

THE ROLE OF MEANINGFUL WORK IN COLLEGE TEACHERS' WORK ENGAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

This study suggests the impact of meaningful work on employees' work engagement and eventually on teacher's well-being (happiness). We conducted a random sample analysis using a sample of 513 college teachers working in various colleges in Puducherry. The results of the analysis provide an important role for meaningful work in the on-going pursuit of well-being at work. We hope this study inspire practitioners to actively cultivate the meaningfulness of work within their institutions.

Keywords: Meaningful work, Work Engagement, Burnout, Happiness

INTRODUCTION

Generally, People spend their significant time of their life at work (Blustein, 2008), and in the incessant human pursuit of happiness, work has taken up a key position as it is an important source of purpose, meaning and identity (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). The importance of meaningful work is reflected in the fact that contemporary employees increasingly value meaningful work ahead of income, job security, promotions or working hours (Cascio, 2003). As a result, there is a need for organizations to actively cultivate the meaningfulness of work in order to retain and attract the most talented employees (Havener, 1999). This makes the meaningful work as a gateway for both researchers and scholars in the field of work. However, indulging of interest in this topic of meaningful work, this plays a vital role in emerging and volatile world. This challenges employees and make them thrive. On the other hand, the transformation of work increases the complexity of work, potentially harming the work experience and well-being of employees (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). In an unstable environment, adding value for others and making a difference may not be self-evident. This enhances us to know about the meaningful work that is affecting the well-being both at home and work.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is therefore to increase our understanding of the impact of meaningful work on employee well-being in the modern workplace, and subsequently at home (that is happiness).

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEANINGFUL WORK

Meaningful work refers to work that employees perceive as significant in that it serves an important purpose (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). In the field of social sciences, meaningful work is often described as the job characteristic that employees value the most (Grant, 2007; Harpaz & Fu, 2002). Some scholars make a stronger statement about meaningful work and regard it as a fundamental right (Frankl, 1959; Yeoman, 2014). Meaningless work, in contrast, is described by scholars as disengaging, alienating and disfranchising (Nair & Vohra, 2009; Shantz, Alfes, & Truss, 2014).

All in all, the psychological meaningfulness of work refers to the cognitive experience of work by employees in a way that work is perceived as significant and meaningful.

Although some people are more likely to experience meaningful work simply because they possess certain personality traits (e.g., calling orientation; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997), most people have the tendency to pursue meaning in their life (Frankl, 1984).

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Happiness is not the same as optimal functioning, but it is a closely related phenomenon. Happiness can be developed via a hedonic or a eudaimonic route. The hedonic route is concerned with the act of seeking pleasure and/or avoiding pain, while the eudaimonic route is associated with a deeper personal level of meaning and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Huta & Waterman, 2014). People have a desire to benefit other people; to do meaningful work, and to do work that matters (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Therefore, we expect a positive relationship between meaningful work and happiness via increased work engagement. Furthermore, meaningful work leads to general well-being, because lower levels of exhaustion and cynicism (the elements of burnout) are important predictors of health and a better health has been repeatedly associated with higher levels of happiness (Argyle, 2013; Veenhoven, 2008). Therefore we expect a positive relationship between meaningful work and well-being (happiness) via decreased burnout. This leads to the following three hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Meaningful work has a positive relation with happiness and partly mediated by increased levels of work engagement.

Hypothesis 2: Meaningful work has a positive relation with happiness and partly mediated by decreased levels of burnout.

Hypothesis 3: Meaningful work has a direct and positive relation with happiness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To fulfil the set objective of the proposed study, the data shall be collected through both primary and secondary sources.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Descriptive type of research method will be utilized in the study. On the whole the study will be descriptive in nature implying natural observation of the characteristics of the research subject without deliberate manipulation of the variables or control over the settings.

DATA COLLECTION SOURCES

To get a complete knowledge of the construct of Engagement and well being, its operation and implications, primary and secondary data from every possible sources will be obtained. Primary data will be collected by using questionnaire and interview method. And most of the secondary data literature will be studied from books, journals, case studies, Universities websites, and educational publications, newspapers and researches done on this construct and data shall also be collected from internet websites, which will facilitate recent trends and information in this area of research.

THE STUDY POPULATION

The study will cover teaching workforce employed in Colleges in Puducherry. Puducherry comprises of 4 Private Colleges affiliated to Pondicherry University.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLE SIZE

Respondents will be drawn from colleges located in Puducherry. These colleges have been selected as it has maximum number of teaching staff in its area. For the purpose of

better representation, quota sampling technique will be followed to draw the sample. The respondents will be drawn from both the types of colleges. The sample will consist of approximately 513 respondents well spread into all categories.

THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire to be designed for fulfilling each of the objectives. Meaningful work was measured using the Positive Meaning subscale of the Work And Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012). All 4 items were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 5 (absolutely true). Positive meaning (PM) was assessed with four items, including "I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning".

Work engagement was measured with the validated nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). Example items are: "At work, I am bursting with energy" (vigor), "I am enthusiastic about my job" (dedication), and "I am immersed in my work" (absorption). Participants used a seven-point frequency scale, ranging from (0) never to (6) always.

