5

Creating Meaning and Purpose at Work

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Introduction

Organizations frequently look to employee well-being as an engine for improved performance, motivated by the idea that a happy worker is a better worker and by data suggesting that work well-being delivers impressive return on investment. Every dollar an organization invests into its employees' well-being provides a return of roughly three to five dollars (Goetzel & Ozminkowski, 2008; Rath & Harter, 2010). Driven by an intuitive appeal and a growing body of research, meaningful work holds the promise of being the "next big thing" among organizations seeking a lever for improving organizational performance (Dik, Byrne, & Steger, 2013). Essentially, it may be time to move beyond engagement and commitment and strive for meaningful work.

The general public may have a ready, semantic grasp of what meaningful work should look like and feel like, but scholars have differed in how they have formally defined the construct. The common thread across all definitions is the idea that for work to be meaningful, an individual worker must be able to identify some personally meaningful contribution made by his or her effort. Beyond this, meaningful work speaks to people's subjective experience that their jobs, work, or careers are purposeful and significant, that their work is harmoniously and energetically synergistic with the meaning and purpose in their broader lives, and that they are enabled and empowered to benefit the greater good through their work. This chapter reviews current theory, assessment, and research on meaningful work with the hopes that a better understanding might enable meaningful work to be cultivated and harnessed to maximize performance, build strong brands, nurture innovation, and benefit both employees and their host communities while they are at it.

Meaningful work represents an opportunity to transition from organizational practices that seek simply to maximize effort and output – such as policies focused on incentives, engagement, and commitment – to practices that augment effort and output with improved welfare for a wide range of organizational stakeholders ranging from shareholders

to employees to host communities. At its heart, meaningful work scholarship and application seeks to optimize occupational opportunities in such a way that employee motivation, effort, and productivity are enhanced, and that employees enthusiastically adopt attitudes of ownership, responsibility, and citizenship toward their organization, while simultaneously enjoying greater well-being, health, and belongingness. To access these qualities among its employees, organizations need to provide fertile conditions for the growth of meaningful work. This chapter draws on the relevant scholarship to review those qualities that characterize such meaning-friendly conditions. First, meaningful work theory is reviewed to identify the major themes and dimensions of meaningful work. Second, meaningful work assessment is reviewed. Third, correlates, predictors, and benefits of meaningful work are identified and discussed. Fourth, practical recommendations for fostering meaningful work are suggested to guide individual workers, leaders, and organizations.

Meaningful Work Theory

Theories of meaningful work could in some ways be said to draw their inspiration from Durkheim's (1897) sociological analysis of suicide. Durkheim argued that one cause of suicide was unemployment because it deprived people of their function and their opportunity to contribute to society. That a noted sociologist was so concerned with the damage unemployment could do to people may have been rooted in the massive changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution to the role of work in people's lives. In some ways, work was transformed from a predestined path trod by all members of a particular family lineage, where Shoemakers made shoes, Cartiers transported goods, and Breuers made beer. As machines replaced human labor and as assembly line techniques deconstructed work into a sequence of connected tasks, traditional occupations were uprooted and people became responsible not for production as *fait accompli* but rather for production in terms of incremental additions to a whole. More than 100 years after Durkheim's observations about the dire impact of losing one's place in society through the loss of work, we still see concerns about how quickly the world of work changes, how rapidly "human" jobs are outsourced or even replaced by robots or algorithms. As technology continues to change the shape of work in our lives, by increasing competition in the job market, increasing globalization, and increasing the reach of workplace communications into personal time, people struggle with the challenge of trying to balance work demands with life priorities.

Meaningful work is viewed as a way to bring harmony, if not balance, to the busy lives of workers, providing workers with well-being at the office and providing organizations with enhanced productivity, performance, and dedication. There are two primary families of meaningful work theories. The first is comprised of theories about either the meaning ascribed to work or the meaning people derive through their work; the second is comprised of theories about work as a calling.

Meaningful work theories

Simply put, meaningful work is any paid or unpaid work or occupational role people fulfill that is judged by them to possess meaning, purpose, or significance. This basic definition is similar to the definition offered through the influential Job Characteristics Model (JCM; Hackman & Oldham, 1976), where meaningful work is described in terms of employee perceptions that a particular job is meaningful, worthwhile, and valuable. Within the surveys that fleshed out the JCM, however, meaningful work was assessed by asking employees about their own personal opinions, and the opinions of their co-workers, regarding

whether work done on a specific job is useless and trivial, or very meaningful (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Accordingly, meaningful work is work that is not useless or trivial, but is instead meaningful. It is in elaborating this general sentiment that meaningful work should have some meaning to it that scholars recently have spent most of their efforts.

More recently, a formal multidimensional model of meaningful work has been proposed. Steger, Dik, and Duffy (2012) framed meaningful work in terms of three dimensions. Steger and colleagues drew upon the much larger body of scholarship on meaning in life as a whole to identify the important role of self-transcendence in meaningful work (for review, see Steger, 2009, 2012a, 2012b). It has been theorized and shown that as people transcend their own immediate and self-centered concerns to embrace the concerns of those beyond themselves they experience greater meaning in their lives (e.g., Dik, Duffy, & Steger, 2012; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Schnell, 2009; Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008). The model Steger and colleagues developed can be displayed in terms of concentric circles indicating people's degree of transcendence from the basic qualities of a job. Meaningful work transcends simple job execution when workers perceive that their work is meaningful and has a point or purpose within the organization. The relationship of one's work to meaning in one's personal life as a whole is another step of transcendence away from simple job characteristics. Finally, the ability of work to surpass benefits to one's own life and provide broader impacts for the greater good represents yet another level of transcendence. Figure 5.1 displays the dimensions of meaningful work from this theory. In the central circle is the extent to which a worker judges her or his job to be meaningful and significant. In the next circle is the degree to which a job or work is harmonious with meaning and purpose in the worker's life as a whole, or alternatively, helps workers build more meaning in their lives. In the largest circle is the degree to which a job or work helps the worker contribute to or positively impact others or the greater good in prosocial ways.

