# On the meaning of work: A theoretical integration and review

Brent D. Rosso [a,1], Kathryn H. Dekas [b,2], Amy Wrzesniewski [c,*]

[a] *University of Michigan, 701 Tappan Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, United States*
[b] *Google, Inc., 1600 Amphitheatre Parkway, Mountain View, CA 94043, United States*
[c] *Yale University, 135 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511, United States*

## Abstract

The meaning of work literature is the product of a long tradition of rich inquiry spanning many disciplines. Yet, the field lacks overarching structures that would facilitate greater integration, consistency, and understanding of this body of research. Current research has developed in ways that have created relatively independent domains of study that exist in silos organized around various sources of meaning and meaningfulness. In this paper, we review the meaning of work literature in order to propose new frameworks within which to classify existing work and to seed new work. Our review is organized by the major sources of the meaning of work on which extant research has focused, and by the mechanisms through which work is proposed to become meaningful. We analyze the evolution and current state of meaning of work research, identifying core patterns and assumptions that have defined research in this area to date, and offer a theoretical framework based on this body of research that illuminates the main pathways to meaningful work. Throughout, we outline several promising directions for future research that we hope will stimulate further generative inquiry in this rich area of study.

## Contents

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 203 432 5979.
*E-mail addresses:* brosso@umich.edu (B.D. Rosso), kdekas@google.com (K.H. Dekas), amy.wrzesniewski@yale.edu (A. Wrzesniewski).
[1] Tel.: +1 734 936 0997.
[2] Tel.: +1 734 936 0170.

''Man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life.'' (Frankl, 1959, p. 115)

''The organization man seeks a redefinition of his place on earth – a faith that will satisfy him that what he must endure has a deeper meaning than appears on the surface.'' (Whyte, 1956, p. 6)

What makes work meaningful? Why does work mean such strikingly different things to different people? How does the type or amount of meaning people find in their work shape their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors? Questions about where and how employees find meaning in work are fundamental to how employees approach, enact, and experience their work and workplaces (Brief & Nord, 1990a; Meaning of Work (MOW) International Research Team, 1987; Super & Šverko, 1995; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). These questions have intrigued psychologists, sociologists, economists, and organizational scholars for decades and have inspired philosophers and theologians for centuries prior. Scholarship on the meaning of work continues to flourish as work becomes an increasingly prominent domain of life (Rapaport & Bailyn, 1998) and as employees expect work to fulfill an increasingly larger set of psychological, social, and economic needs (Casey, 1995).

Research on the meaning of work charts a wide terrain across many disciplines. It has focused on questions of where employees find meaningfulness in their work, how different meanings are made of similar jobs, how work meanings have changed over time and across cultures, and the personal and organizational implications of holding different beliefs about the meaning of work. Organizational scholars' interest in this topic has been fueled by the breadth of personal and organizational consequences associated with perceptions of meaning and meaningfulness in work. Indeed, the meaning of work has been shown to influence some of the most important outcomes in organizational studies, such as work motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Roberson, 1990), absenteeism

(Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997), work behavior (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), engagement (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004), job satisfaction (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), empowerment (Spreitzer, 1996), stress (Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010; Locke & Taylor, 1990), organizational identification (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), career development (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Dobrow, 2006b), individual performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Wrzesniewski, 2003), and personal fulfillment (Kahn, 2007). The topic of the meaning of work also appeals to organizational scholars since it moves beyond hedonic perspectives of work behavior to deeper considerations of purpose and significance (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) and eudaimonic aspects of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989).

As much as we have learned about the meaning of work and its consequences, the literature remains splintered into a diverse array of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. In particular, meaning of work researchers have tended to examine singular factors or processes contributing to the meaning of work, rather than taking a more comprehensive view. This has led to the development of relatively distinct domains of study in the literature, and many missed opportunities for these domains to build on each other. Mirroring a broader pattern in the field of organizational behavior, in which subfields are distinguished by their outcome variables (Staw, 1984), the fragmented nature of the meaning of work literature has left this research difficult to interpret as a whole.

It appears that the meaning of work literature is still experiencing its adolescence, having undergone considerable growth and development in many academic disciplines over a number of years, but without yet establishing a coherent identity. Although this development has contributed knowledge in a diverse set of research areas, it has also led to confusion about what is known about the meaning of work. This developmental milestone provides an important opportunity to take stock of how scholars have approached the study of the meaning of work and what they have learned in this pursuit, with the aim of helping the field transition to the next stage of development. The burgeoning interest in questions about the meaning of work makes this a particularly ideal time to do so.

Inspired by the opportunity to assess what organizational scholars have learned thus far, we embarked on a journey to review the meaning of work literature. Our aim was to push scholarship in this area forward by imposing new structure on a diffuse literature in order to make sense of the major assumptions and arguments about the meaning of work. We reviewed literature in the realm of organizational studies that was explicitly related to the meaning of work, limiting our review to empirical and theoretical papers that explicitly focused on meaning or meaningfulness in work, or at least included them as variables of study. Where appropriate, we traced the organizational research back to its disciplinary roots in psychology, sociology, and other fields.[3] For each piece we reviewed, we identified key themes and theoretical arguments, empirical findings and contributions, sources of the meaning of work, antecedents and consequences, explicit and implicit mechanisms for how work takes on meaning or becomes meaningful, and research methods. We then analyzed the material we culled from the literature to discern underlying patterns, themes, and assumptions.

Our analysis revealed that although meaning of work researchers have examined this topic from a bewildering array of angles, in a basic sense they all explicitly or implicitly weigh in on two key issues: where the meaning of work comes from (i.e., the sources of meaning), and how it is that work becomes meaningful (i.e., the underlying psychological and social mechanisms). Thus, we have structured our review according to (a) the sources of the meaning of work that have traditionally been the focus of research in this area, and (b) the mechanisms through which work is proposed to become meaningful. With regard to sources of the meaning of work, our analysis revealed a literature organized around four main sources: the self, others, the work context, and spiritual life; where single sources of meaning or meaningfulness have typically been examined in isolation from other sources. Our analysis of mechanisms yielded a variety of different, and often implicit, explanations for the processes – or mechanisms – through which work takes on meaning or is perceived as meaningful. In this paper, our central goals are to explicate, organize, and make sense of these distinct perspectives about the sources and mechanisms of the meaning of work, to reflect on promising areas for further inquiry into these topics, and to present a new theoretical framework that brings coherence to the disparate research in this area.

We begin our review by offering a distinction between the study of ''meaning'' and ''meaningfulness'' in the meaning of work literature. We then identify the major sources of meaning and meaningfulness that have defined the landscape of meaning of work research. Next, we uncover the mechanisms that scholars have used to explain the

---

[3] We did not undertake a review of treatments of the meaning of work in the disciplines where such research has not entered the organizational literature, although we urge scholars of the meaning of work to look to these disciplines for inspiration and insight.

underlying psychological and social processes through which work takes on meaning or is perceived as meaningful. Finally, we bring coherence to the literature by offering a theoretical framework for the main pathways to meaningful work. Throughout, we pay particular attention to the implicit assumptions underlying this work and we identify promising opportunities for new perspectives and future research contributions.

## 1. The meaning of "meaning" and "meaningfulness"

Although meaning is an intuitively simple concept to grasp, defining "meaning" is a challenging exercise, as other scholars have argued (e.g., Brief & Nord, 1990a; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Super & Šverko, 1995). What meaning is and where meaning comes from entail complex considerations. Meaning can be constructed individually – from a person's own perceptions, socially – from norms or shared perceptions, or both (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The literature on the meaning of work within the field of organizational behavior has primarily employed a psychological perspective, presuming that perceptions of meaning are rooted in individuals' subjective interpretations of work experiences and interactions (Baumeister, 1991; Brief & Nord, 1990a; Wrzesniewski, 2003). This psychological perspective grants primary agency to individuals, who are surrounded by a number of potential sources of meaning in their work, to assess the meaning of work for themselves. Within this framework, scholars have employed a variety of different definitions of "the meaning of work," ranging from general beliefs, values, and attitudes about work (Brief & Nord, 1990a; Nord, Brief, Atieh, & Doherty, 1990; Roberson, 1990; Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999), to the personal experience and significance of work (MOW International Research Team, 1987; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003).

In contrast, a sociological perspective on meaning presumes that individuals ascribe meaning to things or come to see certain aspects of their lives as more or less meaningful in ways that reflect socially or culturally influenced worldviews and value systems (Geertz, 1973; Kluckhohn, 1951; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Mead, 1934). Scholars in this tradition propose that work is likely to be deemed meaningful when the social and cultural systems around people ascribe value to their work activities. However, the vast majority of meaning of work research in the organizational behavior realm emphasizes individual experiences, cognitions, and feelings, as opposed to the societal or cultural forces driving interpretations of meaning. Therefore, given our goal of reviewing empirical and theoretical organizational research on the meaning of work, our review is largely centered on individual perceptions of the meaning of work.

An important point of definitional clarity that has often gone overlooked in the literature is the distinction between the concepts of meaning and meaningfulness. Researchers have often used the terms "meaning" and "meaningfulness" interchangeably, contributing to confusion about whether and how these constructs are different, and how they relate to each other. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) suggest that when scholars refer to the "meaning of work," they are usually referring to either the *type* of meaning employees make of their work ("meaning") or the *amount* of significance they attach to it ("meaningfulness").

### 1.1. Meaning

*Meaning*, according to Pratt and Ashforth (2003), is the output of having made sense of something, or what it signifies; as in an individual interpreting what her work means, or the role her work plays, in the context of her life (e.g., work is a paycheck, a higher calling, something to do, an oppression). Perceptions about meaning are ultimately determined by each individual, although they are also influenced by the environment or social context (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Although work meanings, like meanings given to other experiences or life domains, may be positive, negative, or neutral (Brief & Nord, 1990b; Wrzesniewski, 2003), the use of the term "meaning" in this literature usually implies *positive* meaning. Research in this tradition has tended to focus on how employees make or find positive meaning in their work, even, for example, in work that is typically considered undesirable (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).[4] However, the use of the word "meaning" in the meaning of work literature primarily denotes positive meaning; probably, we argue, because it is often mistaken for "meaningfulness."

---

[4] We limit our discussion to positive aspects of meaning and meaningfulness of work. A sizable literature employing sociological perspectives on the meaning of work has considered negative work meanings, focusing on the experience of alienation from work as suggested by Marx (1964a, 1964b). As this work has not become a focus of the meaning of work literature in organizational behavior, we consider it beyond the scope of our review.

*1.2. Meaningfulness*

The fact that work has a particular meaning does not necessarily determine that it is meaningful. *Meaningfulness* refers to the amount of significance something holds for an individual (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Given that the amount of perceived or felt significance of something can vary greatly, a single work experience may be experienced as extremely meaningful by one individual and not very meaningful by another. However, the construct of meaningfulness has a positive valence in the literature, whereby greater amounts of experienced meaningfulness are more positive. ''Meaningful work'' is therefore work experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals.

*1.3. Differentiating the terms*

Because the terms ''meaning'' and ''meaningfulness'' are related, there is a considerable amount of overlap in the way they are used in the literature, frequently confounding the concepts. Oftentimes, when authors use the word ''meaning'' in reference to work, we believe they intend to imply that the work has significance – as in ''that work has meaning.'' In such cases, we argue that ''meaningful'' or ''meaningfulness'' would be more accurate terms – as in ''that work is meaningful,'' or ''that work has great meaningfulness.'' This would reserve ''meaning'' for instances in which authors are referring to what work signifies (the *type* of meaning), rather than the *amount* of significance attached to the work. We hope that this differentiation helps to demarcate these two related concepts. In this paper, we seek to make explicit when researchers are talking about meaning and when they are talking about meaningfulness, and we urge other meaning of work researchers to do the same. Following tradition, we also use the broad phrase ''meaning of work'' to encompass both meaning and meaningfulness, while striving to differentiate where appropriate.

In the following section, we identify and organize the major sources of meaning and meaningfulness that have defined research on the meaning of work, and summarize the core research comprising each of these domains. Although we have strived for parsimony in the new framework we apply to this literature, a few research areas are not easily apportioned to a single source of meaning. In these rare instances where similar constructs are studied within different sources of meaning, we clarify their distinct treatment in each domain.

## 2. Sources of the meaning of work

Meaning of work scholars have considered a wide variety of factors that influence perceptions of meaning and meaningfulness, ranging from individual attitudes to organizational values to spiritual connections and beyond. One way of thinking about these different factors is that they are all potential sources of meaning or meaningfulness in work.

