ideology of work that should inform institutions to foster the sense of dignity, he suggests on the other hand that institutions should manifest such respect by supporting individual autonomy and sense of competence by providing workers with information, training and participation in business systems. Levi never takes into account the role of wages and the paycheck echoing the need to allow individuals to contribute to society with the products of their work. "This is black-market stuff, but it's genuine," says Faussone to Levi in offering him a glass of vodka to help him "sleep well." The special drink is the result of a job a man has "put his signature on [it] […]" (p. 213).

Task significance and work

Task significance is meant to cover the idea of giving a scope in working activities that resonates with the need for understanding the reason behind working tasks – in other words, what renders work individually and socially worthy. Levi is equipped with a long and complete knowledge of work to support the importance of the

questions "why am I here? what am I doing?," as it appears from his presentation of the conditions of dehumanized work in the Lager:

> "Driven by thirst, I eyed a fine icicle outside the window, within hand's reach. I opened the window and broke off the icicle, but at once a large, heavy guard prowling outside brutally snatched it away from me. "Warum?" [Why?] I asked him in my poor German. "Hier ist kein warum" (There is no why here), he replied, pushing me inside with a shove" (Levi, 2003, p. 29).

Institutions are responsible for workers' day-to-day experience and their sense of contribution that promotes the fact that their work is socially purposeful (Lips-Wiersma, 2019). Furthermore, a sense of contribution is supported by institutional orientation. Hence, an institutional ethic with regard to task significance and worthy work suggests that there is potential and objective good in doing such work (Ciulla, 2019). Thus, tasks are significant as long as they benefit workers as well as other people, and work is worthy in its being valued by the market (Michaelson et al. 2014).

Notwithstanding task significance, the sense of competence or the know-how at work can be a way to respond by either seeking to reinstate purposelessness or cope with the experience of a sense of contribution at work. The know-how, i.e., tacit knowledge, represents an individual's work knowing that we cannot reduce it into a singular definition or measurable working rule. It is part of the profound understanding of the significance of one's work characterized by an emotional content that makes work dignified and bearable.

> Anyhow, these are all things you can read in books; but how you draw the cables of a suspension bridge isn't in any book, or at least not the impression it makes on you. (147)

Beyond this, entrepreneurs and leaders have the power to make work insignificant by delegating job' responsibilities and subordinating the purpose and direction of one's job to their profit. In The Bridge (a chapter in The Wrench), Faussone

tells his Indian story, or when he participated in the building of a suspension bridge in India. After months of work, the bridge collapses due to environmental conditions. Faussone continues reporting how entrepreneurs and leaders tend to not take responsibility for their failures. Likewise, the various workers employed placed the blame on each other in case of failure. Nevertheless, what remains however is the regret of the failure, which is handled individually by the subject. These represent the circumstances under which individuals can feel a sense of meaninglessness at work due to the rise of the sense of powerlessness, disconnection and self-doubt. The absence of control and relational connection constrains the individual needs in dynamically unfolding situations. The work is interconnected with the actual artefact and its worth for the worker. The meaning of work is thus not the preoccupation but the contribution by the product itself.

> Excuse me for letting myself go like this, but when a man puts his whole heart into a job, and then it ends like this bridge I'm telling you about, well, it makes you feel bad. You feel bad for lots of reasons: because you've wasted all that time, because afterward there's always a big stink with lawyers and courts. (165)

Discussion

In this paper, we used Primo Levi's The Wrench to address fundamental questions on the conceptualization of meaningful work in the field of WOP. The prevailing positivistic models in the current literature tend to propose a perpetuation of meaningful work as a positive work phenomena alongside key elements such as employees' well-being and performance in terms of gaining outcomes (Bal, 2020; Weber et al., 2020). Then, current views and related empirical research tend to exclude the incorporation of the conditions that make work meaningful (Bailey & Madden, 2020). In contrast to this background, the literary fiction analysis engaged in the present contribution employed fiction as an instrument of research to study the concept of meaningful work and the psychological function of work.