Meanings of work   An ancillary pursuit has grown around efforts to define the meaning of work to people, rather than what the experience of meaningful work is like for them. Although these two concepts – the meaning of work versus meaningful work – are distinct, their similar names warrant some explication. Whereas meaningful work, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, can be defined as the subjective experience that one's job, work, or career is meaningful, provides synergy with one's meaning in life, and benefits some greater good, the "meaning of work" pursues "the significance, beliefs, definitions and the value which individuals and groups attach to working as a major element of human activity" (Harpaz & Fu, 2002, p. 641). Another way of looking at the distinction is that meaningful work research seeks to understand the meaning and value work provides to people, and meaning of work research seeks to understand the role work plays in human life and society. Research in this tradition (e.g., Harpaz & Fu, 2002) has focused on the centrality of work in people's lives, their adoption of entitlement and obligation social norms, the value they place on common work outcomes, their work goals, and their identification with their work roles. An alternative approach to the meaning of work organized these concepts and many more into four categories: self-related variables such as values, beliefs, and motivation; other-related variables such as co-workers, leaders, communities, and families; work-context variables such as job design, financial considerations, and cultural work norms; and spiritual life variables such as spirituality, and sacred callings (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). One could argue that there are a few variables left out (physical work abilities, for example), but between these two approaches, it seems possible that nearly any aspect of a worker's life could impact the meaning she or he attaches to work. Thus, work will play an enormous variety of roles and be viewed in wide diversity
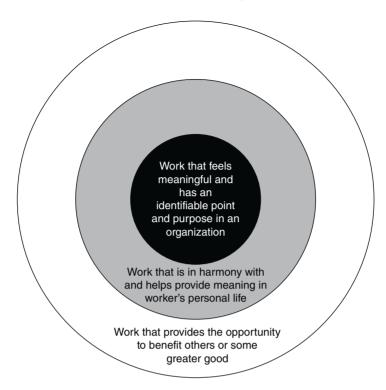
Figure 5.1 The three-level model of meaningful work proposed by Steger, Dik, & Duffy (2012). Each level represents a degree of transcendence from the worker's specific job. Meaningful work includes: (1) Workers' perceptions of meaning or purpose in job or career activities (in the center circle); (2) The capacity for work to be in harmony with and to help nurture meaning in the worker's broader life, which is one level of transcendence higher than the job itself (in the second circle); and (3) the opportunity to positively impact or benefit the greater good of stakeholders in the worker's community, society, or even planet, which is another level of transcendence higher (in the outer circle). *Source*: Steger et al. (2012). Reproduced with permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

of ways, but the question still remains, what factors make any give occupational pursuit more meaningful, purposeful, and significant?

Facilitators of meaningful work   The most comprehensive accounting of mechanisms to create meaningful work organized the literature into seven pathways: authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, and cultural and interpersonal sensemaking (Rosso et al., 2010). The origins of some of these pathways lie in the JCM. In the JCM, meaningful work results when workers engage in jobs that provide them with the necessity of using a variety of skills, talents, and activities; the opportunity to work on a job that results in a completed task such that they see a job progress from beginning to end; and the ability to work on a job that substantially impacts the lives or work of their co-workers or others outside of the organization (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Thus, the JCM identifies elements that help people develop self-efficacy, self-esteem, belongingness, and perhaps cultural and interpersonal sensemaking. It can be seen that recent multidimensional models of meaningful work have incorporated and expanded the general idea of the third predictor of meaningful work. Rather than meaningful work

arising because people view their job to impact the work or lives of others, meaningful work itself is composed in part of the desire and opportunity to tangibly help others or the greater good. The other two predictors of meaningful work articulated in the JCM, skill variety and completing a whole task, have been de-emphasized in recent models of meaningful work, in favor of organizational, social, and psychological characteristics.

In Steger and Dik's (2010) model of meaningful work, meaningful work is brought to life when people are able to develop a comprehensive and accurate cognitive understanding of themselves as a component of their working environment, as well as when they can discern a purpose or purposes in their lives that provides the fundamental motivation for their work efforts. Although not all aspects of this model were fully fleshed out, research and practice since the publication of that model has helped identify key aspects of how to help achieve meaningful work.

The multidimensional meaningful work model of Steger and colleagues (e.g., Steger & Dik, 2010; Steger et al., 2012) characterizes work as one of several important life domains in which people learn how to navigate, find their niche, and express their values, strengths, and aspirations. On the personal level, meaningful work is fostered by characteristics such as an honest appraisal of one's strengths and weaknesses, a desire to make a positive impact on others and on the greater good, authenticity, taking responsibility for and adopting an ownership mentality toward one's organization, knowledge of organizational policies and operations, a complete grasp of one's scope of work and responsibilities, and sufficient knowledge of the values and mission of an organization that one can ascertain fit with one's own purpose. On the interpersonal level, meaningful work is fostered by respectful relationships, a sufficient understanding of an organization's social and political landscape, and opportunities to help and be helped, or mentor and be mentored. On the leadership and organizational level, meaningful work is fostered by clear communication of the values and mission of the organization in conjunction with an authentic adoption of those characteristics in the operational culture and practice of the organization, authenticity and ethical behavior from leadership teams, a clear and articulated vision of how each employee contributes to the organization's functioning through his or her work, and the willingness to allow some degree of autonomy and personal expressiveness in how each worker fulfills his or her duties. All of the pathways to meaningful work identified by Rosso and colleagues (2010) are captured by this approach. In a later section, I will expand on how these many points of emphasis can be organized into a more user-friendly format to help individuals and organizations implement meaningful work programs.

Calling theories

In the broadest sense, calling in work is defined as work that is personally meaningful and holds some ability to pursue prosocial desires. For example, Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011) define calling as "a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain" (p. 1003), and others similarly define calling in terms of purpose in life (Hall & Chandler, 2005) or meaning (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). This definition is the secular version of the calling construct, and is very similar to definitions of meaningful work, as we saw in the previous section of this chapter. The heritage of calling lies in its religious roots, however, and several modern theories of calling have adopted what is known as "neo-classical" or spiritually informed definitions. For example, Dik and Duffy (2009) define calling as "a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented

values and goals as primary sources of motivation" (p. 427). Dik and Duffy fashioned their definition from an interdisciplinary review of relevant scholarly work.