In our literature review, we identified four main sources of meaning or meaningfulness in work: the self, other persons, the work context, and spiritual life. Although they have not been previously organized according to these categories, these research domains represent distinct and relatively well-defined perspectives on how a particular source affects the meaning or meaningfulness employees experience in their work. In this section, we review literature that speaks to each source of meaning or meaningfulness, summarizing key theoretical and empirical contributions in that domain, and offering our evaluation of the research and suggestions for future study. As will be apparent, some of these sources have been paid considerably more attention than others. We begin our review with sources of meaning and meaningfulness that are narrowest in scope and most focused on the self, and progress outward to sources that are broader in scope and more external to the self.

*2.1. The self and the meaning of work*

Discussing ''the self'' as a source of the meaning of work may sound odd to readers unfamiliar with this literature (and perhaps even to some who are). Yet, psychologists have long considered the self as a primary agent or determinant of many kinds of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs (Bandura, 1989; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961). Likewise, a rich area of study has developed around how individuals' values, motivations, and beliefs influence their perceptions of the meaning of work. When meaning of work scholars reference the self, they typically invoke the self-concept (Bono & Judge, 2003; Shamir, 1991), which is ''the totality of a [person's] thoughts and feelings that have reference to himself

as an object'' (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7). A person's self-concept is malleable, changing as self-perceptions and feelings change in response to various experiences and work contexts (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The literature exploring the self as a source of the meaning of work can be divided into three domains of research, focusing on (1) values, (2) motivations, and (3) beliefs about work.

### 2.1.1. Values

Most discussions about values in the meaning of work literature generally follow Rokeach's (1960, 1973) conception of values, which suggests that values are the ''products of cultural, institutional, and personal forces acting upon the individual that in turn have consequences of their own'' (Brief & Nord, 1990b, p. 24). Work values, in particular, have been defined as ''the end states people desire and feel they ought to be able to realize through working'' (Nord et al., 1990, p. 21). Work values vary across individuals, and reflect the influence of social norms, interpersonal interactions, and work experiences (Locke & Taylor, 1990; Nord et al., 1990; Roberson, 1990). Individuals' work values can both shape and be shaped by their experiences at work (Locke & Taylor, 1990). Similarly, work values are purported to have a ''mutually causal relationship with the meanings that individuals attach to their work'' (Nord et al., 1990, p. 22), both resulting from the meanings societies attach to work and acting as a source of meaning individuals draw from in their work.

Meaning of work researchers have discussed values in a variety of ways; most notably in terms of work values, but also in terms of broader values and value systems related to other domains of life (see Brief & Nord, 1990b; Šverko & Vizek-Vidović, 1995). Although meaning of work scholars have studied or theorized about the role of these different instantiations of values in the construction of the meaning of work, researchers have tended to use the values construct broadly and loosely, and have often inadequately or unclearly distinguished ''values'' from ''meaning,'' either considering the terms synonymously or defining and operationalizing the ''meaning of work'' *in terms of* values (e.g., Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Brief & Nord, 1990b; Gandal, Roccas, Sagiv, & Wrzesniewski, 2005; Locke & Taylor, 1990; Nord et al., 1990; Roberson, 1990; Ros et al., 1999; Šverko & Vizek-Vidović, 1995). Because values seem so intertwined with the meanings (discussed here) people make of work (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002), we discuss values in this paper both as a source of work meaning and as a component of the mechanisms associated with how work becomes meaningful (discussed later).

In examining values as a source of meaning, scholars have used many different values categorizations, ranging from a broad intrinsic/extrinsic value orientation dichotomy (Roberson, 1990), to more specific categories of values (e.g., material outcomes vs. achievement vs. a sense of purpose vs. social relationships vs. self-concept enhancement and maintenance) (Locke & Taylor, 1990; Rokeach, 1960, 1973), to a single predominant cultural value system like the Protestant work ethic (Roberson, 1990). To operationalize and test the effects of these values, some researchers have applied Schwartz's (1992) scale of ten basic values (e.g., Gandal et al., 2005), while others have developed new scales to measure values in order to study work meanings (e.g., Super & Šverko, 1995). Research suggests that individuals may self-select into occupations that align with their personal value profiles (e.g., Gandal et al., 2005). Likewise, Locke and Taylor (1990) suggest a cyclical process whereby values influence occupational choices, and the experiences of work in those occupations reinforce those values. Applying a cross-cultural lens to the role of values in the meaning of work, the Work Importance Study (Super & Šverko, 1995) found that across eleven national cultures, the fulfillment of personal potential, or ''self-realization,'' was an important value for a majority of respondents.

Overall, while extant research suggests that values play a vital role in shaping the meanings people make of their work (Brief & Nord, 1990b), the array of definitions and operationalizations of values in the meaning of work literature, coupled with the challenge of disentangling the ''meaning'' and ''values'' constructs in some research, makes it difficult to generalize from the findings. We encourage scholars to embrace this as an area for future clarification and research.

### 2.1.2. Motivation

Some of the first empirical links to the meaning of work arose through the study of internal work motivation, which is ''the degree to which an individual experiences positive internal feelings when performing effectively on the job'' (Oldham, 1976, p. 559). Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model highlights the interconnection of meaning and motivation, establishing *experienced meaningfulness of work* as one of the critical psychological states necessary to the development of internal work motivation. According to the job characteristics model, when employees experience their work as meaningful (i.e., significant, challenging, and complete), the potential for that

work to be internally motivating is greatly improved because they feel their work matters (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980). This relationship has received sound support in subsequent research and meta-analyses (e.g., Fried & Ferris, 1987).

Hackman and Oldham's (1976) foundational work on motivation accompanies the proposal of a more general continuum of internally to externally driven motivation (de Charms, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Koch, 1956), with the most internally driven form of motivation being intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation, defined as ''the desire to engage in an activity because one enjoys, or is interested in, the activity'' (Sheldon, Turban, Brown, Barrick, & Judge, 2003, p. 359), concerns activities that are valued for their own sake (Young, 1971), rather than as a means to another end (Staw, 1976). However, a variety of explanations have been proposed for what sparks intrinsic motivation. For example, one stream of research asserts that intrinsic motivation results from the expected congruence between one's self-concept and a particular environment or activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Pinder, 1984). This explanation suggests that intrinsic motivation is driven by perceptions of enjoyment, interest, or satisfaction in work. Self-determination theory has followed from this cognitive view of motivation, suggesting that the purest forms of motivation exist when people experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In contrast, more affectively oriented explanations suggest that intrinsic motivation results from feelings or self-perceptions that one is the locus of causality for one's own behavior (Calder & Staw, 1975; de Charms, 1968; Gecas, 1982; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Koch, 1956; Shamir, 1991). Although both views have been influential in conceptions of the meaning of work, on balance, the cognitive view has enjoyed more prominence in the organizational behavior (see Seo, Barrett, & Bartunek, 2004; Staw, 1984) and meaning of work literatures.

Meaning of work scholars have proposed that when people experience a form of intrinsic motivation, they are likely to interpret it as a sign of congruence between their work activities and their self-concepts, which produces greater experienced meaningfulness (Cardador, Pratt, & Dane, 2006; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Shamir, 1991). For example, Shamir (1991) suggests that even work tasks that are not inherently enjoyable will be experienced as both intrinsically motivating and meaningful if they are connected to components of an individual's self-concept. While research on intrinsic motivation and meaningfulness suggests a credible and compelling reciprocal relationship between these variables, this work suffers from the limitations of cross-sectional designs. Future research should utilize experimental or longitudinal research methods to more clearly establish the direction of causality (or the co-occurrence) of intrinsic motivation and meaningfulness, with the aim of disentangling the potential interactive effects of these two psychological states.

### 2.1.3. Beliefs

Research on beliefs – specifically beliefs about the role or function of work in life – examines another route through which the self can shape the meaning of work. Three main streams of research are particularly noteworthy: (1) job involvement and work centrality, (2) work orientation, and (3) callings.

First, a classic stream of research explores how employees' level of involvement with their work or job shapes the meaning of their work. Two constructs are central to this area of research: job involvement and work centrality. The *job involvement* construct examines the extent to which employees believe their jobs are central to their lives, and reflects the congruence between one's needs and perceptions that the job can meet those needs (Kanungo, 1982). Job involvement therefore provides a measure of the strength of employees' psychological identification with their jobs (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965). The more involved one is with the job, the more difficult it is to dissociate oneself or one's self-esteem from that job, making that work more meaningful (Brown, 1996).

Scholars have also studied the influence of *work centrality*, or perceptions about how central work is to a person compared to other domains of their life (e.g., family, leisure, religion, community involvement). Work centrality researchers propose that the meaningfulness of work will vary depending on the depth or strength of the relationship between an individual and the domain of work. Typically, studies of work centrality ask individuals to rate or depict the perceived importance of work in relation to other domains or roles in their lives in order to assess the meaningfulness they see in their work (Dubin, 1956; MOW International Research Team, 1987). Similarly, studies of *work involvement* (Kanungo, 1982; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965) are often used as a means of operationalizing the amount of meaningfulness individuals see in their work, compared to other life domains. While this research suggests that individuals with stronger beliefs about work centrality are likely to perceive greater meaningfulness in their work, it also suggests that it is more devastating for them to lose a job or retire from the workforce (Baillie, 1993; Douglas &

Carless, 2009; Price, 2000), setting up a debate about the potential benefits and consequences of high work centrality (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

A related area of research, often referred to as ''the lottery studies,'' examines work centrality by asking people whether they would remain in the work force if they could afford not to work. Morse and Weiss (1955), followed by Vecchio (1980) and others (e.g., Arvey, Harpaz, & Liao, 2004; Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1994; Highhouse, Zickar, & Yankelevich, 2010), surveyed people with the question, ''If by some chance you inherited enough money to live comfortably without working, do you think you would work anyway or not?'' (Vecchio, 1980, p. 362).[5] The results of these studies have consistently shown that a large majority of respondents indicate a preference to continue working (Arvey et al., 2004; Morse & Weiss, 1955; Vecchio, 1980), although the size of this majority has decreased slightly over time (Highhouse et al., 2010). Researchers suggest that this inclination toward employment emphasizes just how central work is in the lives of people across many cultures, and noting that the meaning of work is often much more than strictly financial for most people.

The literature on *work orientation* also examines how individuals' beliefs about work influence the meanings they make of their work (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Research on work orientation goes broader than job involvement or work centrality, however, by considering people's beliefs about the activity of work in general, as opposed to beliefs about their current work. The work orientation construct therefore provides a way of characterizing the primary types of meanings people see in the activity of work, supported by the assumption that people can derive different meanings from most any job or occupation, but that these meanings are shaped or determined by the individual's orientation to (i.e., beliefs about) work in general. A person's work orientation therefore offers a window into how they understand what their work means, how they are likely to carry out their jobs in accordance with these meanings, and why they work in the first place (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009; Scott Morton & Podolny, 2002; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Theorists have introduced a tripartite model of work orientation, proposing that individuals tend to see their work primarily as a job, a career, or a calling (Baumeister, 1991; Bellah et al., 1985; Schwartz, 1986, 1994; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). People with a *job* orientation focus on the material benefits of their work to the relative exclusion of other kinds of meaning and fulfillment. The work is primarily a means to a financial end that allows them to enjoy their time away from work. Usually, the interests and ambitions of those with job orientations are expressed outside of the domain of work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) and involve hobbies and other interests. In contrast, those with *career* orientations work for the rewards that accompany advancement through an organizational or occupational structure. For those with career orientations, the increased pay, prestige, and status that come with promotion and advancement are a dominant focus of work. Advancement brings higher self-esteem, increased power, and higher social standing (Bellah et al., 1985). Finally, those with *calling* orientations work not for financial rewards or for advancement, but for the fulfillment that doing the work brings. Here, the work is an end in itself, and is usually associated with the belief that the work contributes to the greater good and makes the world a better place. A calling orientation is thought to develop in concert with one's work, and is therefore distinct from the more specific notion of a calling to a particular type of work that is rooted internally. The latter conceptualization of a calling is discussed in more detail below.

Scholarship on work orientations elucidates the meaning of work by highlighting the core beliefs people have about work, and the impact of these beliefs on various work behaviors and attitudes. This research reveals that not only does a person's work orientation shape the meaning they make of work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), but that it also influences the kinds of jobs they seek when they become unemployed (Wrzesniewski, 1999) as well as the general values they endorse in life and work (Gandal et al., 2005).

