

MEANING AT WORK AND WORK ENGAGEMENT: A META-ANALYSIS

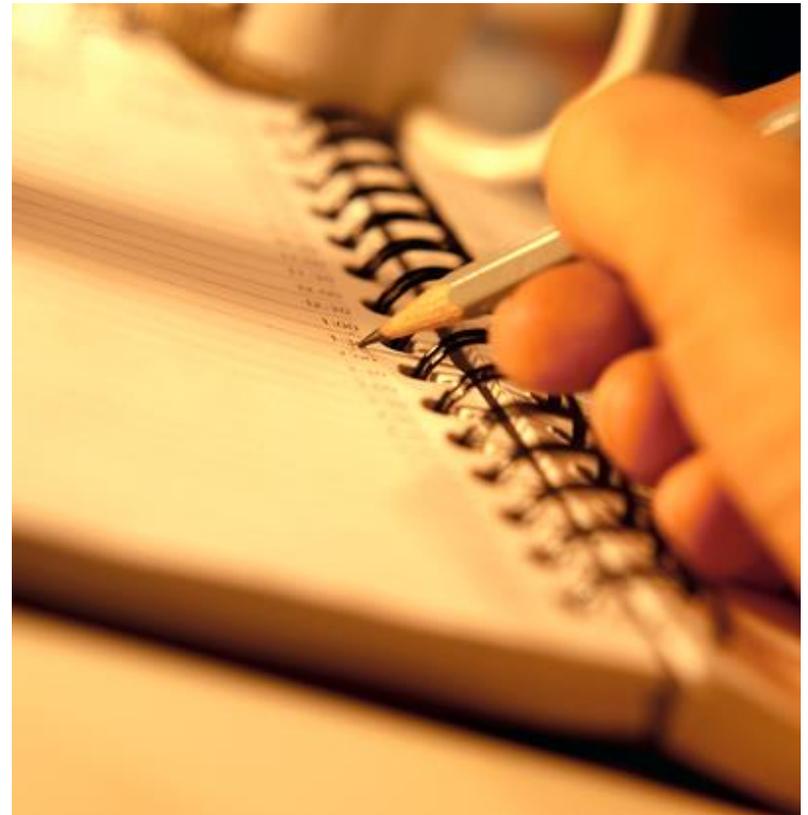
Heejin Kim & Maritza Salazar

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Agenda

- Background
- Present study: Hypotheses
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Limitations
- Conclusion

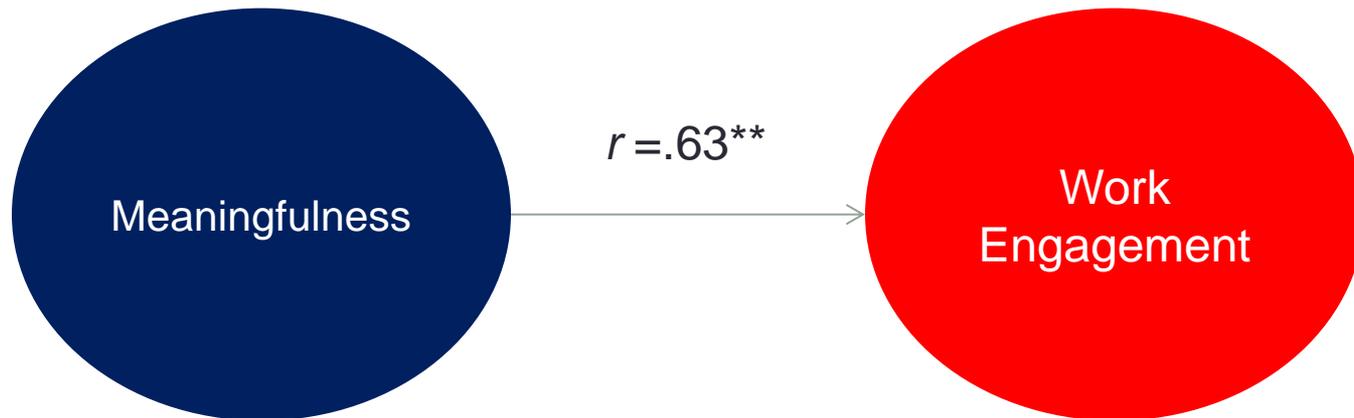




Deprived of meaningful work, men and women
lose their reason for existence; they go stark,
raving mad.

(Fyodor Dostoevsky)

May, Gilson, & Harter (2004)



Since May et al. (2004)...



Present Study: A Meta-analysis

- To conduct a systematic review of the relationship between meaning and engagement
- To understand the conditions where the effect is stronger or weaker



Work Engagement

- A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption
- Related to positive organizational outcomes
 - Job satisfaction
 - Organizational commitment
 - Job performance
 - Financial returns

Halbesleben, 2010; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, Tairs, & Bakker, 2006; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009.