A somewhat similar definition of calling emerged from qualitative research among working adults in Germany and the United States. Hagmaier and Abele (2012) found five dimensions in their interviews: sense and meaning, value-driven behavior, person–environment fit, identification with one's work, and transcendent guiding force. However, factor analysis of survey items derived from these dimensions resulted in three dimensions: transcendent guiding force (which is similar to transcendent summons, though it includes questions about inner voice, inner call, and destiny), identification with one's work (which assesses identifying with, feeling passionate about, and realizing full potential through one's work), and finally sense and meaning and value-driven behavior (which is very similar to the prosocial dimension of other calling theories, and includes items about serving a common goal, making the world a better place, and having high moral standards for one's work). This model of calling captures some sense that one is guided to work, that such work is personally expressive, and that one works with high moral standards to benefit others. It does not have an explicit dimension that assesses whether work is meaningful to the respondent. Thus, calling is work that is personally meaningful, is motivated by an interest in serving a prosocial benefit, and in addition is a response to a summons to work that comes from transcendent sources, such as religious Higher Powers, respected authorities, or perceived societal need.

The spiritual dimension of calling does seem to provide additional benefit in understanding the impact of a calling. A study of highly educated working mothers found that sanctification of work predicted higher positive emotions and job satisfaction, and lower life–work role conflict above and beyond other measures of religiosity (Hall, Oates, Anderson, & Willingham, 2012). Despite such results, several lines of research under the rubric of calling do not include transcendent summons or other spiritual content in their approach to calling. Because of this, most calling research is well aligned with meaningful work research and can be used to understand the predictors, correlates, and outcomes of meaningful work.

Calling as one among many work orientations   Within the models of calling that are directly compatible with meaningful work theory, it is typical to draw upon a three-dimensional orientation toward work first presented by Bellah and colleagues (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). People with a *job* orientation focus on work as an avenue toward financial or material compensation with little to no concern for whether work is meaningful or significant. People with a *career* orientation focus on work as an avenue for gaining a sense of achievement, mastery, status, or advancement within an organization, again with no particular interest in meaning. In contrast, however, people with a *calling* orientation focus on the fulfillment, prosocial benefits, and sense of purpose that work provides, particularly in terms of making the world a better place. The calling orientation is relevant to theories of meaningful work because of how scholars have relied upon it. For example, Wrzesniewski and colleagues (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) framed their research in terms of calling.

Pratt and colleagues proposed that Bellah's classic calling orientation could itself be further understood as a combination of three independent dimensions (Pratt, Pradies, & Lepisto, 2013). Essentially, Pratt and colleagues suggest that work can be a calling for people because they can harvest different forms of fulfillment from their work: the *craftsmanship orientation* pertains to people who feel fulfilled by developing skills, mastery, and doing a job well; the *serving orientation* specifically captures the greater good aspect of calling and refers to people who feel fulfilled when their work helps other people; the *kinship orientation* applies to people who feel fulfilled in their work because of the

quality of relationships people develop through their work, whether that pertains to co-workers, professional organizations, or customers. These dimensions may exist outside of the parameters of calling as well. For example, the craftsmanship orientation may be very similar to the career orientation if the worker's emphasis is upon mastery and execution more than on status and promotion.

Living a calling versus anticipating a calling   One further distinction has been made in calling scholarship that has not been explored in the wider meaningful work literature. There appears to be a difference between having a calling and living a calling. Whereas the former refers to people's perception that they apprehend that there is a career out there that they would find to be meaningful, the latter refers to the realization of that career and that one is actively engaged in one's calling rather than simply feeling as if a calling awaits somewhere down the road (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013). It may be well and good to feel that one's calling is coming, but theoretically, there should be greater benefits to be working one's calling (Duffy & Autin, 2013). From a conceptual standpoint, meaningful work most closely resembles living a calling; certainly the definition of meaningful work suggests that people are supposed to describe their current employment or volunteering. Because the difference between perceiving and living meaningful work has not been tested, it is difficult to say.

   Calling theory, like meaningful work theory, emphasizes self-knowledge and self-understanding. There are few apparent ways to know if one has a calling that do not rely on comparing jobs and careers to how one wishes to work and what one desires to accomplish at work.

Meaningful Work Assessment

In part due to the theoretical efforts discussed above, meaningful work appears to be an increasingly important point of reference, both culturally and academically. Several international work and consulting firms have released surveys and recommendations about meaningful work, and the pace of research seems to have accelerated briskly. As one rough metric, a simple PsychINFO search was undertaken on May 17, 2015, using the search term "meaningful work," and limiting the results to journal articles and books. This search returned 225 results, of which more than 50% have been published since 2009 (110 citations) and *nearly 30% have been published between 2013 and mid-2015* (67 citations, 29.8%). There are much more rigorous ways of exploring just how active and growing this area of scholarship is, but this approximation corresponds well with anecdotal observations. In a field that marks publications from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s into the present, it is a testament to the rising prominence of meaningful work that almost one-third of papers and books published have appeared since 2012. It is also a testament to the amount of empirical exploration that is needed, given that we are talking about only a couple of hundred papers and books to date.

   The backbone of any science is built upon theory, methods, and, ultimately, assessment. Meaningful work assessment spans a variety of efforts, from single items and ad hoc surveys to theoretically and psychometrically developed multidimensional questionnaires. The purpose of the following section is not to provide recommendations on which measures to use, but instead to bring together and review the most prominent and notable efforts in meaningful work assessment. Additional reviews of meaningful work and calling assessment are available as well (see Duffy, Autin, Allan, & Douglass, 2015; Steger, Dik, & Shim, in press).

Review of meaningful work assessment tools

Initial efforts to measure meaningful work, and also calling, have often focused on simply assessing the degree to which people report work as being meaningful or as being a calling. For example, meaningful work was measured as a simple, unidimensional construct in the JCM (Hackman & Oldham, 1975), and prominent early efforts to research calling relied on people to choose which of three paragraphs best described them, with one of the paragraphs standing as a definition of calling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Implicit in each of these approaches were several qualities, however. In the JCM, meaningful work items assessed whether work was meaningful or whether it was useless and trivial. In calling measurement, the paragraph used as stimulus for calling measurement included descriptors of work being one of the most important parts of life, a vital part of who one is, taking work home with one, having the majority of friends at work, loving work, work making the world a better place, encouraging others to enter the same line of work, and being upset if forced to stop working (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Thus, particularly in the case of calling, a lot of concepts are packed into meaningful work.

The next major developments in assessing meaningful work continued to add content while still adhering to a unidimensional measurement strategy. For example, May, Gilson, & Harter (2004) assessed meaningful work as a component of workplace empowerment with six items assessing meaningfulness in terms of importance, value, worthwhileness, and significance of activities. All of these items essentially riffed on synonyms for "meaningful" and antonyms of "uselessness," which were the core components of meaningful work within JCM. In fact, most meaningful work assessment through the mid-2000s used various synonyms of meaningful work and antonyms of meaningless work to explore the construct. This includes a survey developed by Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, and McKee (2007), which added items assessing work as fulfilling, rewarding, and achieving important outcomes.