Beyond the study of calling orientations within the work orientation literature, there is a significant body of research focused exclusively on the more specific notion of callings. Of the various streams of research examining sources of meaning in work, research on callings is particularly multifaceted, and therefore will be reviewed both in this section and in our later discussion of spiritual life as a source of the meaning of work. Although the concept of a calling emerged in Judeo-Christian theology as a call from God to a particular vocation, a significant portion of the modern research on calling takes a decidedly secular focus, treating a calling as the expression of one's deepest self in work (Bellah et al., 1985; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Novak, 1996). Here, we review the research treating callings as an expression of the self, and we review the sacred sense of a calling later.

---

[5] Item wording in Vecchio (1980) and Highhouse et al. (2010) is slightly different than in the original Morse and Weiss (1955) study.

Callings in the secular sense have been defined as a ''meaningful beckoning toward activities that are morally, socially, and personally significant'' (Wrzesniewski, Dekas, & Rosso, 2009). Callings are thought to be unique to each individual – something people believe they must do to fulfill their unique purpose in life – and are often seen as a path or connection to one's deepest self (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Levoy, 1997; Novak, 1996). Pursuing a calling refers to the enactment of personally significant beliefs through work (Elangovan et al., 2010), and enacting one's calling through work has been referred to by some as the highest form of subjective career success (Dobrow, 2006b; Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Commentary in the popular press about callings has proliferated in recent years. However, comparatively less empirical research has examined what it means to pursue or enact a calling. This may be due to the lack of convergence around exactly what a calling is, as well as the lack of a common measurement instrument (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Dobrow, 2004). The small set of empirical research studies that have emerged on callings suggests that when work provides individuals with opportunities to enact their callings, people tend to see their work as more meaningful because it is experienced as personally fulfilling and having worldly impact (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010; Dobrow, 2004). Recent research on callings has focused on defining, measuring, and validating the calling construct (Berg, Grant, et al., 2010; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Dobrow, 2004), illuminating various dimensions and consequences of a calling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dobrow, 2006a; Elangovan et al., 2010), and analyzing how callings are experienced (Berg, Grant, et al., 2010; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dobrow, 2006b). In other words, the majority of work in this area focuses on experiences related to perceptions of *enacting* a calling, although we suspect that additional value can be gained from exploring the psychological processes related to *pursuing* a calling and how these experiences influence the meaning of one's work (see Berg, Grant, et al., 2010, and Bunderson & Thompson, 2009, for initial inquiries into these questions).

### 2.1.4. Future directions: the self and the meaning of work

In summary, a considerable body of research demonstrates that the self is a valuable source of the meaning of work. Our review of the research in this area reveals that underlying values, motivations, and beliefs influence how individuals interpret the meaning and meaningfulness of their work. In other words, how individuals see themselves and how they are oriented toward the activity of work play a crucial role in the meaning of that work. Our review also highlights the rather splintered nature of how scholars have treated the self in relation to the meaning of work.

There are a number of opportunities for future research on the self as a source of the meaning of work. First, we encourage scholars to compare the influence of different facets and conceptualizations of the self on the meaning of work. Current research tends to use singular elements of the self-concept to conceptualize the self (e.g., values, motivations, beliefs). Furthermore, meaning of work scholarship has been quite vague thus far about what exactly the ''self'' is, and what implications various facets of the self (e.g., values vs. motivations vs. beliefs) have on the meaning of work. For example, to what extent do these facets of the self interact with or compensate for one another as people determine or interpret the meaning of their work? Meaning of work scholars also tend to use an *independent* conceptualization of the self, defined by an individual's personal values (typical of a Western cultural orientation). This approach may promote the conclusion that stronger connections between work and one's ''authentic self'' lead to greater experienced meaningfulness. In contrast, an *interdependent* conception of the self (typical of an Eastern cultural orientation), which conceives of the self as fundamentally interconnected with others, might suggest that greater interdependence is more meaningful for people than the pursuit of individual goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).[6] We encourage researchers to more deeply consider the variegated nature of the self and to explore the influence of various facets or conceptions of the self on perceptions of the meaning of work.

Second, we were struck by the observation that although researchers have examined the impact of *cognitions* about the self on the meaning of work, there remains a dearth of scholarship on the role of *affect*, either as a source or a mechanism of meaning or meaningfulness. Research in psychology suggests that affect (particularly positive affect) plays a crucial role in the experience of meaning (e.g., King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006). Additional research

---

[6] It is possible that this orientation toward others is associated with having a calling in the spiritual sense as well. We explore this in a later discussion of transcendence as a mechanism of meaningful work.

examining affective components of the self or affective responses to self-related cognitions would make valuable and necessary contributions to the literature.

Third, as was noted in our discussion about research on values, meaning of work scholars have been quite loose in construct definition and operationalization, often conflating ''meaning(s)'' or ''meaningfulness'' with values, motivations, and beliefs. While these concepts are closely related in terms of how individuals make sense of events and environments, researchers need to be more deliberate about how they define meaning (and to what extent meaning is embedded within the self-concept, versus in the context, interactions, or broader social system). The specific relationship between values and the meaning of work is particularly underspecified. Thus, future research differentiating self-related antecedents, processes, and outcomes in the development of the meaning of work is necessary to advance our understanding of the self as a source of meaningfulness.

Fourth, there is a particular need for researchers to build on the literature on values and the meaning of work. Other scholars have already suggested that the selection of values represented in the current literature remains quite limited (Roberson, 1990), is biased toward positive work meaning and Western cultural worldviews (Nord et al., 1990; Roberson, 1990), and overlooks spiritual values and other values beyond the bounds of the workplace (Nord et al., 1990). This focus has left important values unaddressed. In addition, much of this research resides at the theoretical level, without adequate empirical examination. This area of study would therefore benefit from greater research attention.

Finally, in the area of work orientation, we encourage researchers to explore unanswered questions around how work orientations may change over time (see Dobrow, 2006b; Wrzesniewski, 1999), how organizations may influence work orientations, and how work orientations come to be constructed. Emerging evidence suggests that work orientations are rooted in socialization processes during adolescence (Dekas & Baker, 2010) and are relatively stable over short periods among adults (Wrzesniewski, 1999). We urge scholars to more deeply explore the origins and determinants of work orientations and the extent to which they may be malleable over time or across contexts. Specifically, future research employing longitudinal methods (e.g., following employees through the course of their careers) is important for investigating these questions and others like them.

We now move outward from the self to focus on a second major source of meaning and meaningfulness in work: the impact of others on the meaning of work.

## 2.2. Others and the meaning of work

A second area of study in the meaning of work literature addresses how individuals' interactions and relationships with other persons or groups, both within and outside the workplace, influence the meaning of their work (Grant, 2008b; Kahn, 1990, 2007; Near, Rice, & Hunt, 1980; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Organizational scholars have explored the effect of a variety of others on the meaning of work, including (1) coworkers, (2) leaders, (3) groups and communities, and (4) family.

### 2.2.1. Coworkers

The workplace is an arena in which a diverse array of interpersonal relationships are formed (Dutton & Ragins, 2007), and these relationships can have a strong influence on the meaning of work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Although few studies have specifically examined the role of interpersonal relationships, extant theory offers some interesting pathways through which coworkers can influence the meaning of work.

Theorists have suggested that close interpersonal relationships with coworkers may have a positive impact on perceptions of meaningfulness if they provide opportunities for employees to express and reinforce valued identities at work (Kahn, 2007). Others have theorized more generally about the influence of proximal coworkers. For example, social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) suggests that employees look to others in the workplace for cues about how to think and behave, and draw from these cues in constructing their own attitudes, interpretations, and meanings of work (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Recent theory extends this social perspective on meaning, suggesting that coworkers influence individuals' interpretations of the meaning of their work through an interpersonal sensemaking process whereby employees draw cues about the meaning and value of their work from other persons in the workplace (through observations, conversations, etc.) (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Because of the influence these cues have on how people perceive their own work and work roles, coworkers can play a critical role in the meaning of work.

## 2.2.2. Leaders

Leaders also play an important role in shaping or influencing the meaning of work. First, leaders frame the mission, goals, purpose, and identity of the organization for employees in ways that influence their perceptions of the meaning of their work (Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Leaders and the symbolism of their interpretations of, communications about, and responses to various work events and circumstances therefore have an important influence on the meanings people make of their work (Podolny et al., 2005). Researchers have also explored how certain leadership styles can influence the degree to which work is perceived as meaningful (Bono & Judge, 2003; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). This research has particularly emphasized the meaningfulness-related outcomes of transformational leadership, defined as going ''beyond exchanging inducements for desired performance by developing, intellectually stimulating, and inspiring followers to transcend their own self-interests for a higher collective purpose, mission, or vision'' (Howell & Avolio, 1993, p. 891). As Bono and Judge (2003) conclude, ''when transformational leaders describe work in ideological terms, and focus on higher-order values such as high achievement as a value in and of itself (Burns, 1978), followers come to see their work as congruent with personally held values and thus as more meaningful'' (p. 555). In other words, leaders can imbue work with meaningfulness by prompting employees to transcend their personal needs or goals in favor of those tied to a broader mission or purpose.

## 2.2.3. Groups and communities

By virtue of their employment in work organizations, employees are members of many groups and communities, including work teams, divisions, professional networks, and various social categories. Groups can be defined as a collection of two or more people who are engaged in a common activity or share a common identity or goals (Alderfer, 1977). Employees' connections to work groups of various types and sizes have been both theoretically and empirically linked to the meaning of work. In particular, research has shown that individuals' roles in and sense of identification with the groups of which they are a part have significant potential to impact the levels of meaningfulness they perceive in their work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Bechky, 2003; Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Weick, 1995; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). In this section, we discuss research on the influence of various types of groups on the meaning of work, including social identity groups, work groups, and organizational communities.

Research on social identity theory suggests that individuals categorize themselves according to the social groups of which they consider themselves a member (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). These affiliations and identifications can happen quite easily, are often defined in relation to perceived outgroups, and can occur on the basis of a wide range of social categories, including organizational membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). By psychologically locating themselves in groups within the larger social environment, individuals reduce uncertainty by establishing clearer self-conceptions and self-understanding (Hogg, 1992). These psychological identifications (or lack of identifications) with the work community are important determinants of work meanings (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Weick, 1995). To the extent that employees identify closely with their various workplace groups and see them as valuable and distinctive from others, these identifications are likely to provide positive meaning for employees (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Pratt et al., 2006). On the other hand, if employees perceive their groups to be unattractive or lacking in status, or do not personally identify with these groups, their work may take on negative meanings (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Oftentimes, though, even employees affiliated with unattractive occupations draw upon the strong cultures and identities of their groups as a resource to buffer themselves against stigma and enhance the positive meanings of their work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

Organizations play an important role in providing community for employees, who draw meanings and psychological resources from these group memberships (Whyte, 1956; Levinson, 1965). Pratt and Ashforth (2003) theorize that to the extent organizations create close-knit, family-like dynamics among members of the organization, employees will experience their work as more meaningful. Brickson's (2005, 2007) work on organizational identity orientations offers another identity-based view of the potential meaning-related outcomes of person-organization connections, suggesting that employees' perceived congruence between their identities and the identity orientation of their organization (i.e., individualistic, relational, or collectivistic) plays a role in the meaning of their work.

Organizations can also shape the meaning of work by providing opportunities for employees to forge stronger ties to their larger organizational communities. Research suggests that when organizations provide their employees with opportunities to contribute something of value to fellow members of the organizational community, employees gain an

enhanced sense of purpose, agency, and impact, which are experienced as meaningful (Grant, 2007; Grant et al., 2008; Kahn, 1990; Morse & Weiss, 1955).

### 2.2.4. Family

In addition to the many interpersonal relationships developed at work, relationships with others outside of the work domain also influence the meaning of work (Brief & Nord, 1990b; Near et al., 1980). Often, individuals' most salient non-work relationships are with their families. While family relationships can occur in the work domain (e.g., in family-run businesses), it is more common that work and family represent relatively distinct, yet interconnected, domains of a person's life (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Kanter, 1977; Voydanoff, 1987). Although many scholars have investigated the ways in which attitudes, cognitions, and experiences related to work or family may affect the other domain (e.g., Brief & Nord, 1990d; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003, 2006; Kanter, 1977; Rothbard, 2001), few have directly studied the influence of family on the *meaning* of one's work. However, there are some notable exceptions. In their seminal book on meanings of work, Brief and Nord (1990d) describe ways in which family might influence the meaning of work. First, family can put strain on one's work through demands for time, energy, and economic resources. In particular, as financial demands from the family increase, economic rewards become more salient and work is likely to take on more of an economic meaning (Brief & Aldag, 1989; Brief & Atieh, 1987; Brief, Konovsky, George, Goodwin, & Link, 1995). Family may also enhance positive meanings of work by offering a supportive and relaxing environment in which a person can recover from the demands of work and by confirming the role of the work or the job in a person's life by "expressing admiration, respect, and love [for the person]; by affirming what [one] said and did was right; and by giving assistance such as money, time, labor, or information" (Brief & Nord, 1990d, p. 223). Through both avenues, the meaning of work and family likely have a reciprocal relationship, such that each can shape the meaning of the other (Brief & Nord, 1990d).

