

Meaningfulness of Work under Multi-level Identity Interactions: Case of Organisational and Occupational Identities at a Uniformed Service Organisation

Himanshi Rajora (FP/07/15)

Thesis Advisory Committee: Prof. Nimruji Prasad (TAC Chair & Thesis Advisor)
Prof. Leena Chatterjee (Member) Prof. Anirvan Pant (Member)

Abstract

Organisations are embedded in society, and organisational members bring along with them their different beliefs, value systems, experiences, and practices. This makes the organisations as an amalgamation of individuals influenced by different social forces working together in teams. It is for this reason that issues in the organisations are multi-level ranging from micro to macro aspects interacting, and interwoven. It can thus be argued that organisational and occupational level aspects can together impact an individual's psychological experience of work. One such experience is the Meaningfulness of Work (MOW) for an individual. Meaningfulness of work is understood as "the sense made of, and significance felt regarding the nature of one's being and existence" (Steger et al., 2006:81). May et al. (2004:11) defined it as "the value of a work goal or purpose judge[d] to the individual's own ideals and standard".

Lysova et al. (2019) have proposed that there is a need to develop multi-level theories to understand the MOW by examining how organisations can better facilitate MOW based on personality, organisational, societal, and other factors. In spite of this vast scholarship, the literature on MOW remains sketchy towards examining MOW beyond its psychological individual level (Dobrow, 2013; Frieder et al., 2018; Fouché et al., 2017; Woods & Sofat, 2013). However, some indications that organisational level aspects (Albrecht et al., 2015; Colbert et al., 2016; Cardador & Rupp, 2011; Fletcher, 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Sorakraikitikul & Siengthai, 2014) and occupational level aspects (Allan et al., 2018; Duffy et al., 2017; Işık et al., 2019) can facilitate (or impede) MOW exist in literature. But, the literature has remained silent in examining these organisational and

occupational level aspects, which may facilitate MOW, as ‘Organisational Identity’ (OI) and ‘Occupational Identity (OCI)’.

Further, organisational behaviour scholars have also suggested that there is a need for problematising real-life context-based phenomena in formulating research problems (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Bamberger, 2008; Cunliffe, 2003; Härtel & Connor, 2014). Hence, this study is an endeavour to pursue a research problem by problematising a real-time context-based phenomenon. It seeks to understand MOW from a multi-level perspective, an aspect which has not been sufficiently examined in the literature (Lysova et al., 2019). The two levels taken together are organisational identity (OI) and occupational identity (OCI). Here, the OI is a macro level aspect; OCI operates at the meso (occupational) level, and MOW operates at the micro-level.

In this regard, consider an anecdote from a real-life situation. Navy as an organisation employs house-keepers among its several employees, these employees are likely to have an OI of a sailor based on their membership with the organisation, their socialisation and training as sailors. However, based on their work profile, they are involved in mundane tasks like cleaning the ship, which depicts their OCI as that of a house-keeper. The two differently invoked but interactive identities, namely organisational identity (OI) and occupational identity (OCI), here are likely to influence the employees’ perception of their MOW. The thesis seeks to explore similar phenomena to understand MOW from a multi-level perspective of OI and OCI through the following research question:

Question: Does the interaction between organisational identity and occupational identity influence the MOW?

The study followed the qualitative research tradition adopting the interpretive style of analysis because the accounts of OI, OCI, and MOW are constituted through language and narratives which are context-specific (Klein & Myers, 1999) and to meticulously understand them, it was obligatory to follow interpretivism (Chreim, 2005). In the same line of reasoning, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) was adopted for analysis of data. The study was carried out in a combatant uniformed services organisation named ‘Gallant’ (pseudonym) because it offered substantial opportunities for the

interaction of OI and OCI enabling an in-depth study into nuances of the phenomenon. The data comprised of 48 interviews, observations and archival documents.