Our analysis offers an initial emancipatory and normative meaning of work from the psychological function of work for the individuals' life and

meaningfulness (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013). In parallel with Hannah Arendt's thought (1958), the analysis of Levi's perspective revealed the tripartite interplay between labor, work and action for the human conditions by providing an initial comprehension of the existential role of work in human life. In contrast with Arendt, Levi finds a continuum between the Arendtian distinction between the homo Faber (in work) and animal laborans (in labor) where the action (i.e., making, working) connect the two polarized dimensions. Individuals are capable to experience their life as purposeful and meaningful, as work can be conducive to human flourishing resulting from a sense of self-actualization, self-development, social identity and community. Levi argues that what fosters the experience of meaning stands in the relationship between work and action so that the know-how at work makes it possible to discover meaningfulness and leads to greater meaning in the relationship between oneself, labor, and work itself.

Work can foster a sense of purpose and contribution in one's own life to society. Individuals can experience and perceive work as meaningful by a physical objective (i.e., manual work) or contribution to the individual and the social context (i.e., creative and intellectual work). According to Levi, work is what allows people to actualize themselves, to cultivate their skills (i.e., sense of competence), to achieve aesthetic and ethical experience in their relation with their work and task. Therefore, work can be meaningful in the extent to which its objectives are visible, holistic and opposite to repetitive, uninteresting and intellectually dull. In this spirit, there are objective standards that render work experienceable as meaningful. Since work is a source of community, institutions should respect individuals by involving ethical actions and managerial practices that meet conditions for the perception of work as meaningful and avoid denigrating it.

The aspects that emerged in our analysis support a view of work as something that contributes not only to the value and worth of the work but the subject's overall living conditions, well-being and ethical questions of worth, sustainability and purpose. Accordingly, it is apparent that Levi's account covers the repudiation of neoliberal and capitalist ideology that tends to debase and devalue the role of work. Work has to contribute to a subject's life by giving purpose and making life

bearable. It is the bind and place for a social self and their community, where morals are negotiated and constituted, being effective beyond organizations and thus forming the society. Work concerns the social relationships among workers and between workers and the leadership, where it implicitly or explicitly becomes obvious what kind of human is operating. Work itself must contain inherent meaning in terms of a true need for specific skills, whenever cognitive or manual in producing a true artefact, the subject can relate to and advocate for it. Here, the process must contain autonomy, development, stimulating requirements and individualization and thus acknowledging that the subject is not randomly interchangeable and respectful of the psyche, the body and the relative needs. Work is not about continuous excitement and modern overstimulated constant striving for joy within modernity; meaning or holism cannot be artificially placed in a work environment or product. It is about the sustainable and true meaning between humans defining what humanity is.

Limitations

Our findings rely on an explorative approach to a novel and thus serve with ideas for new approaches and thinking about work. Despite this, as for all the studies, certain limitations affect our analysis and results. Firstly, the findings are a co-constructed understanding between the author and the audience (i.e., the authors) who interprets them. Notwithstanding, we confronted individual meaning-construction with each other; thus, we contribute beyond one singular interpretation.

Secondly, the novel stems from a specific time, and living conditions and work conditions have changed. However, the findings seem to have even gained importance as work develops to enhance meaninglessness, fragmentation and moves further away from a graspable objective within the current environment. Moreover, the coping of Primo Levi and its earnestness in terms of viewing life are grounded in his own experiences in life, impacted by living through the Holocaust and struggling with meaning in life and faith in humanity in general. Nevertheless, this might serve with actuality in a dystopian scenery of everyday life today. The Wrench belongs to that rare category of works on work that can foster moral imagination and ethical comprehension of what it means to live well through work.

Levi's concepts and lessons also invite a practical reflection and consideration of the value of literary analyses for approaching work and organizational ethics.