Ashmos and Duchon (2000) bucked this trend with the meaningful work subscale of their measure of workplace spirituality. In addition to assessing the personal meaningfulness of work, this scale focused on work's connection with important values as well as with greater social and community good. Unfortunately, it also added joy, energy, and positive anticipation of work to the list, clouding the issue of what the scale actually measures. For example, one person could obtain a high score on this scale primarily because her job enables her to make a personal contribution to a valued social cause, while another person could obtain a high score on this scale because she loves eating the free snacks, jumping on the trampoline, playing video games with her co-workers, and other trappings of work engagement campaigns. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that all of these meaningful work measures were unidimensional, scores tended to be quite reliable. In addition, they correlated in expected ways with other positive indicators of workplace adjustment, laying the initial groundwork for establishing that meaningful work is desirable. At the same time, they were less suited for helping determine what meaningful work actually is.

Part of the reason that these meaningful work measures may seem somewhat preliminary is that none of the assessment instruments were grounded in meaningful work theory but rather were developed according to the pragmatic needs of individual studies. More recently, measures of meaningful work and calling have been built on firmer theoretical foundations. For example, Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011) sought to ameliorate the conceptual confusion they found around definitions of calling by defining it as "a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain" (p. 1005). They built a 12-item scale upon this definition, which logically asks about levels of passion, enjoyment, personal satisfaction, sense of destiny, constant presence in one's mind, being moved and

gratified by one's calling, and even the degree of sacrifice people would accept and the obstacles people would overcome to pursue their calling. These items are summed to a single calling score, supported by confirmatory factor analysis. Calling scores showed large correlations with other ways of unidimensionally assessing calling. All of these unidimensional measures of calling also had large correlations with work engagement and job involvement. In fact, the largest correlate of both Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas' scale and Wrzesniewski and colleagues' (1997) calling measurement was with job involvement. The theory-driven unidimensional measurement of meaningful work thus seems to yield psychometrically robust scales, but may not do enough to differentiate meaningful work (and calling) from similar constructs.

Several recent efforts have consulted theory and developed psychometrically robust scales that assess multiple dimensions. The first is the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ; Dik, Eldridge, Steger, & Duffy, 2012) which was developed to assess Dik and Duffy's (2009) theory of calling. The CVQ assesses a 2 × 3 array of calling subscales created by an overarching Searching For vs. Experiencing the Presence Of dimension laid over three content areas: Transcendent Summons, Purposeful Work, and Prosocial Orientation. The second is the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012) which was developed to assess Steger and Dik's multidimensional model of meaningful work (Steger & Dik, 2010; Steger et al., 2012). The WAMI uses three subscales to measure Positive Meaning, Meaning Making Through Work, and Greater Good Motivations. Both of these models are described earlier in this chapter. The resulting tools, the CVQ and the WAMI, correlate more highly with other measures of the same construct than with measures of related but distinct constructs and show patterns of differentiation among the subscales each assess. A third effort, the Multidimensional Calling Measure (MCM; Hagemeier & Abele, 2012) was developed psychometrically to have three subscales, each measured by three items. The subscales capture work identification/fit with job, sense of meaning as values-driven behavior, and transcendent guiding force. Scores converge with other measures of calling (Duffy et al., 2015). Finally, a fourth multidimensional measure was developed based on qualitative research. The Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale has six subscales focused on assessing ways in which people view their work to help develop the self, promote unity with others, service to others, and developing potential (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). Although validity information for this scale was not presented, the psychometric properties and grounding theory are both compelling. Thus, using any of these three tools, meaningful work is measured with more specificity than simply using synonyms of the target construct. Further, hypotheses about which components of meaningful work are most central and important can be tested directly using subscales, which avoids the confusion caused by having diverse content included among the items.

Undoubtedly, further advances and refinements to the assessment of meaningful work will be forthcoming, but already there are a few theory-driven, psychometrically robust tools available, including unidimensional (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011) and multidimensional (Dik, Eldridge, et al., 2012; Hagemeier & Abele, 2012; Steger et al., 2012) scales.

Correlates, Predictors, and Benefits of Meaningful Work

Not every study of meaningful work has used the best available measures. However, studies that have included multiple measures have all found high convergence among different measures of meaningful work (e.g., Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy et al., 2015). Because of this, we can have some confidence that studies of the predictors and

benefits of meaningful work are likely to pertain to a variety of meaningful work assessment tools. In addition, with the exceptions of the transcendence subscales of the CVQ and MCM, most measures of calling cover the same material as measures of meaningful work, so most research on calling is directly informative about meaningful work.

Correlates of meaningful work

The vast bulk of meaningful work research has used cross-sectional methods and correlation-based analyses. As would be expected from the meaningful work theories reviewed earlier in this chapter, meaningful work (and calling) positively correlates with a wide range of desirable well-being and work-related variables. In general, those who feel their work is meaningful also report higher levels of well-being (Arnold et al., 2007), including more frequent positive emotions (Steger, Littman-Ovadia, Miller, Menger, & Rothmann, 2013; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010), more positive self-image (Torrey & Duffy, 2012), more satisfaction with life (Douglass, Duffy, & Autin, 2016; Steger et al., 2010; Steger et al., 2012), and more meaning in life (Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008; Dik & Steger, 2008; Douglass et al., 2016; Steger et al., 2010; Steger et al., 2012). People engaged in meaningful work also report lower levels of anxiety and depression (Steger et al., 2012). In addition to the personal well-being that those engaged in meaningful work enjoy, it appears that meaningful work adds significantly to the quality of home life as well. Those engaged in meaningful work reported a high degree of work-to-home enrichment such that their work helped them be a better member of their families (Tummers & Knies, 2013).