Other scholars have examined the meaning of work in relation to family for specific populations, particularly immigrants. Questions about the meaning of work can be more salient for immigrants than for others, as immigrants often find themselves in lower status jobs in their new country than those they held in their home countries (Krau, 1981). Still, many find positive meaning in their new jobs due to the broader purpose for which they are performing the work, which often relates to pursuing a better quality of life for their families (Bhagat & London, 1999; Bullock & Waugh, 2005; Krau, 1981, 1984).

### 2.2.5. Future directions: others and the meaning of work

The study of others as sources of meaning offers several intriguing opportunities for future research. First, although there is a fair amount of research on the role of various others on the meaning of work, this literature is considerably underdeveloped compared to the extant research on other sources of the meaning of work. Meaning of work researchers should continue investigating how others inside and outside of the workplace influence the meaning of work. Research on others as sources of meaning could examine the role of a wide variety of intriguing complex social and interactional processes. While some work has begun to address how these interactions contribute to the meaning of work (e.g., Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), there remains little empirical scholarship on the topic.

Second, we urge researchers interested in others as a source of the meaning of work to broaden the frameworks from which they investigate these questions. Much of the research in this area has applied self-oriented perspectives to the question of how others influence the meaning of work. For example, research on others as a source of meaning has focused on how others reflect or enhance one's own established identity. Although identity-based views have provided valuable insights into the impact of others on the meaning of individuals' work, there may be other compelling explanations for why others shape the meaning of one's work that involve social interactions between people or groups (e.g., Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006) or more holistic conceptions of human connectedness (e.g., Sandelands, 2003).

Third, we encourage researchers to pay more attention to the influence of *dyadic* interpersonal relationships on the meaning of work. Current research focuses more on psychological connections to larger workplace communities or identity groups, and thus we know little about how connections to specific individuals shape the meaning of work. Since some individuals can be more salient or significant than others in a given context (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), certain coworkers, such as mentors, may have particularly strong influence on the meaning people make of their work (Kram, 1983; Ragins & Verbos, 2007).

Next, more research is needed on the influence of family on the meaning of work. The boundaries between work and family domains can be difficult to navigate (see Clark, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Rothbard, 2001), and work demands can affect spousal relationships (e.g., Bailyn, 1971; Burke, 2000; Robinson, Carroll, & Flowers, 2001). Negotiating the boundaries between work and family is likely to influence employees' perceptions about the meaning work has in their lives. As people make choices or tradeoffs between the work and family domains, they likely do so based on the meaning of their work, and these choices, in turn, may influence the perceived meaningfulness of that work.

Finally, future research can extend this area of study by exploring how membership in and identification with groups of varying sizes (e.g., work group vs. broader society) differentially impact employees' perceptions of meaning and meaningfulness. At a minimum, membership in small versus large groups or social categories could impact the meaning of work through different types of mechanisms. For example, small group membership might be meaningful because it elicits feelings of interpersonal connection and support (affective mechanisms), while large-group membership might be meaningful because it enhances valued identities or self-perceptions (cognitive mechanisms).

As indicated by the opportunities for future research suggested above, we see great promise in this area of scholarship. In the next section, we consider the role of the work context in the meaning of work.

### 2.3. The work context and the meaning of work

The context in which work is conducted is another important source of work meaning that has seen strong emphasis and diverse treatments in the literature. Almost by definition, all judgments about the meaning of work occur in the context of a particular work environment, and many researchers have explored the impact of these contexts on perceptions of both meaning and meaningfulness. In examining the role of context in the meaning of work, researchers have paid particularly close attention to (1) design of job tasks, (2) organizational mission, (3) financial circumstances, (4) non-work domains, and (5) the national culture in which the work is conducted.

#### 2.3.1. Design of job tasks

A job can be defined as a "set of task elements grouped together under one job title and designed to be performed by a single individual" (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992, p. 173). Among the earliest and most prominent organizational scholarship to explicitly model meaningfulness in relation to other important antecedents and outcomes is research on job design. Hackman and Oldham (1976, 1980), in their job characteristics model, suggest that the specific characteristics of a job determine the experienced meaningfulness of that work (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Grant, 2008a, 2008b; Griffin, 1983). In particular, jobs allowing for higher levels of autonomy, skill variety, task identity, and task significance have been shown to lead to more experienced meaningfulness of work (Fried & Ferris, 1987; Hackman & Lawler, 1971), which, in turn, contributes positively to motivation, performance, and satisfaction. The legacy of the job characteristics model has been an emphasis on the importance of job tasks in shaping employees' experience of the meaningfulness of their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Recent research has strengthened the link between job characteristics and the experienced meaningfulness of work, and has highlighted the role of the social context (Grant, 2007, 2008b; Grant et al., 2007). Focusing on the job characteristic of *task significance*, or the extent to which individuals feel their work has an impact on others (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980), Grant and colleagues have demonstrated that work designed to promote a sense of purpose and positive impact on others contributes to greater perceived task significance and, thus, more meaningfulness (Grant, 2008b).

Other recent work in this domain extends the assumptions of traditional job design research to suggest that employees do not simply impute meaning from the characteristics of their jobs, but instead proactively design (or re-design) the task and relational boundaries of their jobs in order to shape the meaning of their work (Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010; Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009; Lyons, 2008; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Research on "job crafting" emphasizes the personal agency exercised by employees in shaping the meaning of their work by actively crafting their jobs and the social environment to fit their personal goals, skills, and values (Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010).

#### 2.3.2. Organizational mission

While organizations are the contexts in which most employees work, a relatively limited body of research examines the direct impact of the organizational context on the meaning of work. Instead, organizations are more often treated as

the backdrop against which interactions occur that shape interpretations of work (Levinson, 1965; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). However, work organizations are important sites of meaning and meaningfulness of work (Brief et al., 2005; Klein & D'Aunno, 1986; Pfeffer, 2006; Podolny et al., 2005), and the missions of organizations play an important role in how employees interpret the meaning of work.

Organizational missions are representations of the basic goals, values, and purposes to which an organization is dedicated (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). Meaning of work researchers have proposed that organizational missions serve as sources of meaning insofar as employees perceive congruence between their core values and ideologies and those of their organizations (Besharov, 2008; Pratt, 2000; Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). Although perceived congruence can provide positive meaning for employees, the deep meanings inherent to organizational missions and ideologies can also be a double-edged sword, because organizations that form psychological contracts with employees on the basis of mission or ideology may face a stronger set of negative reactions if they are perceived to be violating these ideals (Besharov, 2008; Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Thompson & Bunderson, 2003).

### 2.3.3. Financial circumstances

Another stream of research considers the work context by examining the role of individuals' financial circumstances in how they determine the meaning of their work. The role of monetary rewards is an area currently enjoying a resurgence of research interest in organizational behavior (e.g., DeVoe & Pfeffer, 2007; Pfeffer & DeVoe, 2009; but see Gill, 1999 for an argument against this focus). This research emphasizes the importance of financial incentives for individuals' motivation to work and the meaning they make of their work (Brief, Brett, Futter, & Stein, 1997; Brief et al., 1995; Jahoda, 1982; Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006). Research has shown that for those who are involuntarily unemployed or otherwise have inadequate incomes, the economic value of work becomes more salient (Brief et al., 1995; Brief & Nord, 1990a; Jahoda, 1982; O'Brien, 1986). In other words, employees with greater financial needs focus more on the economic value of work than do other employees, because they do not have the luxury not to. Scholars have argued that poverty is a classic ''strong situation'' which can constrain the meanings to be found in work (Leana, 2007; Leana, Stiehl, & Mittal, 2009; Mischel, 1977). Accordingly, when suffering economic distress, individuals tend to deemphasize the latent value of work (e.g., self-fulfillment, community, social status) in favor of the manifest value of work (e.g., monetary rewards) (Brief et al., 1995, 1997; Brief & Nord, 1990a; Jahoda, 1982).

### 2.3.4. Non-work domains

Although scholars tend to give primary attention to the work domain in studying the meaning of work, experiences in non-work domains play an important role in the meaning of work as well (Brief & Nord, 1990c; Champoux, 1981; D'Abate, 2005; Greenberg, 1953; Kabanoff, 1980; Near et al., 1980; Snir & Harpaz, 2002; Thompson & Bunderson, 2001). Scholarship in this area generally focuses on the challenges of navigating the balance or boundaries between work and non-work domains (Brief & Nord, 1990c; Champoux, 1978; Near et al., 1980; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006) or the mechanisms that connect them (Snir & Harpaz, 2002). At present, scholarship linking work and non-work domains is primarily theoretical, rather than empirical. For example, Brief and Nord (1990c) propose that individuals' values are the key to understanding connections between the work and non-work domains and their resulting influence on the meaning of work. To the extent that individuals' values are salient and actionable across multiple life domains, Brief and Nord (1990c) argue that people will behave consistently across those domains. Moreover, the meanings people make of work are influenced by their ability to enact their work congruently with their values (Brief & Nord, 1990c). Thompson and Bunderson (2001) propose a similar argument using an identity lens, suggesting that time spent in work and non-work activities is a ''container of meaning'' (p. 17), and to the extent that one's time, whether in work or non-work domains, is spent on identity-affirming activities, one will perceive less conflict between domains. When both domains are identity affirming, Thompson and Bunderson (2001) argue that there will be a ''seamless meaningfulness'' (p. 30) in the person's life, and the domains will enhance each other.

Recent work has begun to explore these connections empirically. D'Abate (2005) found that individuals who find greater meaningfulness outside of the workplace (e.g., in leisure activities) more frequently integrate activities associated with non-work domains (e.g., hobbies, social activity, entertainment) into their workdays. In other words, people strive to make their work more meaningful by making it feel less like ''work'' and more like ''play'' (see also Sandelands, 2003). Likewise, using multiple operationalizations of work meaning, Snir and Harpaz (2002) find a reciprocal relationship between the effect of the meaning of work on leisure and vice versa. These studies help substantiate prior claims (e.g., Kirchmeyer, 1992) that non-work domains offer a window into understanding the meaning of work.

### 2.3.5. National culture

Some of the earliest writings on the meaning of work are rooted in the perspective that broad social and cultural forces have a powerful influence on the meanings people make of work. Economic theorists such as Marx (1867) and Weber (1904) proposed that sociopolitical forces related to the development of capitalism and industrialization fundamentally and enduringly altered the relationships between people and their work. In Weber's (1904) influential view, the predominance of the Protestant work ethic in society allowed for the emergence of capitalism and the bureaucratization of work, separating individuals from the craft of their work and thereby creating an "iron cage" in which they are left to search for meaning. These themes have been intimately woven into perspectives about how meanings of work have changed over time, reflective of broader social and cultural changes and trends (Brief & Nord, 1990a). Our aim is not to recount this extensive literature – this has been done effectively elsewhere (e.g., Bellah et al., 1985; Brief & Nord, 1990a; Ciulla, 2000; Super & Šverko, 1995) and lies outside the boundaries of our review. However, some research in the organizational behavior literature has explored important cultural influences on the meaning of work, and therefore falls within our purview.

Of the scholarship on the role of culture in the meaning of work, the area in which scholars have made the most empirical progress is in cross-national research (e.g., England & Misumi, 1986; England & Whitely, 1990; Furnham, 1990; Harpaz, 1990; Harpaz & Fu, 1997; Lundberg & Peterson, 1994; Misumi, 1990; Moltz, 1993; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Snir & Harpaz, 2006; Super & Šverko, 1995). This research seeks to understand the role of national culture in the meaning of work by studying work meanings in a variety of industrialized countries. The motivations for such studies are to move beyond biases about work meaning implicit in research conducted in Western societies, and to reveal patterns about the meaning of work across many cultures (England & Whitely, 1990). This research builds on the work of theorists who have suggested that meanings of work are largely socialized by individuals' cultural environments (e.g., Hulin & Blood, 1968; Whitely, Peiro, & Sarchielli, 1992). The largest empirical effort of this sort was undertaken by the Meaning of Working (MOW) study, an international research endeavor with data collected from 15,000 respondents in eight countries between 1981 and 1983 (MOW International Research Team, 1987). Utilizing work centrality and work values as the central measures of meaning, this research has yielded findings on various differences in meanings of working between these eight national cultures. For example, Japanese employees were found to have much more positive orientations toward work than employees in other countries, work more hours per week, and give work the highest level of centrality, but at the same time are significantly less likely to focus on potential personal benefits of work, such as affect, identity, or income (England & Whitely, 1990; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Snir & Harpaz, 2006). Surprisingly, Britain and Germany, two cultures thought to be highly influenced by strong Protestant work ethic values, demonstrated the lowest levels of work centrality (MOW International Research Team, 1987).