Conclusion

In his letter to his friend Oskar Pollak, Franz Kafka stated that books must break the frozen sea within people. This sentence concludes our view of the potential of novel fiction for studying working phenomena and contexts and especially those difficult to investigate and to overcome conceptual limitations. The literary analysis can offer a means to address current *frozen* concepts and practices that might lead to neglect (Symon & Cassell, 2006) of the value of individuals and work in research conducting (Bal, 2020). The literary analysis of *The Wrench* has been proposed to enrich the existing lenses on work by a comprehensive explorative perspective beyond measurability. The aspects that emerged in our analysis support a view of work as something that contributes not only to the value and worth of the work but the subject's overall living conditions, well-being and ethical questions of worth, sustainability and (social) purpose. It is apparent that Levi's account covers the repudiation of neoliberal and capitalist ideology that tends to debase and devalue the role of work. Indeed, the development of The Wrench as an object of study makes the present paper part of that growing interest in critical theory and research. However, literary analysis for theory building and research conducting in organizational domains are quite rare. We invite the reflection and consideration of the value of literary works that can help to provide an understanding of working phenomena, their morals, and to pursue societal and market improvement. In the same spirit as others (Bal & Dóci, 2018; Bal, 2020; Weber et al., 2020), we hope that our analysis could stimulate critical theory-building and research conducting which at outset consider work as crucial for human life and the basis for community using all (data) we got to gain new knowledge.

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CONCLUSION

Results narrative

But how many closed windows amongst those living stars! How many unlit stars, how many sleeping people ... We must try to find ourselves again. To communicate with some of those lights shining in the distance in the countryside.[4]

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Prefazione a 'Terra degli uomini/Il pilota e le potenze naturali', 1939.

This thesis is the result of a research path that originated from the wish to study a phenomenon that, above and together with all the other phenomena connected to so-called work and organisational psychology, plays a fundamental role in valuing both people and their work.

Meaningful work, work as a source of meaning, the meaning of work for people: these themes have found momentum, in academia and elsewhere, because of the centrality of work in the lives of individuals and in society. The issues this thesis is concerned with – all of which led to the study of paradoxes in meaningful work – are particularly relevant, in terms of social dynamics, considering the current state of affairs. Transformations involving work modalities and processes,

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[4] Here, too, the translation is mine. The English versions available lack this preface, which is present in the original French and Italian versions. Here is the Italian extract I translated: 'Ma quante finestre chiuse in mezzo a quelle stelle vive! Quante stelle spente, quanti uomini addormentati … Dobbiamo pur tentare di ritrovarci. Di comunicare con qualcuna di quelle luci che brillano in lontananza nella campagna.'

deriving from such upheavals as those caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and financial crises, put work and organisational psychology in front of new challenges. Amongst these challenges are the workers themselves, whose lives, work, and action should be valued and supported by work and organisational psychology (Arendt, 1959; Islam & Sanderson, 2021).

Conceptual dilemmas posit limits to scientific literature on meaningful work, and this research is driven by the wish to solve them. Both terminology and theory have been amply discussed in the introduction to this doctoral thesis, and they represented the stepping stone for the identification of the so-called psychological paradoxes of meaningful work; consequently, the critical, interdisciplinary, and pluralistic bases of the research were presented. Particular attention has been paid to the nature and relative conceptual dilemma of a binomial such as stability versus episodicity in the phenomenon. In Chapter 1, the research focused on the so-called first paradox, where an ample literature review was followed by a proposal for a narrative synthesis encompassing theoretical, practical, and research implications. In Chapter 2, the second paradox – concerning contextual agents and the multidimensional nature of the construct – was taken into account. Here, we developed and validated a tool to identify and measure salient dimensions for the phenomenon, both on a personal and contextual level. Then, both these contributions were aligned in a single paper focused on both issues – the first and second paradox. The aim in Chapter 3 was to understand how work and psychological variables could affect the episodicity of the phenomenon. This led to a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon as both multileveled and temporally dynamic, and to the identification of antecedents at the individual level. Eventually, in Chapter 4, a methodology was developed that is situated at the margins of work and organisational psychology. The aim here was to take into account the third paradox, which concerns the understanding of the reason why work should or could be considered a source of meaning.