They also more highly value their work than other people do (Nord, Brief, Atieh, & Doherty, 1990) and believe their work to play a more central role in their lives (Harpaz & Fu, 2002). Although ambition, fear, or disempowerment also might drive work to be seen as valued and central, for people with meaningful work this does not seem to be the case. They are not more burned out at work (Creed, Rogers, Praskova, & Searle, 2014; Hagemeier & Abele, 2012). Rather they report greater job satisfaction (e.g., Douglass et al., 2016; Hagemeier & Abele, 2012; Kamdron, 2005; Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010; Lobene & Meade, 2013; Sparks & Schenk, 2001; Steger & Dik, 2009; Steger et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) and work enjoyment (Steger et al., 2010). While at work, they are more engaged than others (Steger et al., 2013). They also appear to have greater certainty (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007) and clarity about their career choices (Steger et al., 2010), and they feel greater self-efficacy about their careers (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Domene, 2012). People who have meaningful work feel strongly positive about their careers and organizations, being more committed than others, having greater intrinsic motivation, and being less likely to have intentions to quit working for their organization (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011; Fairlee, 2011; Lobene & Meade, 2013; Steger et al., 2012). Meaningful work is also positively correlated with self-reported supervisor performance ratings (Lobene & Meade, 2013), an indication that meaningful work pays off with better work.

People who experience meaningful work (and calling) may be profound social resources for organizations. For example, they are less hostile than other workers (Steger et al., 2012) and report greater work unit cohesion (Sparks & Schenk, 2001), greater faith in management and better work team functioning as rated by supervisors (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Further, they report engaging in more frequent organizational citizenship behaviors, meaning they are the ones who are turning off the lights before they go home, making the fresh pot of coffee, and leaving your lunch unmolested in the breakroom refrigerator (Rawat & Nadavulakere, 2015; Steger et al., 2012).

The seeds of meaningful work may be sown quite early. For example, within samples of American and Korean undergraduate students, those who reported that their academic majors were congruent with their eventual career aims reported significantly higher levels of meaningful work than those who perceived their academic majors to be a mismatch with the career they wanted to pursue (Shin, Steger, & Lee, 2014). This study suggests that knowing you are on the wrong career path diminishes meaningful work. Perceiving one's self to be overqualified for a job also appears to diminish meaningful work (Lobene & Meade, 2013).

Thus, research suggests a wide range of desirable correlates of meaningful work, such as life satisfaction, meaning in life, career commitment, and job satisfaction. These relationships appear to hold up over longitudinal analysis as well (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Douglass, 2014). However, it should be noted that in this field, as in others within psychology, there has been some reliance on studying students, as well as on American samples. Exceptions to this trend are numerous. There are several examples of studies that have surveyed working samples, often using survey panel techniques, such as Mechanical Turk, which frequently yields a sample of workers from diverse occupations (e.g., Duffy et al., 2013). There also is no shortage of other studies that have recruited working samples from specific organizations from countries around the world (e.g., Steger et al., 2013), and some of those studies have been explicitly cross-cultural, comparing results with an eye to how nation of origin may moderate people's experiences (e.g., Douglass et al., 2016). The hope is that as meaningful work gains credibility and appeal, there will be expanded opportunities for using more sophisticated research methods in a wider range of working samples around the world.

Predictors of meaningful work

Predictors of meaningful work can be separated into three categories: individual-level predictors, interpersonal predictors, and workplace characteristic predictors. However, it should first be noted that most research on meaningful work has been correlational, so it is not generally possible to determine whether many of the variables that have been linked to meaningful work are predictors, benefits, or simply related variables. General correlates of meaningful work and calling were reviewed in the previous section. This section focuses on the minority of studies that generate plausible information about predictors and benefits of meaningful work.

Individual-level predictors of meaningful work   The most commonly researched type of predictor for meaningful work seems to be individual-level variables, such as personality traits or other workplace variables (e.g., job satisfaction). Although they cannot unambiguously demonstrate causality, longitudinal studies suggest relationships between meaningful work and other variables across time. If early measures of some variables predict later meaningful work, but early meaningful work measures do not predict later variables, then it is not tenable to assert that meaningful work exerts causal influence over those other variables. In one example of this work, researchers assessed medical students twice in a two-year span, finding that changes in both meaning in life and vocational development predicted later changes in whether students felt they were living a calling, with no evidence supporting the reverse path (Duffy, Manuel, Borges, & Bott, 2014).

Some variables are thought to be predictors by their nature. A prime example is character strengths. Character strengths are theorized to be particular aspects of the self that are socially laudable, and generate positive experiences in the self and others when

they are used. They are thought to be present from an early age, so they should precede meaningful work in development. Studies have found positive correlations between the degree to which people endorse their character strengths and the level of meaningful work they experience (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). There is no existing theoretical explanation for how meaningful work might create strengths, so logic suggests that cultivating strengths may be a way to facilitate meaningful work.

Studies also have shown that people who actually use their strengths in their work are more likely to view their work as meaningful (Hartzer & Ruch, 2012; Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). Because one may use or stop using strengths on a daily, or even hourly, basis, there is less of a theoretical rationale for suggesting that strengths use creates meaningful work in favor of arguments that finding meaningful work encourages people to use their strengths. However, because of the flexibility of strengths use, this may be an important facet of programs designed to encourage meaningful work.

Interpersonal predictors of meaningful work There is very little research on interpersonal predictors of meaningful work, despite the importance of the social context to work experiences. Qualitative research on people who mentor others found that work becomes more meaningful for them because of their mentoring (Kennet & Lomas, 2015). Although the workers who were interviewed reported that mentoring was a way for them to obtain more meaning in their work, it is still possible that people who engage in mentoring (at least voluntarily) are precisely those who already find work to be meaningful. Despite the fact that research has not established causality in any way, mentoring is included as a potential predictor only because establishing a mentoring program is a potentially easy and concrete method that could be used to increase meaningful work.

Workplace characteristic predictors of meaningful work Perhaps the most logical place to start looking for workplace characteristic predictors of meaningful work is in the performance of leaders in organizations. A leader's behavior can have wide-ranging implications for employee performance, and set the tone for how workplaces function. Leadership provides an irresistible lever for models of how to foster meaningful work because of the potential to improve the working experience for multiple workers at a time through interventions with a much smaller number of leaders. There have not been any studies of the link between leadership and meaningful work that are able to speak directly to causality. Because of this it is perhaps not fully prudent to categorize leadership as a predictor of meaningful work simply because of assumptions that influence flows from leader to follower rather than from follower to leader. In the absence of more rigorous research methods, it is impossible to rule out alternative explanations, however. For example, people who view their work as more meaningful might be influenced by their meaningful work to view leaders through rose-colored glasses and transfer their positive feelings about work to leaders, whether the leaders have earned it or not. It is also possible that people engaged in meaningful work elicit better working relationships with their leaders because of the high value that those engaged in meaningful work bring to the workplace through increased commitment, enjoyment, engagement, effort, performance, and social contribution. There is reason to be cautious, therefore, in assuming that leadership automatically influences meaningful work.