Perhaps the core learning from these studies, however, and a surprising one, was that the meanings of work across these eight cultures were more alike than different. Indeed, regardless of national culture, respondents demonstrated high levels of work centrality, valued intrinsic factors like personal freedom at work, self-expression, variety, interesting and satisfying work, and personal alignment with job demands, and also frequently cited financial motivation as a key meaning of work (England & Whitely, 1990; Harpaz & Fu, 1997; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Snir & Harpaz, 2006). Researchers also identified eight distinct "meaning of working patterns" that were present in each of the cultures studied (e.g., apathetic workers, alienated workers, economic workers, social contribution workers, expressive workers) – an unexpected cross-national consistency (England & Whitely, 1990). Thus, an important conclusion from this research is that at least for the industrialized nations studied, there is likely more variance in work meanings within cultures than between cultures. Similar results were found in another large cross-cultural research study focused on values and the meaning of work among workers in eleven countries (Super & Šverko, 1995). England and Whitely (1990) conclude that although important cross-cultural differences exist, the patterns of similarity "clearly indicate that working is a complex phenomenon in each country and that a plurality of views about working seems to be the rule" (p. 98).

### 2.3.6. Future directions: the work context and the meaning of work

Research exploring various elements of the work context has yielded valuable insights into the construction of the meaning of work. However, there are several ways in which this broad area of literature could progress. First, the context in which work occurs in the modern world has changed since some of the foundational meaning of work scholarship was published. For example, job boundaries within organizations have become more fluid (Bridges, 1994), employees are

changing jobs much more frequently than in the past (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), and organizations are increasingly utilizing team-based work structures (Hackman, 1987). Each of these developments has increased or otherwise altered the importance of the social context of one's work by changing the number or strength of ties to others at work. Thus, it is possible that some of the assumptions upon which this literature has been built may no longer apply. In particular, researchers should investigate whether employees construct meaning differently, or with more difficulty, in less stable jobs than they do in more stable jobs, or when working as part of a work team versus as an individual contributor.

Second, we encourage organizational scholars to draw upon the research on the meaning of work for retirees, much of which is occurring in other disciplines (Baillie, 1993; Brief & Nord, 1990c; Dorfman & Kolarik, 2005; Douglas & Carless, 2009; MorBarak, 1995). Retirees represent an increasingly large segment of the world's population, and due to longer than expected life spans, the nature of retirement is changing, with many returning to the workforce in new capacities (Costa, 1998). Whether retirement from one's primary work is voluntary or involuntary, the context within which retirees conduct their work may be different than that of most traditional workers due to unique financial situations, life experiences, health considerations, and other factors. Therefore, this growing population may offer new ways of understanding the meaning of work.

Third, the heightened focus of many organizations on embracing missions related to social and environmental responsibility (which organizational scholars have begun to attend to: see Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003) suggests that the influence of corporate ethics and organizational missions and reputations on the meaning of work is due for much more research attention than it has previously received. Employees who work for organizations identifying or distinguishing themselves as ethical or responsible may derive meaningfulness from positive personal or public perceptions of the organization making valuable societal contributions. However, we expect that while an emphasis on the common good may have positive implications for employees' experienced meaningfulness, perceived duplicity in how an organization touts or enacts such a mission may have more profound (and negative) effects (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003).

In the next section, we review the literature on spiritual life and the meaning of work. This work extends beyond tangible work and social contexts into the realm of ethereal sources of meaning.

### 2.4. Spiritual life and the meaning of work

Although a growing domain of scholarship in the meaning of work literature examines the role of spiritual life on the meaning of work, there remains considerable timidity in organizational studies around whether and how to examine the intersection of work and spirituality (Nord, Brief, Atieh, & Doherty, 1988; Weiss, Skelley, Haughey, & Hall, 2004). This may be due to a lack of a shared vocabulary or tangible theoretical frameworks from which to begin (Besecke, 2001), or because of pervasive cultural norms encouraging the rationalization and separation of work and religion (Weber, 1904). To date, limited empirical research has been generated on the topic of spirituality and work (Weaver & Agle, 2002), with yet fewer studies explicitly addressing the role of spirituality in perceptions of the meaning of work. This dearth of scholarship is ironic, since several fundamental concepts in the study of the meaning of work, such as callings and vocations, have deep theological roots (Calvin, 1574; Luther, 1520). In addition, research has found that individuals frequently turn to spirituality or religion in their fundamental search for meaning and purpose in life (Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Šverko & Vizek-Vidović, 1995), and although they may be reluctant to discuss it at work, large numbers of employees across the world think of their work in spiritual terms (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Grant, O'Neil, & Stephens, 2004; Sullivan, 2006) and see their religion playing an important role in how they conduct their work lives (Childs, 1995). This suggests that spiritual life has an important influence on the meaning of work, yet is often overlooked in organizational scholarship (Nord et al., 1990). There are two areas of research on spiritual life that have particular relevance to the meaning of work: (1) spirituality writ large and (2) sacred calling to a particular vocation. We explore these two areas below.

#### 2.4.1. Spirituality

Recent years have seen an upsurge in studies about the influence of spiritual connections on the meaning of work (Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, & Fry, 2005). Spirituality is an aspiration toward connection to the sacred, including a higher power, guiding force or energy, or belief system (Hill & Pargament, 2003). For many theorists, spirituality cannot be understood without inquiry into questions of meaning (e.g., Vaill, 1991). By their very nature, spiritual pursuits seem to engender self-transcendence, connecting the ego to something greater than oneself or superseding the ego entirely (Maslow, 1971). Indeed, research demonstrates that spiritual employees tend to interpret work activities in relation to

something outside of and larger than themselves, related to a higher purpose or meaning (Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Sullivan, 2006; Wuthnow, 1994, 1995). In this sense, spirituality as a source of meaningfulness shares similarities with other sources, such as interpersonal relationships and the cultural context, where meaningfulness results from connecting to entities beyond the self. Some scholars who theorize about the relationship between spirituality and the meaning of work echo the influential theorizing of Victor Frankl (1959), positing that it is through living for and seeking after that which is outside of the self that humans find meaning and purpose in life and work (e.g., Weiss et al., 2004). Research shows that spiritual employees perceive their work differently than non-spiritual employees, seeing their work behaviors in spiritual terms of caring, service, and transcendence (Curlin, Dugdale, Lantos, & Chin, 2007; Grant et al., 2004; Scott, 2002; Wuthnow, 2004). Therefore, when employees perceive work in a spiritual light, their work is likely to take on a deeper sense of meaningfulness and purpose for them.

### 2.4.2. Sacred callings

A majority of the theoretical and empirical research on the role of spiritual life in the meaning of work focuses on the constructs of sacred calling and vocation. In our review of the self as a source of meaning, we described research that examines callings from a secular perspective, where the call emerges from internal beckoning to particular types of work. However, a sacred calling is defined quite differently: as an invitation from God to a vocation, through which God's will is done (Hardy, 1990; Weiss et al., 2004).

The roots of the concept of a sacred calling are typically traced back to Christian theology, becoming particularly prominent in the writings of Protestant reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin. According to Luther and Calvin, work has little spiritual significance in and of itself (Calvin, 1574; Luther, 1520), but can become holy when done in the service of God (Hardy, 1990; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). Luther, and Calvin after him, believed that God predestined each person to a unique calling, or "station," in life.[7] According to this theological tradition, the sacred calling is revealed to individuals and is the way they are intended to act as the "hands of God" on earth (Dik & Duffy, 2009). Heeding one's calling is thought to give purpose to otherwise menial labors, because the labor is done in service of a sacred meaning much greater than the individual (Hardy, 1990). Thus, the pursuit of a sacred calling imbues work with both meaning and meaningfulness through the sense that one is serving God and meeting the needs of the larger community (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Novak, 1996). Research has demonstrated that the sense that one is pursuing a sacred calling has a strong influence on experienced meaningfulness in work (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Steger et al., 2010). Although many researchers apply a secular perspective to the study of callings, many employees experience calling as a sense of duty to or direction from God, rather than as a personal pursuit (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Steger et al., 2010).

### 2.4.3. Future directions: spiritual life and the meaning of work

There exist many opportunities for further research on the impact of spiritual life on the meaning of work. Most importantly, there is simply a need for more research in this area. Specifically, the field needs more rigorous empirical work to supplement, test, and build upon the extant theoretical perspectives. Although the existential nature of spiritual pursuits makes scientific inquiry on the topic more challenging, spirituality likely engages similar psychological and social processes to those suggested by other sources of meaning. Indeed, research has established strong relationships between spirituality (and related constructs like religiosity) and happiness (Gallup, 1984), life satisfaction (Poloma & Pendleton, 1990), and well-being (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Researchers have suggested that the sense of purpose, belongingness, hope, and community that comes from spirituality and religiosity is what underlies their impact on happiness and well-being (Myers & Diener, 1995). As we discuss in the following section, these processes are related to the experience of meaningful work as well. Thus, when work has spiritual meaning or more deeply connects people to religious communities, that work is likely to be experienced as more meaningful. Systematic examinations of the mechanisms through which spiritual life impacts the meaning of work would be important contributions to this literature.

We urge researchers to employ rigorous research methods in the study of spiritual life and meaning. Many of the studies on spiritual life that we reviewed in the meaning of work literature use particularly small or targeted samples to test their hypotheses, suffer from a lack of clear theoretical constructs and validated measures, employ cross-sectional

---

[7] Weber (1904) proposed that the idea of work as holy when done in the service of God led to the rise of capitalism because Protestants eager to demonstrate their salvation engaged in diligent work while saving their earnings.

research designs, and/or miss opportunities to better explicate the psychological processes underlying spiritual meaning-making. For these reasons, we strongly encourage scholars conducting work in this area to strengthen the methodological rigor of the work by employing longitudinal designs focused on broader samples of employees. Our hope is that this would help remove the hesitancy with which researchers have approached this domain of research, and create a strong foundation upon which future research can build.

### 2.5. Summary: sources of the meaning of work

Our review of the meaning of work literature surfaced the four major sources of meaning discussed above. In the next section, we categorize and elaborate the underlying mechanisms through which these entities may trigger the construction of meaning or meaningfulness. By delineating how scholars have explained the processes through which the meaning of work is shaped, our review moves beyond a consideration of where meaning and meaningfulness originate to an analysis of the processes through which they are produced.

## 3. How work becomes meaningful: mechanisms of meaning

Scholars have employed various explanations for the processes, or mechanisms, through which the sources we reviewed above contribute to the meaning or meaningfulness of work. Following Stinchcombe (1991), we define mechanisms as the how's and why's of observed relationships. In a basic sense, mechanisms are the underlying engine driving a relationship between two variables, capturing the processes through which one variable influences another. Often, mechanisms reside at a different level of analysis than the focal entities in a given relationship (Stinchcombe, 1991). The mechanisms driving perceptions about the meaning of work range from intrapsychic processes emphasizing the fulfillment of the self to those that transcend the self entirely. Treatments of mechanisms in the meaning of work research range from explicit and measurable to implicit and theoretical, with some researchers being more deliberate than others about delineating these underlying processes. However, most of the research on the meaning of work articulates in some way, whether explicitly or implicitly, the processes through which a particular source influences the meaning or meaningfulness of work, and scholars have called for more of this (e.g., Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). In this section, we identify a core set of psychological and social mechanisms common to many of the sources reviewed above. By mapping the key mechanisms employed by meaning of work researchers to explain how the meaning of work is constructed, we aim to establish an organizing framework that will help scholars make sense of the existing literature as well as provide a structure and stimulus for future research in the field.