It will thus be clear why I chose a critical and pluralistic approach. The research reported in my thesis is the result of this plurality, taken into account and put into action in light of the importance of meaningful work, a phenomenon that is also a means to support and value people and their work through research, and in particular through work and organisational psychology.

The analysis thus offers a comprehensive picture both of its object and its context. The research acquires contextual importance in offering a contribution that can spur further initiatives to maintain and enhance the quality of work, as well as give space to its value in human life. In order to do so, this closing section will try to summarise the main points of the research in an attempt to provide a point of reflection – a results narrative – that opens new windows on the exploration of the phenomenon of meaningful work according to a critical perspective on work and organisational psychology.

How did we get here? The critical work and organisational psychology perspective

In order to shed light on new research possibilities opened up by this research, as well as on its own limitations, it is fundamental to provide an overview of this work starting from its methodological premises.

The starting point, as stated earlier, was the adoption of a critical perspective on work and organisational psychology. Such a perspective is characterised by paying particular attention to conceptual clarifications concerning the object of research. What is required here of the work and organisational psychologist, even before methodological rigour, is loyalty to the responsibility taken towards the object of research. Contrary to many other methodological perspectives and guidelines, critical psychology opposes what is commonly known as mainstream research practice – by which we mean a prevalence of widespread research trends dictating both methodological perspectives and objects of research, usually in line with current interests in the scientific panorama. Instead, a critical perspective on work and organisational psychology aims at breaking these barriers and proposing a form of reflexive knowledge on its object of study – people and their work.

In terms of methodology, a critical perspective implies pluralism: from a purely theoretical work, as the one opening the thesis (Introduction), a literature review follows (Chapter 1), while quantitative research leads another section of the thesis, using a cross-sectional design and self-report measurements (Chapter 2), as well as a complex longitudinal design in the form of a Diary Study (Chapter 3). The

final chapter is devoted to the exploration of an embryonal methodology, based on the use of a literary text (Chapter 4).

The 'mapping' of phenomena, by now acknowledged as a common objective for work and organisational psychology, is at the basis of this research, which accounts for why a pluralistic and interdisciplinary methodology was called for. It may be maintained that all doctoral theses are of such nature, considering the tendency to standardise that which permeates their realisation. However, a critical approach like the one that has been adopted here should 1) promote congruence between the values of a researcher and the values that underpin the research they do; 2) create benefits for less powerful people in organisations and seek to minimise harm; and 3) promote paradigmatic and methodological pluralism (Sanderson, et al., 2019). Each of the studies included in this thesis was centred on the level of the person and their work in order to value their singularity and avoid falling for hasty or banal conclusions. This research path was thus limited to the exploration of so-called paradoxes in meaningful work according to this framework, hoping to offer an opportunity for reflection without presenting a 'final' form of knowledge.

Where do paradoxes of meaningful work take us? Value people and work

Meaningful work concerns the individual, their work, and their social context. The paradoxes explored in this research project are related to and derive from precisely these three key factors. Hence, research wanting to focus on meaningful work and its theoretical dilemmas must focus on such aspects, which require a specific cognitive approach deriving from their configuration. As such, a conceptual, empirical, and reflexive mapping derived from this research, one that can be defined as a 'practice for the enhancement of people and their work' in the framework of work and organisational psychology. Following the common thread traced in the introduction, the various connection lines, and this concluding section, we will offer a small repertoire as well as some implications and ideas on possible emerging models concerning the phenomenon of meaningful work in the context of work and organisational psychology.