Meaningful Work

- **Meaning:** the connection between two different entities or things that create a non-physical reality accessible to humans
- **Meaningful Work:** Work experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals



Hypotheses

- H1. Higher meaning at work will be correlated with higher work engagement across samples.
- H2. Moderation analyses
 - a. Age
 - b. Study locations
 - c. Meaning measures
 - d. Publication status



Methods

- Search
 - PsycINFO, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, reference sections of review articles
 - Keywords: *Meaning**, *calling*, *purpose*, *engagement*
 - Peer-reviewed articles, unpublished manuscripts, dissertations and book chapters



Methods

- Inclusion criteria
 - a. empirically test the relationship between meaning and engagement
 - b. include effect sizes either on the manuscripts or upon request, and
 - c. be conducted in the work setting
- ▶ $k=22$

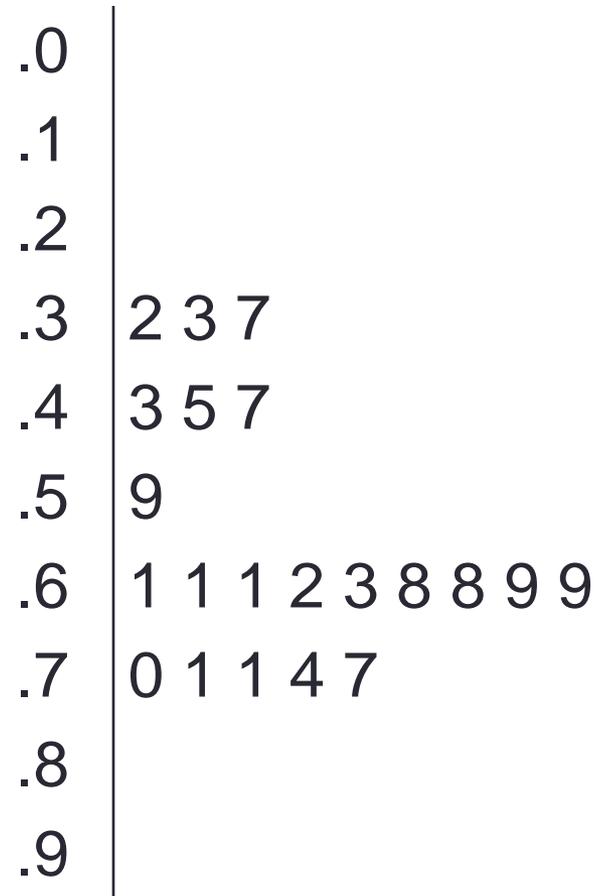
Methods

- Meta-analysis with a mixed model
 - Mean effect size: random-effects model
 - Moderators: fixed-effect model
- Coding
 - Systematic coding scheme
 - *r* statistics

Results

- Main effect
 - $r = .60$, $z = 15.81$, $p < .001$
 - 95% CI [.55, .66]
 - All the primary ES [.32, .77] were significant
- Heterogeneity of samples ($k=22$)
 - $Q = 258.88$, $df = 21$, $p < .001$; $I^2 = 91.89\%$

Stem-and-leaf Plot



1. Age

Older population had a stronger mean correlation than younger population.

Moderators	k	N	M_r	Z_r	SD_{Z_r}	95% CI	Q
Age							47.20**
Older	10	3,338	.69	.84	.02	.67-.70	55.73**
Younger	9	2,744	.58	.66	.02	.55-.60	84.50**

Note: ** $p < .001$; age ranged [28.29, 47.5] and the cutoff was 38; k=19 due to missing age information;

2. Study location

The sizes of correlation varied across different study locations.

Moderators	k	N	M_r	Z_r	SD_{Z_r}	95% CI	Q
Study location							150.84**
America	7	2,074	.70	.87	.02	.68-.72	47.46**
Australia	2	935	.69	.85	.04	.66-.73	.77
Asia	2	391	.62	.72	.05	.55-.67	.02
Europe	4	1,508	.64	.76	.03	.61-.67	30.22**
Africa	7	1,760	.46	.50	.02	.42-.50	29.57**

3. Measures used

A. Meaning vs. Calling

Calling had slightly stronger correlation with engagement but the difference was not statistically significant.

Moderators	k	N	M_r	Z_r	SD_{Z_r}	95% CI	Q
Measures							2.17
Meaning	18	5,587	.63	.74	.01	.61-.64	222.47**
Calling	3	920	.66	.79	.03	.62-.69	7.04*

3. Measures used

B. Majority vs. Others

1) Majority: May et al. (2004)

2) Others: used once or only by the inventor(s)

Moderators	k	N	M_r	Z_r	SD_{Z_r}	95% CI	Q
Measures							67.13**
May et al., (2004)	13	3,651	.56	.64	.02	.54-.59	104.39**
Others	7	2,247	.70	.86	.02	.67-.72	77.58**

4. Publication status

On average, published articles reported smaller correlations than unpublished manuscripts.

Moderators	k	N	M_r	Z_r	SD_{Z_r}	95% CI	Q
Measures							7.65**
Published	19	5,769	.62	.72	.01	.60-.63	222.40**
Unpublished	3	899	.68	.82	.03	.64-.71	28.83**

Discussion

- Relatively small number of studies
 - Engagement literature is more focused on job itself rather than individuals' relation with it
- Cross-generation implications
- Cross-cultural implications
- Diverse meaning measures
 - May et al. (2004): might be too broad
 - Specific to the context; increase relevance
- Issues with reporting
 - Insufficient information (e.g., mean age, number of items in measures)

Limitations and Future Directions

- More studies are needed
- Work engagement as the only outcome
 - Give the study a clear focus
 - Not enough to demonstrate that meaning at work is beneficial to organizations interested in various outcomes

Conclusion

- How employees perceive their meaning at work matters for them to engage in their work
 - Employees' psychological perceptions of their work is an important factor to determine their level of engagement at work.
- Context matters
 - Age, Country etc.



Contact Information

Heejin Kim, M.A.
Claremont Graduate University
heejin.kim@cgu.edu