MEANING AT WORK AND WORK ENGAGEMENT: A META-ANALYSIS

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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)
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

Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003; Rosso, Dekas, & Wresniewski, 2010;
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  • Peer-reviewed articles, unpublished manuscripts, dissertations and book chapters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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Leaves</th>
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<td>.0</td>
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<td>.1</td>
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<td>0 1 1 4 7</td>
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<td>.9</td>
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1. Age

Older population had a stronger mean correlation than younger population.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderators</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Zr</td>
<td>SD$_{Zr}$</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>47.20**</td>
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<td>Older</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>.84</td>
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<td>.67-.70</td>
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<td>Younger</td>
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<td>2,744</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.55-.60</td>
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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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderators</th>
<th>k</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mr</th>
<th>Zr</th>
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<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Q</th>
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<td>America</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>.70</td>
<td>.87</td>
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<td>.68-.72</td>
<td>47.46**</td>
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<td>.69</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.66-.73</td>
<td>.77</td>
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<td>391</td>
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<td>1,508</td>
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<td>.76</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.61-.67</td>
<td>30.22**</td>
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<td>1,760</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.42-.50</td>
<td>29.57**</td>
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3. Measures used

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderators</th>
<th>k</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mr</th>
<th>Zr</th>
<th>SD_{Zr}</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Q</th>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>.61-.64</td>
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<td>.66</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.62-.69</td>
<td>7.04*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Measures used

B. Majority vs. Others
1) Majority: May et al. (2004)
2) Others: used once or only by the inventor(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>k</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mr</th>
<th>Zr</th>
<th>SD_{Zr}</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Q</th>
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<tr>
<td>May et al., (2004)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3,651</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.54-.59</td>
<td>104.39**</td>
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<td>Others</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2,247</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.67-.72</td>
<td>77.58**</td>
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## 4. Publication status

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

<table>
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<th>N</th>
<th>Mr</th>
<th>Zr</th>
<th>SD_{Zr}</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Q</th>
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<td><strong>Measures</strong></td>
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<td>.82</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>28.83**</td>
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</table>
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.
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