As discussed before, the first paradox concerned a possible double nature of the phenomenon. Chapters 1 and 3 both took this paradox into account, offering a

theoretical and empirical understanding from which a simple model, based on the interdependency of the individual and their environment, emerged. Indeed, an individual is influenced in multiple ways by the working context, with factors ranging from job quality to working conditions. However, they are also an agent, with their own story and self-representation, capable of self-actualising. It would thus be extremely reductive to think of the phenomenon of meaningful work as only subjective or only contextual.

This emerged from the analysis carried out in Chapter 2 with respect to the second paradox. Intertwining the three contributions contained in as many chapters, a coherent picture of the phenomenon and its salient subjective and contextual factors was obtained.

Meaningful work is not to be seen as a phenomenon resulting from an academic point of view on the man–work–society relationship. On the contrary, as explored in Chapter 4, which focused on the third paradox, it has deep roots. Work represents an opportunity for the individual to activate processes of individualisation and self-realisation that would otherwise be impossible. This is not to be interpreted as a praise of work and meaningful work but as an acknowledgement of the potential in work for humans as agents.

All this has to be read in light of a simple cognitive model encompassing the contributions contained in this thesis; work has a value that, if nurtured, can provide enhancement to the individual and their community. Meaningful work is thus merely a positive phenomenon, independent of the meaning that a single individual can attach to work *per se*. Hence, the positive potential associated with meaningful work comes precisely from work's ability to reflect human know-how and flourishing. Furthermore, work reflects the value of a community, a society that can look at collective well-being. It is thus fundamental for a simple cognitive model to deal with the various levels involved in the phenomenon (Chapter 1); to enhance diversity and operate at the contextual level (Chapter 2); to grant space for working conditions to interact with *know-how* and subjective views on work (Chapter 3); and to defend and support the value of work (Chapter 4).

What is worth for? Critical limitations and reflections

The aim of a results narrative, such as the one being presented here, is to comprehend the worth associated with the limitations and open questions connected to a research project in order to provide readers and the academic community with an opportunity for critical reflection.

While multidisciplinary in principle, the thesis was based on a prevalently quantitative methodological framework (Chapters 2 and 3). The remaining sections proposed a theoretical-reflexive-deductive approach (Introduction and Chapter 1) and a qualitative-inductive original approach (Chapter 4) instead. The need for an interpretative paradigm providing significance addresses a number of open questions concerning a) themes and b) the overall and disciplinary value of the research.

In regard to themes, there is a need to proceed with the same impetus when studying the phenomenon of meaningful work and the centrality of work. This has to be done while keeping in mind the value work has for people's psyches, as well as for organisations and society, in a field such as work and organisational psychology (Bal, 2020; Weber et al., 2020; Islam 2021). There is also a need for a constant thinking and re-thinking of the meaningful work phenomenon in light of the dynamics it dwells in. Consider, for example, the constant redefinitions of the world of work but also the future outcomes of such changes as those taking place while these pages are being written: the Covid-19 pandemic or the warnings about climate change that now involve each part of the globe. Responsibility is required when dealing with themes concerning phenomena such as meaningful work. Our hope is that what has been gathered from this research could work as guideline for the future.

Similar needs accompany the level of the disciplinary and overall value of this research. There is an acknowledged and widespread call for normativity in research on work, as well as for an adequate moral code capable of taking responsibility for the individual and their environment. Both results and the research process itself help us reason and reflect on those possible limits that we, work and organisational psychologists, have to face when dealing with work, workers, and their needs. The resulting research attitude is thus not neutral but critical, and our wish

for the future is for a society that can be more careful about itself, and for a discipline and a research methodology that is more responsible towards others.

Aside from not wanting to go through the contents of each chapter, there has been no desire to dwell on the structural and contextual limitations imposed on this research by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has taken too much from everybody already. On the contrary, with these concluding remarks, I wanted to propose a comprehensive overview of a – kind of – simple and constructive research method for the field of meaningful work.

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Francesco