In this section, we identify seven categories of mechanisms through which scholars have proposed work is perceived as meaningful or acquires meaning: authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, and cultural and interpersonal sensemaking. We also highlight the different forms each mechanism can take, characterized by distinct psychological and/or social processes. As we will discuss, some mechanisms have been given greater attention in the extant research, and some have been theoretically proposed but not yet empirically tested. With the exception of cultural and interpersonal sensemaking, these mechanisms tend to focus on the psychological processes underlying the experience of *meaningfulness,* as opposed to social or psychological processes underlying the construction of *meaning* – a pattern we will explore. Although there are fascinating theoretical and empirical opportunities for future research on the interplay among these mechanisms in the construction of the meaning of work, our aim is to simply identify and categorize them, as this has not previously been done. We summarize each mechanism below.

### 3.1. Authenticity

One of the most frequently invoked mechanisms in the literature to explain how work becomes meaningful is *authenticity*. Authenticity can be defined as a sense of coherence or alignment between one's behavior and perceptions of the ''true'' self (Markus, 1977; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). Authenticity is often described as a central underlying self-motive which helps individuals maintain a sense of meaning and order in their lives (Gecas, 1991). In the meaning of work literature, mechanisms based on authenticity link various sources of meaning to the enactment or development of the ''true'' self. Our review of the literature revealed that scholars have drawn on various forms of authenticity mechanisms in research invoking the self, others, and the work context as sources of meaning. This research suggests that work experiences promoting the authentic self

shape work meanings or meaningfulness because they enable individuals to maintain consistency with valued attitudes, beliefs, values, and identities while working (Shamir, 1991).

Researchers have employed a variety of different forms of the authenticity mechanism in meaning of work scholarship. One manifestation of authenticity is in the experience of *self-concordance*, or the degree to which people believe they are behaving consistently with their interests and values (Sheldon & Elliott, 1998). The experience of self-concordance is thought to promote feelings of deep and authentic connection to oneself (Bono & Judge, 2003). For example, an individual who feels she is pursuing a calling is likely to believe she is connecting to something fundamental about the core of who she is and behaving in line with what she is personally intended or obligated to do (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dobrow, 2004). This sense of self-connectedness can be deeply meaningful because it promotes feelings of internal consistency (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Similarly, an individual who values social responsibility is likely to feel fulfilled in and authentic to those values when working in a socially responsible organization (Besharov, 2008). These perceptions of self-congruence allow people to feel they are behaving consistently with their interests and values while at work. This consistency helps shape the meanings individuals make of their work, and leads to greater experienced meaningfulness (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991).

A second authenticity mechanism is the verification, affirmation, or activation of valued personal identities through work. These can be described as *identity affirmation* processes. For example, an individual who sees himself as highly analytical will feel more authentic at work when his work tasks demand analytical skills, when his physical work environment and job title reflect his analytical abilities, or when interactions suggest he is perceived by others in the same way he sees himself (Elsbach, 2003; Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009). To the extent that his work affirms or verifies these types of self-conceptions, it is likely to be experienced as a more authentic activation or enactment of his "true" self, and therefore more meaningful (Gecas, 1991).

A third authenticity mechanism is *personal engagement* in work, where meaningfulness is derived from feeling personally immersed and alive in the experience of working (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Kahn, 1990). For example, if an individual feels engaged or intrinsically motivated by her work, she will be likely to perceive those activities as important and allowing for the expression of her authentic self (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Spreitzer, 1996). These feelings of authentic engagement in work are often experienced as meaningful since they indicate the enactment or development of the self-concept (Britt, Adler, & Bartone, 2001; Kahn, 1990; Shamir, 1991; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005).

Although the authenticity mechanism is most obviously related to the self as a source of meaning in work – where activities that develop, express, and fulfill the "authentic" self-concept are experienced as meaningful, and where work meanings are shaped by consistency between the self-concept and one's behavior – the processes reviewed in this section have also been employed by meaning of work scholars to explain the meaningfulness generated from connections to external sources of meaning, including the job design and organizational context. Therefore, although these sources of meaning may differ, the underlying process is the same: in all of these cases, perceptions of authenticity prompt feelings of meaningfulness.

## 3.2. Self-efficacy

A second mechanism employed by scholars to explain the processes through which work comes to be meaningful is *self-efficacy*, or individuals' beliefs that they have the power and ability to produce an intended effect or to make a difference (Bandura, 1977; Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Self-efficacy has long been identified as a powerful motivator of human action toward particular outcomes (Bandura, 1986, 1989). Our review uncovered research indicating that the experience of self-efficacy in or as a consequence of work contributes to meaningfulness because it enables individuals to feel they have the capability and competence to effect change or exercise control in their environment (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991). We identify and describe three ways in which self-efficacy has been used as a mechanism, with each describing processes that are elaborations on Bandura's original work on self-efficacy. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that when work provides individuals with a sense of self-efficacy, it takes on greater meaningfulness.

One of the ways self-efficacy has been employed as a mechanism of meaning is with regard to feelings of personal *control* or *autonomy* in the work domain. Research suggests that people have a need to see themselves as capable of exercising free choice and effectively managing their own activities or environments (i.e., as "self-determining") (Baumeister, 1998; Deci, 1975), and that these cognitions are meaningful because they reassure individuals that rather than being powerless, they are agentic actors (Gecas, 1991; Seligman, 1975; White, 1959; Wrzesniewski & Dutton,

2001). For example, one area in which individuals exercise control or autonomy is in their proactive behaviors at work. If an individual takes proactive steps to independently alter the way he accomplishes his work, and feels he has the autonomy and support to do so, he is likely to experience meaningfulness based on a sense of having a degree of control over his fate (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

A second way in which scholars have discussed efficacy as a mechanism of the meaning of work is with regard to the experience of *competence* resulting from successfully overcoming challenges in one's work. For example, when an individual sees herself learning, growing, and effectively responding to challenges, she is likely to feel more personally competent and efficacious in her work (Masten & Reed, 2002; Spreitzer et al., 2005). This felt competence provides a sense of meaning for individuals in their work (Gecas, 1991).

A third self-efficacy mechanism, which we refer to as *perceived impact*, suggests that when individuals feel they are making a difference or having a positive impact on their organizations, work groups, coworkers, or other entities beyond the self, they feel more capable of effecting positive change, and thus are more likely to experience greater levels of meaningfulness in their work (Grant, 2008b). In other words, the perception that one can positively impact others through work activities stimulates the experience of self-efficacy, which contributes to meaningfulness. For example, an employee who acts prosocially at work by assisting coworkers, the organization, or other beneficiaries will come to perceive that he has the capacity to effect positive change. This perceived impact on others or the environment is experienced as meaningful (Cardador, 2009; Grant, 2007; Grant et al., 2007; Rosso, 2010).

## 3.3. Self-esteem

A third mechanism that we identified in the meaning of work literature is *self-esteem*, or an individual's assessment or evaluation of his or her own self-worth (Baumeister, 1998). Self-esteem is both an enduring trait of individuals and a malleable state that can be shaped by personal or collective experiences and achievements (Crocker & Park, 2004; Leary & Downs, 1995). Researchers employing self-esteem as a mechanism of meaningfulness suggest that feelings of accomplishment or affirmation resulting from work experiences help to fulfill individuals' motivations for believing they are valuable and worthy individuals (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991; Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). The self-esteem mechanism differs from the self-efficacy mechanism in one key sense: while both can be triggered by accomplishments, the way in which efficacy promotes meaningfulness typically operates through a sense of control over one's environment and fate, while esteem is rooted in a sense of oneself as worthwhile – two very different pathways to meaningfulness.

Although relatively understudied in the literature, the self-esteem mechanism has primarily been examined in terms of how personal or group achievements provide a sense of value and self-worth for individuals, and the meaningfulness resulting from that self-esteem (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). For example, employees who are thriving at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005) and see themselves successfully completing challenging activities are likely to have enhanced perceptions of self-worth and feel like valuable contributors to their groups or organizations. Likewise, people who identify as members of valued in-groups at work (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) may experience greater self-esteem. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that even minimal groups enable some degree of social identity, as long as the situation allows for positive in-group evaluation in comparison to other groups, thereby enhancing self-esteem. These affirmations of value and success bolster individuals' perceptions of the meaningfulness of their work because they enable people to protect and strengthen favorable views of the self, a strong human motivation (Gecas, 1991).

## 3.4. Purpose

A fourth mechanism employed to explain the processes through which work comes to be meaningful is *purpose*, which is defined as a sense of directedness and intentionality in life (Ryff, 1989).[8] Scholars and philosophers alike have long maintained that the pursuit of a purpose provides life with meaning (Aristotle, 2000; Dalai Lama & Cutler,

---

[8] Although Pratt and Ashforth (2003) defined meaningfulness as the perception of work as, at a minimum, purposeful and significant, our analysis suggests that ''purpose'' is a mechanism through which work can come to be perceived as meaningful. At the same time, theory and research on the meaning of work suggests that a sense of purpose is a particularly powerful predictor of meaningfulness. The field would benefit from empirical examination of purpose as a mechanism of meaning fulness. Empirical examination and validation of the meaningfulness construct would also help bring clarity to this issue.

1998). Some have even argued that a sense of purpose or guiding ideals is so fundamental to giving meaning to human action that people will not survive long without it (e.g., Frankl, 1959). There have been a variety of proposed sources of purpose, ranging from internally driven motivations or goals (e.g., Grant, 2008b) to an externally or spiritually driven sense of purpose that one feels compelled or called to fulfill. A sense of purpose has been argued to play an important role in the construction of the meaning and meaningfulness of work through its ability to connect present events to future anticipated events and states (e.g., happiness, love, salvation) (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Research suggests that work experiences which reinforce a sense that one's actions are purposeful or move one closer to desired future goals or fulfillments are likely to be viewed as especially meaningful (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

One of the ways purpose has been employed as a mechanism in the meaning of work literature is in terms of the *significance* of work (e.g., Grant, 2008b; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Research in this area highlights the importance of individuals' perceptions of the significance of their work – in terms of serving or experiencing a sense of purpose through their work efforts – in contributing to the experience of meaningful work. For example, an individual doing work she perceives to be important to society or to her community is likely to perceive work as significant and serving a greater purpose, and therefore more meaningful (Grant, 2008b; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Similarly, an individual who perceives spiritual significance in his work is likely to see work as serving a higher purpose that gives greater meaning to work activities others may consider mundane or even undesirable (Davidson & Caddell, 1994).

A second way that this mechanism has been examined is with regard to *value systems* providing a sense of purpose (e.g., Baumeister, 1991). Value systems are defined as a set of consistent values shared by a group of people (Wiener, 1988). Value systems provide a compass for right and wrong that guides human perception and behavior (Schwartz, 1992), and acting in accordance with these systems of values gives individuals a sense of assurance that ''they have done the right things, thereby minimizing guilt, anxiety, regret, and other forms of moral distress'' (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002, p. 610). These experiences bring meaning to the human experience by generating a sense of purposeful action (Frankl, 1959). As one administrator of value systems, organizations can imbue work with meaning by providing employees with a meaningful sense of purpose or direction (Wiener, 1988). In addition, value systems provide a clear structure of purpose in which employees are likely to perceive their work to be more meaningful as a consequence of operating in and sharing these values. For example, organizations promoting clear missions or ideologies provide employees with a system of values that can give additional purpose to their work in the organization (Besharov, 2008). Acting in accordance with these value systems contributes to the meaningfulness of the work by emphasizing the virtue of one's behavior and providing a sense of assurance that one is acting in accordance with fundamental value bases (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002).

Although meaning of work scholars have discussed values both in terms of authenticity (in the self-concordance perspective noted earlier) and in terms of a sense of purpose deriving from shared value systems (as discussed here), these invoke distinct psychological processes. While meaningfulness derived from self-concordance is driven by a sense of behavioral consistency with one's personal values or interests, the meaningfulness derived from value systems is driven by a sense of purpose resulting from participating in a larger system of shared values. Although we see these as distinct psychological processes, as with any of the mechanisms outlined here, they are likely to work in unison.

### 3.5. Belongingness

A fifth mechanism focuses on individuals' perceptions of *belongingness*. Belongingness is defined as ''a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships'' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Belongingness plays a role in the construction of meaningfulness in a sizable portion of literature on the meaning of work. As a whole, this research suggests that membership in, identification with, and feelings of connection to social groups through work may provide individuals with meaningfulness by helping them experience a positive sense of shared common identity, fate, or humanity with others (Homans, 1958; White, 1959).