The study finds that identity interactions between OI and OCI impacts MOW for an individual. In this regard, three types of identity interactions between OI and OCI are found which are further observed to impact MOW leading to four states of MOW. This study has also found that individuals practice certain strategies to enhance their MOW and observed three types of strategies which facilitate MOW by reducing the tension between OI and OCI. Individuals were found to be adopting more than one strategy simultaneously or at different stages of their career to enhance their MOW. These strategies do not guarantee any permanent or achieved state of MOW. However, the use of these strategies helped the individuals to transform their current state of MOW to an enhanced state of MOW.

REFERENCES

- Albrecht, S. L., Bakker, A. B., Gruman, J. A., Macey, W. H., & Saks, A. M. (2015). Employee engagement, human resource management practices and competitive advantage: An integrated approach. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 2(1), 7–35.
- Allan, B. A., Dexter, C., Kinsey, R., & Parker, S. (2018). Meaningful work and mental health: Job satisfaction as a moderator. *Journal of Mental Health*, 27(1), 38-44.
- Alvesson, M., & Sandberg, J. (2011). Generating research questions through problematisation. *Academy of management review*, 36(2), 247-271.
- Bamberger, P. (2008). From the editors beyond contextualisation: Using context theories to narrow the micro-macro gap in management research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 51, 839-846
- Cardador, M. T., & Rupp, D. E. (2011). Organisational culture, multiple needs, and the meaningfulness of work. *The handbook of organisational culture and climate*, 158-175.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. sage.
- Chreim, S. (2005). The continuity-change duality in narrative texts of organisational identity. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(3), 567-593.
- Colbert, A. E., Bono, J. E., & Purvanova, R. K. (2016). Flourishing via workplace relationships: Moving beyond instrumental support. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(4), 1199–1223.

- Cunliffe, A. L. (2003). Reflexive inquiry in organisational research: Questions and possibilities. *Human relations*, 56(8), 983-1003.
- Dobrow, S. R. (2013). Dynamics of calling: A longitudinal study of musicians. *Journal of organisational behavior*, 34(4), 431-452.
- Duffy, R. D., England, J. W., Douglass, R. P., Autin, K. L., & Allan, B. A. (2017). Perceiving a calling and well-being: Motivation and access to opportunity as moderators. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 98, 127-137.
- Fletcher, L. (2016). Training perceptions, engagement, and performance: Comparing work engagement and personal role engagement. *Human Resource Development International*, 19(1), 4-26.
- Fouché, E., Rothmann, S. S., & Van der Vyver, C. (2017). Antecedents and outcomes of meaningful work among school teachers. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 43(1), 1-10.
- Frieder, R. E., Wang, G., & Oh, I. S. (2018). Linking job-relevant personality traits, transformational leadership, and job performance via perceived meaningfulness at work: A moderated mediation model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 103(3), 324.
- Härtel, C. E., & O'Connor, J. M. (2014). Contextualising research: Putting context back into organisational behavior research. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 20(4), 417-422.
- Işık, E., Kozan, S., & Işık, A. N. (2019). Cross-cultural validation of the Turkish version of the Decent Work Scale. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 27(3), 471-489.
- Klein, H. K., & Myers, M. D. (1999). A set of principles for conducting and evaluating interpretive field studies in information systems. *MIS quarterly*, 23(1), 67-94.
- Lee, M. C. C., Idris, M. A., & Delfabbro, P. H. (2017). The linkages between hierarchical culture and empowering leadership and their effects on employees' work engagement: Work meaningfulness as a mediator. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 24(4), 392-415.
- Lysova, E. I., Allan, B. A., Dik, B. J., Duffy, R. D., & Steger, M. F. (2019). Fostering meaningful work in organisations: A multi-level review and integration. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 110, 374-389.
- May, D. R., Gilson, R. L., & Harter, L. M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of occupational and organisational psychology*, 77(1), 11-37.
- Sorakraikitikul, M., & Siengthai, S. (2014). Organisational learning culture and workplace spirituality: Is knowledge-sharing behaviour a missing link? *The Learning Organization*, 21(3), 175-192.
- Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The meaning in life questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 53(1), 80-93.
- Woods, S. A., & Sofat, J. A. (2013). Personality and engagement at work: The mediating role of psychological meaningfulness. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(11), 2203-2210.