With caveats in place, there is evidence that leadership and meaningful work are related. Because of the passion, authenticity, energy, and vision-setting emphasized in transformative leadership, it is expected that employees working for a transformational leader would connect those qualities with perceiving work to be worthwhile and to be rich in purpose.

Indeed, leaders who are more aligned with transformational leadership approaches have employees who find their work to be more meaningful (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). The provision of paths to meaningful work might be considered to be an important function of the best leaders, and their organizations may then harvest the benefits of having their employees engaged in meaningful work (Steger & Dik, 2010).

Beyond traditional leadership skills, helping employees feel supported also appears to help employees to find meaningful work. High-quality relations with one's supervisor include feeling supported, as well as feeling understood, cared for, and having mutually trusting working relationships. Such high-quality leadership relations are positively correlated with meaningful work (Tummers & Knies, 2013). Support from one's supervisor, as well as greater control over one's job, are both positively correlated with meaningful work. This research was correlational, so the possibility cannot be ruled out that people engaged in meaningful work are more likely to earn supervisor support and be given more control over their jobs. Nonetheless, both of these resources seem like compelling targets for improving the chances that employees will experience more meaningful work due to the fact that they are aspects of job design, which can be modified at the organizational level, rather than relying on individual workers enacting changes. This suggestion is bolstered by a longitudinal study among elder care workers that showed how active involvement of middle managers toward improving teamwork led to more positive perceptions of working conditions, a variable which included meaningful work in this study (Nielsen & Randall, 2009). Improvements in working conditions were further related to improvements in job satisfaction and well-being.

Finally, it appears important to meaningful work that organizations support the higher ideals of employees. People who volunteer are more likely to feel their work is meaningful, even if volunteering is completely separate from their job (Rodell, 2013). However, this does not mean that organizations should not encourage employees to volunteer. Actively supporting employees in their volunteering may be an important way for organizations to foster meaningful work not only because doing so clearly communicates an appreciation of something of importance to employees, but also because it communicates that the organization is willing to support actions that benefit the greater good, which is an important part of meaningful work. Supporting this claim is research showing that awareness of corporate social responsibility activities among employees is positively linked to their sense of meaningful work (labeled "task significance" but measured with items very similar to those on meaningful work questionnaires; Raub & Blunschi, 2014).

Despite the absence of large numbers of studies that have used research methods designed to shed light on causality, we might be able to extrapolate from existing longitudinal research and from correlational research focused on variables that are more or less out of the control of individual employees to form ideas about predictors of meaningful work. Fostering meaning in life, vocational identity, and the capacity to understand and use one's character strengths seem promising as predictors of meaningful work. Working in an organization led by a transformational leader who provides vision and support to employees, and provides opportunities for them to volunteer toward meaningful causes, also seems likely to predict meaningful work. As research continues to progress, we hope to gather more robust evidence about predictors, as well as become better at understanding how fostering meaningful work benefits individuals, organizations, and communities.

Benefits of meaningful work

In exploring the potential benefits of meaningful work, it is helpful to ask what kinds of benefits we should expect to see. According to the JCM, meaningful work helps produce high intrinsic work motivation, high job satisfaction, high-quality performance, and low

levels of absenteeism and turnover. All of these relationships have been found within correlational research designs. However, more powerful causal research methods have not been widely deployed in the study of meaningful work to date. As has been the case with understanding the predictors of meaningful work, longitudinal research methods are the most common ones used to test thoughts about causality. Several studies have found that changes in meaningful work precede changes in job satisfaction and well-being, suggesting that these are potential benefits of meaningful work (Nielsen & Randall, 2009). One of the clearest benefits of meaningful work is reduced absenteeism. One study found that people with greater meaningful work were absent form work less often than others over a three-month span following initial assessment (Soane et al., 2013). Not only are those with meaningful work more physically present at work, they are also more psychologically, emotionally, and behaviorally present at work. Longitudinal research suggests that improving meaningful work benefits employees' engagement at work (Nakamura & Otsuka, 2013). Meaningful work also longitudinally predicted both job satisfaction and career commitment over 3- and 6-month time periods (Duffy, Allan, et al., 2014). Further, meaningful work and calling appear to foster a sense of perseverance, leading people to disregard negative career advice that contradicts their interest in following their calling (Dobrow & Heller, 2015). Of course, not all advice to quit a particular career is "bad" advice. Not everyone is cut out for success in a field just because they are passionate about it, and sometimes people's commitment to their calling can leave them exposed to potential exploitation (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

Thus, meaningful work provides benefits to employees both at work and in their broader lives. They are more committed, persistent, engaged, and satisfied at work, and enjoy greater well-being in life as a whole. To the degree that having happy and committed workers expending substantial effort in an organization is appealing to leaders and managers, then meaningful work warrants inclusion on the shortlist of any organization's programming.

Aside from the benefits to workers, however, there is some evidence that meaningful work provides a solid foundation for a better life. Perhaps the benefits of meaningful work also can be shown by what happens to people when they are unable to follow their desired path to meaningful work. One qualitative study focused on 31 people who said they were unable to follow their calling, whether because they chose another less fulfilling career path or because they followed one calling only to realize they had more than one. These people expressed regret that they missed their callings (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010).

Fostering Meaningful Work

As employees and workplaces become increasingly sophisticated, they are likely to see advantages in transcending simplistic and mechanistic transactional approaches for retaining and motivating talent. It should be apparent that the root problem with simple transactional approaches to incentivizing workers to work harder and to stay with organizations longer is that it is easy for multiple marketplace entities to compete on salary and benefit terms. If the primary incentive a company is offering to a worker to work hard and stay with the company is monetary, then what is to prevent the worker from taking a better deal elsewhere? As both physical and virtual mobility of the workforce increases, companies need to offer more profound reasons for their best talent to stay. A further consideration is that employees appear to be seeking meaningful work, and may expect their employers to be able to provide it (Šverko & Vizek-Vidović, 1995). Of course, the hope of this chapter is that meaningful work is considered as an important cornerstone of talent retention, organizational optimization, and employee well-being. Workers themselves appear to be looking for meaningful work. The importance of meaningful work to workers is that many of them

avow that finding meaning in one's work is as important as level of pay and job security (O'Brien, 1992). In fact, a more recent survey among the international workforce of temporary worker company Kelly Services found that a slight majority of their employees would choose a pay cut in order to have more meaningful work (Kelly Services, 2010).