One way in which the belongingness mechanism has been employed by meaning of work scholars is with regard to *social identification* with others at work. This research suggests that because individuals are motivated to be a part of desirable social groups, membership in workplace groups produces a sense of shared identities, beliefs, or attributes that are experienced as meaningful to employees because they feel like they belong to something special (Hogg & Terry, 2000). These identifications are particularly powerful where the groups to which the individual belongs are perceived as valuable and distinctive in comparison to outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), although even simply

possessing membership in a social group or social category may carry a certain set of (often constructive) meanings (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

A second belongingness mechanism is the more affective experience of *interpersonal connectedness*. Scholarship in this tradition suggests that feelings of interpersonal closeness in the workplace contribute to a sense of belongingness and togetherness that is experienced as meaningful because these connections feel comforting and supportive (Blatt & Camden, 2007; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Dutton et al., 2006; Kahn, 2007; Rosso, 2010). For example, individuals who have close interpersonal relationships at work, or are a part of a close-knit group or organization that feels like a family, are likely to experience a stronger sense of mutual support and belongingness that contribute meaningfulness to the work experience or context (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). This perspective adds an affectively and socially oriented mechanism to the meaning of work literature that is, at present, primarily defined by cognitive and self-oriented explanations.

### 3.6. Transcendence

A sixth mechanism that has been identified as important to the construction of the meaning of work is *transcendence*. Transcendence refers to connecting or superseding the ego to an entity greater than the self or beyond the material world (Maslow, 1971). Whereas the prior mechanisms seek to explain how work becomes meaningful as a result of its connection to valued aspects, goals, or motives of the self, the transcendence mechanism suggests nearly the opposite: that work is meaningful when individuals can subordinate themselves to groups, experiences, or entities that transcend the self (see Frankl, 1959; Weiss et al., 2004).

One way in which meaning of work scholars have employed the transcendence mechanism is with regard to the meaningfulness that results from connecting or contributing to something outside of or greater than the tangible self (e.g., Lips-Wiersma, 2002). We refer to this as *interconnection*. For example, to the extent that a person's work provides her with opportunities to perceive that she is positively impacting broader society or the world, she is likely to feel like she is a part of a system of interconnected persons that is greater than herself and which cannot exist without the collective efforts of many. Similarly, spiritual individuals may find meaningfulness by connecting their work efforts to the divine, providing the sense that they are contributing to a power higher than themselves (Lips-Wiersma, 2002).

A second transcendence mechanism highlights the experience of *self-abnegation*, or deliberately subordinating oneself to something external to and/or larger than the self (e.g., an organization's vision, one's family, a social collective, a spiritual entity). The notion of self-abnegation stands in stark contrast to the *control* form of the self-efficacy mechanism, where individuals seek to exercise control over their surroundings. Agentic self-abnegation also provides an alternate explanation for how individuals reduce practical and existential anxieties. The difference is that one way of dealing with practical or existential anxieties is to seek greater control over one's fate or environment (*control*), and another is to relinquish it to something or someone else (*self-abnegation*) (see Kreiner et al., 2006 for a discussion of this tension). According to a self-abnegation perspective, transcending one's own self-interest by subordinating the ego and relinquishing control to something greater than oneself provides individuals with a sense that they are not alone and that they do not need to be in control. For example, an individual pursuing a sacred calling may experience meaningfulness from following and serving a higher power, having confidence that their destiny has been pre-determined (Weiss et al., 2004). This may also be true for followers of transformational leaders who are inspired to transcend the self to pursue shared goals.

### 3.7. Cultural and interpersonal sensemaking

The seventh and final mechanism we identified focuses on the role of cultural and interpersonal sensemaking in the construction of meanings of work. This mechanism differs markedly from the previous six mechanisms in that it largely concerns the production of *meaning* rather than meaningfulness. While the other mechanisms tend to focus on how meaningful work is as a result of its alignment with features of the self or others, the cultural and interpersonal sensemaking mechanism focuses on understanding how different types of work meaning are constructed. Thus, cultural and interpersonal sensemaking encompasses sociocultural forces that shape the meaning people make of different aspects of their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). As well, this mechanism is unique in that nearly all of the other mechanisms focus on the fulfillment of fundamental human needs (e.g., authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem,

purpose, belongingness). As such, while other mechanisms are rooted primarily in self-based explanations, the cultural and interpersonal sensemaking mechanism emphasizes the role of the social environment in understanding how meaning and meaningfulness are constructed.

Scholars approaching meaning from a sensemaking perspective posit that meaning is inherently a social construction that is defined by the context or environment in which an individual is nested (Weick, 1995). This *social/ cultural construction* perspective, which is a foundation of ''meaning-making'' research (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Sonenshein, 2006; Weick, 1995), challenges the assumption that people process and determine meaning for themselves on an individual basis. Rather, meaning-making scholars assume that meanings are culturally bound by the cues and interpretations that are available to the collective (Weick, 1995). In other words, the way in which work takes on meaning is strongly influenced by which meanings are considered to be legitimate or prominent in the cultural context.

A closely related perspective, known as *interpersonal sensemaking*, builds on social information processing theory to suggest that individuals scan for, read, and interpret cues in their work environments that directly and indirectly inform the meaning of their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). For example, an employee working in a nursing unit may discern that he has a calling to be a helping professional based on a number of cues in the environment, such as hearing coworkers talk about their work as a calling, observing coworkers interact with patients and families in a caring manner, and observing hospital administrators' empowering approach to employees. The interpretation of these cues has implications for the meanings employees make of their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). The interpersonal sensemaking perspective therefore raises the possibility that through the motivated interpretation of cues about one's work and oneself, vastly different meanings can be made of the same work.

Given that all of the other mechanisms focus primarily on *psychological* processes leading to experienced meaningfulness, the cultural and interpersonal sensemaking mechanism contributes a valuable social perspective on the actual construction of meaning.

In the following section, we synthesize the elements of our review to provide an overarching theoretical scheme that illustrates key pathways to meaningful work.
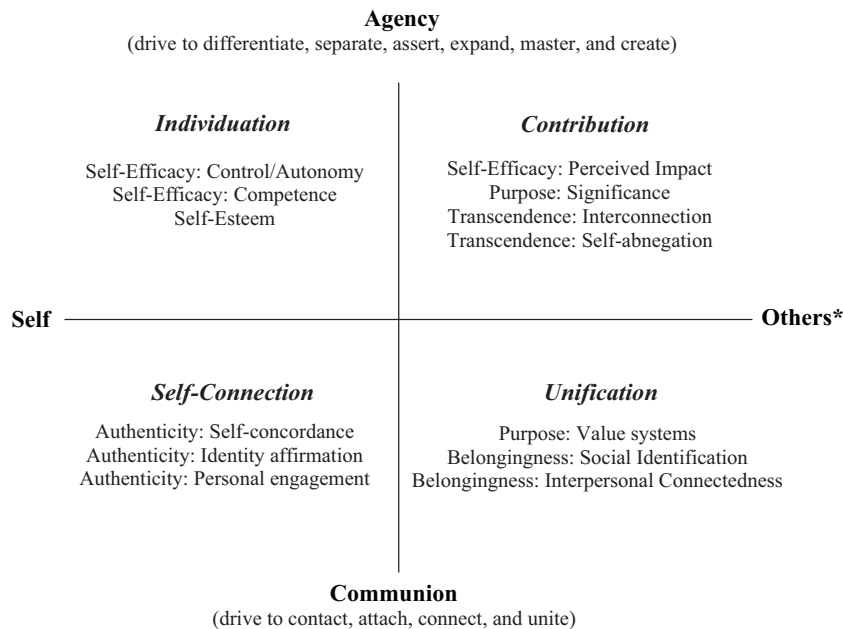
## 4. Pathways to meaningful work: a theoretical framework

Through this review we have sought to bring clarity to a diverse literature by uncovering and organizing the central sources of the meaning of work, and the central psychological and social mechanisms driving perceptions of meaningfulness. In this section, we step back to offer a theoretical perspective that brings further coherence to these themes by illuminating the main pathways through which meaningful work is created or maintained. The goal of this endeavor is to offer a foundation, based on our review, for understanding the experiences or activities that seem most fundamental to fostering the psychological experience of meaningful work. Below, we describe our theoretical scheme and the two key dimensions that define it (see Fig. 1).

As our review illustrates, the meaning of work literature has much to say about how and from where meaningful work may be created and maintained. We have attempted to distill the prominent themes from the extant literature and organize them into categories that we hope will guide future research. But, what can we conclude from this about the main pathways to meaningful work? To answer this question, we analyzed the sources and mechanisms of meaningfulness in search of fundamental underlying themes.[9] Based on our interpretation of the literature, we argue that two key dimensions seem most fundamental to the creation or maintenance of meaningful work. We suggest that it is at the intersections of these dimensions that meaningful work is most likely to be experienced. We elaborate on the nature of these dimensions and their intersections below.

First, we noticed that the mechanisms uncovered in our review differed with respect to the types of motives underlying them. In particular, while some mechanisms emphasize a desire for agency with respect to the self or other entities, other mechanisms emphasize a desire for communion with the self or other entities. A theoretical distinction between agency and communion has been drawn previously in the psychological literature by Bakan (1966), who

---

[9] Since cultural and interpersonal sensemaking concerns the creation of meaning, not meaningfulness, we do not include it in our theoretical scheme. However, given the paucity of mechanisms in the meaning of work literature that detail the processes through which meaning is created, we strongly encourage organizational researchers to deepen inquiry in this area.

**Agency**
(drive to differentiate, separate, assert, expand, master, and create)

|  |  |
|---|---|
| *Individuation* | *Contribution* |
| Self-Efficacy: Control/Autonomy | Self-Efficacy: Perceived Impact |
| Self-Efficacy: Competence | Purpose: Significance |
| Self-Esteem | Transcendence: Interconnection |
|  | Transcendence: Self-abnegation |

**Self** ———————————————————————————— **Others\***

|  |  |
|---|---|
| *Self-Connection* | *Unification* |
| Authenticity: Self-concordance | Purpose: Value systems |
| Authenticity: Identity affirmation | Belongingness: Social Identification |
| Authenticity: Personal engagement | Belongingness: Interpersonal Connectedness |

**Communion**
(drive to contact, attach, connect, and unite)

\*Others = other individuals, groups, collectives, organizations, and higher powers

Fig. 1. Four major pathways to meaningful work: a theoretical framework.

proposed that agency and communion are two "fundamental modalities of human existence" (pp. 14–15). On one hand, humans are driven to separate, assert, expand, master, and create (thus pursuing agency[10]), and on the other hand, they are driven to contact, attach, connect, and unite (thus pursuing communion). As revealed by our analysis, we propose that the agency-communion distinction is relevant for understanding different ways people approach their work, and that the activities driven by the pursuit of agency versus communion may have fundamentally distinct influences on the experience of meaningful work.

Second, our analysis suggested that perceptions of the meaningfulness of work can fundamentally vary based on whether action is directed toward the self or toward others. Work experiences oriented toward the self can be experienced as meaningful, as can experiences oriented toward others. However, the processes through which these sources are experienced as meaningful seem quite different. As discussed earlier, meaning of work researchers have demonstrated the importance of the self and a variety of others (e.g., other individuals, groups, collectives, organizations, and spiritual entities) in perceptions of meaningful work. Like agency-communion, the distinction between self and other reveals important differences in how meaningful work is created or maintained. In particular, mechanisms of meaningfulness seem to differ with respect to the degree to which experiences are perceived as internal or external to the self. Although the notion of "others" encapsulates an array of other people and entities, our analysis suggests that the ways in which others shape the meaningfulness of work share fundamental similarities. Specifically, other-oriented actions or experiences serve to broaden or expand the self in some meaningful way. We therefore consider "others" as a coherent category, as have previous researchers who have treated processes related to the meaning of work that focus on the self as distinct from those that focus on others (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009).

---

[10] It seems important to differentiate the treatment of agency in the psychological literature from that of the economic literature. We follow Bakan's (1966) use of the word agency, which is aligned with the idea of human agency in the philosophy (Hegel, 1807; Marx, 1867) and psychology (Bandura, 1989, 2001) literatures, where agency is defined as the capacity to act with intentionality in the world. In contrast, the literatures in economics, accounting and finance largely treat agency in the context of agency theory, in which agency refers to the relationship between a principal (typically an owner) who contracts with an agent (typically a manager or employee) whose goals may or may not be aligned with the principal and whose behaviors are difficult to monitor (e.g., Spence & Zeckhauser, 1971). Our use of agency is drawn from the psychological literature.