Burnout was measured with two scales from the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996): emotional exhaustion (5 items) and depersonalization (4 items). An example item is "I doubt the significance of my work". The items were scored on a 7-point frequency rating scale ranging from (0) never to (6) daily.

Happiness was measured with the 8-item Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002). An example item is "I feel that life is very rewarding". Participants used a six-point frequency scale, ranging from (0) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The filled in questionnaires will be checked for completeness and then analysed with the help of SPSS. Other appropriate statistical techniques and tests will also be used according to the need and usage of scales in the data collection instrument so as to arrive at authentic conclusions.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

TABLE 1
BASELINE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY POPULATION (N =513)

TABLE1: Characteristics of participants (N=513).

Item	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Men	200	38.99
	Women	313	61.01
Age	Below 23	9	1.96
	23–30	97	21.23
	31–39	70	15.32
	40–45	113	24.73
	46–55	118	25.82
	Over 55	50	10.94
Job level	Student teacher	19	3.91
	Junior teacher	67	13.79
	Senior teacher	330	67.90
	Head of Department	70	14.40

Years in teaching	1–2	36	9.16
	3–5	44	11.20
	6–10	77	19.59
	11–20	121	30.79
	21–30	84	21.37
	More than 30 years	31	7.89
Job Position	Assistant Professors	222	57.66
	Professors	31	8.05
	Associate Professors	132	34.29

Variable	Mea n	SD	ρ	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Meaningful work	2.06 (4)	0.60	0.7 4	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Emotional Exhaustion	5.57 (7)	0.98	0.8 5	0.57 *	-	-	-	-	-
3. Depersonalization	5.47 (7)	1.13	0.9 3	0.43 *	0.63 *	-	-	-	-
4. Vigour	3.82 (5)	0.72	0.9 3	0.66 *	0.57 *	0.45 *	-	-	-
5. Dedication	3.39 (7)	1.30	0.8 8	- 0.41 *	- 0.34 *	- 0.36 *	-0.36*	-	-
6. Absorption	5.19 (7)	1.11	0.9 0	0.72 *	0.67 *	0.59 *	0.65*	0.48 *	-
7. Happiness	2.49 (5)	1.21	0.8 4	- 0.66 *	- 0.44 *	- 0.38 *	-0.50*	0.48 *	- 0.53 *

TABLE 3: Reliability coefficients and correlations of the scales ($N = 513$).

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

The baseline characteristics of the study population are presented in Table 1. The means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations, between all study variables are displayed in Table 2. Our prediction is that meaningful work is related to both employees' work engagement and happiness. In Hypothesis 1, we proposed that meaningful work is positively related to employees' general well-being and that this relation is partly mediated by increased levels of work engagement. In order to test Hypothesis 1, we conducted a regression analysis using PROCESS model 3 (Hayes, 2013), with calculation of 1000 bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence intervals. The results of the analysis revealed a significant positive regression between meaningful work and employees' general well-being via work engagement (Effect = .2631, Boot S.E. = .0228; 95% BCa Cis1000; LLCI .2173 – ULCI .3064). Hence, the results in hypothesis 2, we proposed that meaningful work is positively related to employees' general well-being and that this relation is partly mediated by decreased levels of burn-out. In order to test Hypothesis 2, we also conducted a regression analysis using PROCESS model 3 (Hayes, 2013), with calculation of 1000 bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence intervals. The results of the analysis revealed a significant positive regression between meaningful work and employees' general well-being via burnout (Effect = .3119, Boot S.E. = .0180; 95% BCa Cis1000; LLCI .2760 – ULCI .3467), Hence, the results confirm Hypothesis 2.

Finally, in Hypothesis 3, we argued that there is also a direct relationship between meaningful work and employees' general well-being. In order to test this Hypothesis, we conducted a linear regression analysis. The results of the analysis revealed a significant positive regression between meaningful work and happiness ($B = .47$, $SE = .02$, $p < .01$), this finding is in line with the partial mediation tests using PROCESS model 3 (Hayes, 2013) of Hypothesis 1 and 2. All in all, this provides support for Hypothesis 3.

CONCLUSION

The main practical implication of this study is that the meaningfulness of work matter. It is strongly related to work engagement, burnout, and even overall happiness in life. This makes the cultivation of meaningful work a key issue for managers and policy makers within contemporary organization. Even without the proposed moral obligation for meaningful work (Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2013), or the detrimental costs of burnout (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006), organizations should actively cultivate the meaningfulness of work. Leaders play a special role in the cultivation of meaningful work. They need to be mindful about the impact of meaningful work and actively start a dialogue within the organization in order to make everyone aware of the higher purpose and meaning of the organization.

In conclusion, this study has shed new light on the relationship between meaningful work and teachers well-being, at work. It demonstrates that within today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, meaningful work operates as a buffer against burnout and as a driver for work engagement. The boost in well-being at work even spills over to life at home, in this way benefiting the society as a whole. We strongly believe in the potential of meaningful work and the merits the cultivation of meaningful work has for teachers and institutions. Therefore, we hope this study invites other researcher to explore the role of meaningful work beyond this study.

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