This chapter has reviewed the theory, assessment, correlates, predictors, and benefits of meaningful work. In this section, efforts are made to pull together the many threads of meaningful work into a useful framework for fostering it within organizations. I have found it helpful to organize the theoretical and empirical predictors of meaningful work into two models. The first is the SPIRE model, which incorporates the most important personal-level predictors and correlates of meaningful work. The second is the CARMA model, which incorporates the most important leadership and organizational-level predictors and correlates of meaningful work. Figure 5.2 illustrates both models, along with brief descriptions of each of the components of SPIRE and CARMA.

Much of the meaningful work and calling literature has focused on providing motivation and inspiration to employees to craft more meaningful work for themselves (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013). I use the SPIRE model to focus on potentially important levers for building meaningful work: Strengths, Personalization, Integration, Resonance, and Expansion.

SPIRE		CARMA	
Finding pathways to more meaningful work		**Fostering meaningful work for your employees and followers**	
S Strengths	Know your unique strengths and talents, and use them in executing your work, even if that means going above and beyond your basic job duties	**C** Clarity	Organizations need a vision and mission to be clearly shared across all levels, if a company lacks purpose, its workers might follow suit
P Personalization	Bring more of yourself to work, align work with your values, take responsibility and adopt an ownership mentality for your work and your organization	**A** Authenticity	Organizations must follow their own mission, leaders must behave ethically and honestly; phony purpose and exploitation kill meaning
I Integration	Integrate the motivation of and execution of your job with other elements of your life, work in ways that bring meaning to the rest of your life	**R** Respect	Building positive, effective relationships in an organization begins with leadership modeling respect and creating chances for beneficial interactions
R Resonance	Learn your organization's core values and mission, find ways in which it resonates with your personal mission and meaning through your everyday work	**M** Mattering	Leadership must convey to each worker exactly how their contribution is vital to the success and health of the organization and its mission
E Expansion	Seek ways in which your work can be grown to benefit some greater good, expand your concerns to embrace broader interests beyond your self	**A** Autonomy	Allow followers increased self-expression by providing opportunities for self-direction, trial and error, innovation, and idea interchange

Figure 5.2 One way of organizing theory and research on developing meaningful work at the personal and at the organizational/leadership level. The SPIRE model presents the most important theoretical and empirical predictors of meaningful work that individual workers are likely to have the ability to influence. The CARMA model presents the most important theoretical and empirical predictors of meaningful work that can be distributed organization-wide to increase the likelihood that workers and followers experience work at the organization to be meaningful. *Source*: Author.

As was reviewed above, recognizing one's personal and character strengths, and then finding opportunities to use them in the workplace has been related to perceiving greater meaning in one's work (e.g., Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). Strengths reminds workers of the potential benefits of finding ways to actively and frequently use their strengths in their work.

Personalization refers to the relationship between meaningful work and both work centrality and organizational citizenship behavior, as well as the theorized importance of finding work that is personally expressive (e.g., Dik, Eldridge, et al., 2012; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Steger et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Through personalization, people are encouraged to gain clarity regarding their values and to bring more of themselves to the kinds of work that are consistent with those values.

Integration builds on research showing reciprocal relationships over time between the meaning people find at work and the meaning they find in the rest of their lives (e.g., Duffy, Allan, et al., 2014; Steger & Dik, 2009). As meaning in life is thought to express in part a person's values (e.g., Steger, 2009), integration points to the potential importance of engaging in values-congruent activities while at work, both in terms of the actual tasks required and in terms of the overall values of the organization (Hoffman, Bynum, Piccolo, & Sutton, 2011). Work, then, can become an important path to meaning in life (e.g., Allan, Duffy, & Douglass, 2015; Steger & Dik, 2009).

Resonance builds on research showing that leaders who can express a vision and purpose for an organization make it easier for workers to find meaning in their efforts (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Theoretically, being able to find similarities between one's own personal missions and purposes and those of one's employer should help workers feel more motivated to support organizational missions, and should help workers feel that their work makes their lives better overall by supporting their meaning in life (Nielsen & Randall, 2009; Steger et al., 2012).

Expansion builds on research and theory pointing to the importance of viewing one's work as benefitting others (e.g., Dik, Eldridge, et al., 2012; Grant, 2007; Steger et al., 2012). Longstanding theory (e.g., Dik et al., 2012) and psychometric factor analyses (e.g., Steger et al., 2012) demonstrate that the desire to serve some greater good or benefit others through one's effort is central to meaningful work. Through expansion, people are reminded that one path to meaningful work appears to be to transcend the demands and dynamics of the moment and of one's career ambitions to incorporate ways in which work can also be fashioned to help others.

The CARMA model was developed to light-heartedly remind managers, leaders, and their organizations that, as with properly spelled *karma*, we reap what we sow. If leaders can invest in making it easier for their followers to experience meaningful work, then they may reap the benefits. CARMA focuses on Clarity, Authenticity, Respect, Mattering, and Autonomy.

Clarity is in some ways the mirror image of Resonance from the SPIRE model, and builds on a similar body of research on transformational leadership and other leadership models in which a leader's ability to provide a clear sense of mission and purpose are important tools for inspiring greater performance (e.g., Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Clarity calls attention to the importance not only of setting and communicating a clear organizational purpose, but also the importance of having an apt purpose for an organization. An excellent example of clarity comes from a recent tumble in the U.S. stock market. The CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, sent out a company-wide email very different than the typical emails that are sent out after plummeting stock prices. The email included assurances of the company's growth, its innovation, and competitive products, as well as its positive social impact and the centrality of its employees.

However, there were no stale references to defending shareholder returns, market capitalization, or initiatives to expand its sales force in developing markets. Instead, both modeling and reflecting upon Starbucks' core customer service message, Schultz reminded his employees that many of their customers would come into the store feeling worried and stressed out, so everyone on the Starbucks team should try harder than ever to give them a comforting experience. Imagine the cynical response if the CEO of a company that has a lip-service mission that no one believes tried to send out a similar email. When the mission is authentic and leaders buy in, the impact of mission messaging can be profound.

Authenticity also shares in the research and theory on new leadership models, such as transformational and authentic leadership (e.g., Judge & Piccolo, 2004). If leaders want their workers to bring the depths of dedication, commitment, engagement, and performance that are associated with meaningful work, they cannot repay employee efforts with unethical behavior, cynical manipulations, and disingenuous relationships. Authenticity also asserts that if organizations want followers to buy into their mission statements, leaders should act in accordance with them as well. People engaged in meaningful work appear to bring the best of their personal selves to work, and leaders who want to foster meaningful work should expect to do the same.

Respect builds on literature showing that the social environment of a workplace is important to workers' satisfaction. Leaders and managers play an important role, particularly in setting a supportive tone for a workplace (e.g., Tummers & Knies, 2013). Other people may be among the most influential workplace elements for creating meaningful work (Pratt et al., 2013), and creating a culture where people have fun, work hard and positively, look out for each other, provide support, and engage in caretaking for the organization (e.g., Steger et al., 2012) should be modeled and demonstrated by leaders interacting respectfully (e.g., Leape et al., 2012).

Mattering builds on JCM research and on the core theoretical aspect of meaningful work that job tasks must have a point within an organization, and should lead to recognizable and valued organizational outputs (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Steger et al., 2012). Let's be honest, if an organization cannot express in no uncertain terms why a worker's efforts are important to the organization and how they contribute to a valued outcome, then how can we hope that a worker will discover such matters on her or his own? After all, the organization created the position and dedicated resources to it. To provide a sense of mattering to employees, organizations, and particularly leaders, managers, and supervisors, must take responsibility not only to outline what must be done and how it must be done, but also why it is valuable to everyone in the organization that it is being done.

Autonomy builds on extensive research on well-being (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2001) and the theoretical importance of an employee being given enough authority and freedom to use strengths, engage in mentoring, and many other individualizations of their jobs that enable personalization of work (e.g., Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010; Rodell, 2013). There is risk inherent in granting autonomy to employees. Variations in job execution will emerge, and sometimes those variations will be to the detriment of performance. However, decentralization of responsibility for solving problems and improving organizational performance is a potentially rich source of ongoing innovation. Myriad opportunities for honing how tasks are executed exist within an organization, and the people who are directly encountering those tasks in their daily work are uniquely suited to experimenting with potential improvements. Autonomy is key for enabling employees to connect with their work, make the job their own, and take ownership over innovation and problem solving.

SPIRE and CARMA are intended to work together, and, on the one hand, they are structured to show leaders and organizations what they need to do (CARMA) to provide the seeds of meaningful work (SPIRE). On the other hand, they can be used to give prospective talent a lens (SPIRE) for evaluating whether an organization is capable of fostering meaningful work for them (CARMA). I suspect that opportunities for meaningful work will become a central evaluative tool that the best talent uses to consider job offers, as well as competing offers to leave a company. SPIRE and CARMA may help organizations become better recruiters for the best talent of the future.

Future Research

As the previous reviews of meaningful work assessment, and research on correlates, predictors, and benefits of meaningful work demonstrate, there is a great amount of potential for meaningful work to improve working, both for organizations and for individuals. However, as the review also showed, there are significant gaps in our knowledge of this important variable. Future research should prioritize three key areas. First, at the most fundamental level, most of what we know about meaningful work comes from research conducted in Europe and North America. Although far from perfect, these regions have mature, stable economies operating within democracies that provide employment for the vast majority of their people. Meaningful work is an important part of the picture in such economies for at least two reasons. Mature economies must invest in indirect, psychological means to motivate workers because coercive and exploitative labor practices are curtailed, and workers are usually educated, have access to information about working conditions and compensation, and can use residential mobility to access a wider employer base. In other words, it is generally true that workers in these regions normally cannot be abused and exploited indefinitely and the best of workers can be highly selective in choosing their employers. It is quite a bit less clear whether meaningful work is equally important to workers from countries with developing economies, high levels of unemployment, uneven labor rights, and less democratic governance. It is also unclear whether meaningful work is a similar concept with similar importance outside of North America and Europe. As one compelling example of what the future may hold for meaningful work research, scholars have increasingly incorporated meaningful work in research conducted South Africa, a country facing challenges around both education and raising employment levels (e.g., Rothmann, this volume; Van Zyl, Deacon, & Rothmann, 2010).

The second area of focus for future research should be on increasing the use of longitudinal and experimental research designs. The primary knowledge we have about meaningful work is that the best workers report that their work is meaningful. We are able to go beyond those statements to suggesting that meaningful work is fostered by certain characteristics and creates other benefits when we trace the development and impact of meaningful work over time. Following the reciprocal dynamics of meaningful work over time is not the only way in which the causal power of meaningful work can be tested. Experiments that pull the levers of meaningful work can also be used to assess how increasing or decreasing the meaningfulness of work aids or hamstrings work performance, productivity, and happiness. Such experiments do not always need to be conducted in organizations. For example, participants could be brought into a psychology lab to perform tasks under two conditions; the first would be a control condition in which instructions are given and nothing more, the second would be an experimental condition in which instructions are given alongside an explanation of how completing this task will help another group perform their work and will also benefit the greater good in some way. Comparisons

then would be made in terms of performance, productivity, group dynamics, and participant happiness to see if adding qualities of meaningful work leads to benefits.

Although lab experiments can shed light on the essential promise of meaningful work, real-world research within active organizations is ultimately where the field needs to develop. Thus, the third area of focus for future research should be on building strong partnerships with organizations to enable the development and testing of meaningful work programs. Other partnerships should be created as well, especially between researchers and practitioners. Such partnerships would enable strategies and interventions executed by practitioners to inform future research, and allow the broader dissemination among practitioners of best practices as tested by researchers.

Conclusion

Building on a long tradition, recent years have been particularly exciting ones for meaningful work, with accelerating publication of research reports detailing the many desirable characteristics and outcomes linked to meaningful work. Certainly, more can be done to better understand the benefits of meaningful work and how to foster it on individual and organizational levels. As matters stand, we know quite a lot about the importance of meaningful work to individual and organizational health. Meaningful work is tied to greater personal well-being and meaning in life, more satisfaction and happiness at work, stronger work commitment and engagement, more positive social participation and mentoring, more conscientious caretaking and citizenship behavior, higher performance and more effective teams, and an investment by workers in the broader society that provides the homes for their organizations. Given the progress achieved already, there are compelling reasons to be enthusiastic about the potential for meaningful work to deliver value across multiple levels, encompassing the well-being of employees, the performance of organizations, and the health of communities and societies.

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