Our theoretical scheme brings the two key dimensions of agency-communion and self-others together. We believe that it is at the various intersections of these dimensions that the experience of meaningful work resides, illuminating four main pathways by which meaningful work is created or maintained: Individuation (self-agency), Contribution (other-agency), Self-Connection (self-communion), and Unification (other-communion). *Individuation* reflects the meaningfulness of actions that define and distinguish the self as valuable and worthy. *Contribution* reflects the meaningfulness of actions perceived as significant and/or done in service of something greater than the self. *Self-Connection* reflects the meaningfulness of actions that bring individuals closer into alignment with the way they see themselves. And *Unification* reflects the meaningfulness of actions that bring individuals into harmony with other beings or principles. Fig. 1 organizes the mechanisms of meaningfulness we proposed earlier in the paper, and shows how each mechanism fits coherently into these categories, suggesting that there is something fundamentally significant about the nature of these four pathways that is common to many sources of meaning.

Both the agency-communion and self-other dimensions are related to human action, through the motive for the action and the target of the action, respectively. As suggested by our theoretical model, action directed toward the self (internally) or others (externally), and with the aim of expressing agency or achieving communion, seems to be particularly meaningful. We propose that such a sense of purposeful action is vital to the experience of meaningful work because it represents a directedness or progression toward something valuable (valuable for the self, for various others, or both). The work context provides uniquely ample opportunities for purposeful action since work requires both action and a sense of directionality.

Although our model emphasizes the importance of both the self and various others as valuable sources of the meaning of work – and draws a key distinction between them – it also implies that perceptions of meaningfulness must necessarily travel through the self. In other words, individuals are the ultimate arbiters of the meaning of their own work, as shaped through the lens of their unique perceptions and experiences. Even on the other-oriented side of our model, meaningfulness results from the interaction or alignment of the self *and* the other, rather than the other alone (i.e., the self contributing to and unifying with others).

Our theoretical scheme proffers four main pathways to the creation or maintenance of meaningful work. Although we see these pathways as conceptually distinct, we do not think they are mutually exclusive. Rather, we believe that they may be activated simultaneously. In fact, it seems likely that work experiences that activate more than one of the pathways could contribute to stronger perceptions of meaningfulness. In this sense, the four key pathways to meaningful work offered here may have additive or interactive effects. That is not to say that all pathways must be experienced simultaneously, or even that they can be. Indeed, these are important questions for future empirical research. We do propose, however, that for work as a whole to be perceived as meaningful, it is important that there be sufficient opportunities to experience or enact some or all of these four pathways through work.

We offer this model in response to calls for theoretical leadership and synthesis amidst the seemingly disparate perspectives under the ''meaning of work'' umbrella (e.g., Castillo, 1997). In putting forth this theoretical perspective, we are not advocating for a single unified theory of the meaning of work. However, we do believe that the model we have put forth holds both theoretical and empirical promise as a coherent framework for what it is that ultimately makes work meaningful.

## 5. Discussion

The vast range of research reviewed in this paper is evidence of a rich and diverse tradition of scholarship on the meaning of work. This research has contributed valuable insights to our understanding of how employees find and create meaning and meaningfulness in their work, and the field of organizational behavior has clearly benefited from such a broad understanding of factors contributing to the meaning of work. At the same time, there are important patterns in the way the meaning of work has been studied thus far that we believe reveal opportunities to strengthen this area of study.

In our review of the literature, four major patterns emerged as particularly worthy of further investigation. First, existing research has largely been conducted in a siloed manner, with scholars focusing their research primarily on single sources of work meaning. Second, while the sources of meaning studied in the literature have ranged widely, from the self to the work context to spirituality, most of the current research relies on explanatory mechanisms that are self-oriented (e.g., authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem), with less research employing externally oriented mechanisms (e.g., transcendence). Third, existing scholarship has perpetuated certain taken-for-granted assumptions

about how individuals make meaning of work, which has slowed the development of new ideas and approaches in research on the topic. And fourth, meaning of work researchers have largely failed to consider the role of socioeconomic status in how employees make meaning of work. We consider these four patterns below, discuss how and why they may have evolved in this way, and suggest promising future opportunities that they present for research on the meaning of work.

### 5.1. Noteworthy patterns in the meaning of work literature

The first pattern revealed in our analysis is that the meaning of work literature is predominantly divided into discrete research silos built around single sources of work meaning (e.g., the self, others, the work context, and spiritual life). Although the body of literature was not intentionally built in this way, and while researchers may not have been aware that they were contributing to particular ''silos,'' this pattern emerged clearly in our review of the literature. Without question, the extant research in each silo has contributed immensely to our understanding of how individuals experience meaning and meaningfulness through their work, revealing the nature of the connections people have to various sources of meaning as well as the mechanisms through which these connections shape the meaning of work. In fact, it would be difficult to imagine a still relatively young research domain like the meaning of work developing any differently. Scholars have necessarily embraced a broad range of research questions as they set out to identify and understand the various features of the person and environment that contribute meaning and meaningfulness to work.

However, because most research has emphasized single sources of work meaning, we have been left with rather simplistic views of how people construct meaning and meaningfulness in their work. Scholars have mostly examined the influence of single sources of meaning on individuals' perceptions of meaning or meaningfulness. This would be analogous to trying to understand group-level processes by studying each individual's relationship to the team leader. We contend that this bias toward focusing on the impact of single sources of meaning has limited our ability to reach a more comprehensive understanding of how employees make meaning of their work. Individuals are likely to draw from multiple sources of meaning in their work, and the potential for these sources to combine or interact in determining meaning or meaningfulness is largely unexplored. We fear that we have missed opportunities as a field to consider the integrative nature of these sources. Indeed, naturalistic inquiries into what makes work meaningful have suggested that people draw from many sources of meaning simultaneously and that it is in the combination or alignment of these sources that the meaningfulness of work is enhanced (Korotkov, 1998; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Perceptions of meaning or meaningfulness are likely to take shape within the context of all possible sources of work meaning and their interrelationships. Various sources or mechanisms may have an additive effect on the meaning of work, or certain sources or mechanisms may interact with each other to produce multiplicative effects.

By overlooking the integrative nature of various sources and mechanisms of meaning, researchers have missed valuable opportunities to develop more comprehensive understandings and models of the meaning of work. For example, individuals who perceive two main sources of meaning in their work, such as a compelling organizational mission and intrinsically motivating tasks, may find that their work is experienced as more meaningful than for those who perceive meaning in only one source. On the other hand, it is possible that certain psychological mechanisms (e.g., authenticity) are more influential in the construction of meaningfulness than are the sources from which they are derived. In any case, though the sources can spark meaningfulness through a variety of pathways, the impact of activating several pathways is not known. For example, while the simultaneous triggering of a sense of authenticity, purpose and transcendence in work may be maximally beneficial for individuals' experiences of meaningfulness in work, the benefits of multiple pathways to meaningfulness might plateau beyond a certain number of sources or mechanisms. There may even be a curvilinear effect through which too many active pathways to meaning are exhausting and lead to burnout. Thus far, the field has missed opportunities to consider the integrative nature of these sources and mechanisms. We discuss strategies for addressing this in the discussion.

The second pattern revealed by our analysis is that certain mechanisms have been more heavily favored than others in the literature. In particular, our review suggests that researchers have tended to emphasize self-oriented mechanisms like authenticity and self-efficacy (e.g., the Individuation and Self-Connection quadrants of Fig. 1) over externally oriented mechanisms like transcendence in explaining how employees construct the meaning of work. Indeed, even sources of meaning or meaningfulness that are quite distal to the self are frequently addressed in ways related to the self. For example, much of the research we reviewed on the organizational context as a source of meaning emphasizes

personal identity development as the central mechanism for meaningful work. Self-oriented mechanisms are undoubtedly important in the construction of the meaning of work; after all, we are often ego-oriented beings who focus a considerable amount of our energy on the fulfillment of our needs and desires. However, our strong reliance as a field on self-oriented mechanisms may be precluding us from engaging in deeper consideration of the influence of other-oriented mechanisms or meaningful connections to other entities outside of the self (e.g., the Unification and Contribution quadrants of Fig. 1). Indeed, other scholars have already expressed concern about embracing perspectives that position work as ''the quintessential place to express and cultivate the self'' (Baumeister, 1991, p. 124). We argue that scholars' consistent use of self-oriented mechanisms to explain how individuals make meaning of their work leaves the field with a limited understanding of the meaning of work. Some scholars have made progress in developing models of the meaning of work that encompass multiple mechanisms (e.g., Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). However, many opportunities exist to explore a broader range of mechanisms, and we still lack models that consider the interplay of the sources and mechanisms of meaning.

The third pattern revealed by our review is that the existing scholarship on the meaning of work tends to build from, and perpetuate, taken-for-granted theoretical assumptions. For example, much of the literature employs the assumption that individuals are fairly passive recipients of their environments, making meaning from the specific people and work context surrounding them. In other words, the assumption is that the meanings people make of their work and the amount of meaningfulness they perceive in it are constrained by whatever currently exists around them. While we agree that this is partially true, most scholarship on the meaning of work fails to consider the ways in which employees actively shape those very environments (Bell & Staw, 1989), both tangibly and psychologically, in ways that affect the meaning of their work. As Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) have noted, employees are motivated crafters of meaning, and the ways in which they influence their own work, work environments, and their own interpretations of the work have a significant impact on the meaning of their work.

In addition, scholars have tended to converge around a broad-brushed account of how the meaning of work has evolved throughout history. This narrative traces the changing meanings of work from the time of the ancient Greeks, where work was seen as a form of punishment, through the Middle ages, where work began to take on a religious cast as a form of absolution, to the Protestant Reformation, where the concept of calling promoted an intrinsic value of work and laid the foundation for a ''Protestant work ethic'' in secular society, and into modern industrialized society, where the Industrial Revolution separated individuals from the craft of work and work is increasingly motivated by extrinsic rewards. Such a narrative has taken on a folkloric quality in meaning of work scholarship. However, although this narrative has conceptual appeal as a straightforward way of understanding and explaining vast cultural shifts in the meaning of work, scholars rarely question the assumptions upon which it has been perpetuated, and too frequently rely on secondary sources to support these claims. Still – perhaps because we are attracted to its simplicity – scholars continue to tell this story, despite previous calls for reevaluating the assumptions underlying it (see Nord et al., 1990). We too have been guilty of promulgating this perspective (Wrzesniewski et al., 2009). We encourage researchers to reexamine these historical texts and the validity of this narrative.

Finally, another less explicit but still common assumption is that there exists a shared, generic sense of work common to all types and levels of employees. Despite the fact that scholars have raised concerns that the meaning of work literature is framed around certain (more privileged) types or classes of work (e.g., Brief & Nord, 1990a), much of the literature continues to overlook, or remain agnostic about, whether different levels of employees – e.g., CEOs vs. midlevel managers vs. frontline employees vs. unskilled low-wage laborers – tend to engage in different meaning-making processes or experience different types of meaning in their work. The prominent models of the meaning of work tend not to explicitly consider their applicability to types of work beyond the realm of full-time, regular employment at a living wage. Brief and colleagues (Brief, 2008; Brief et al., 1995) have voiced concern that meaning of work scholars have overemphasized meaning-related motives for work behavior, particularly for the scores of employees for whom work is simply a means to financial end (Brief & Nord, 1990b). We agree that scholars ''. . . must admit to [our] strong preference for work as a source of value, both social and self-fulfilling. But we are also painfully aware of the elitism – and perhaps the ethnocentrism – of the notion of work as self-fulfilling. The majority of people in contemporary societies do not do the kinds of work that could be a source of self-fulfillment'' (Dupré & Gagnier, 1996, p. 558, as cited in Brief, 2008). Other scholars have proposed that because poverty is a classic ''strong situation,'' some fundamental assumptions prevalent in the organizational studies literature may be challenged when the workforce of interest is low-income (Leana, 2007; Leana, Appelbaum, et al., 2009; Leana, Stiehl, et al., 2009; but see Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010 and Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001 for evidence that low-level work can be deeply

meaningful). Clearly, more research in this area is needed to confirm, dispel, or elaborate the underlying assumption that employees experience work in similar ways.

In summary, it seems that as a field we have missed opportunities to revisit and re-examine some of the important theoretical, historical, and cultural assumptions underlying our conceptions of the meaning of work. While shared assumptions and traditions are necessary for the growth of a fertile research domain, they may bias the conclusions we make about how employees find and construct the meaning of their work. As a result, these assumptions may also limit our ability to answer new questions about the meaning of work – or to answer current questions in new ways. It seems valuable at this stage of the development of the literature to pause and question broadly the fundamental assumptions, theoretical perspectives, and historical and cultural traditions upon which we are building our theories about the meaning of work.

### 5.2. How did we get here?

We see a number of possible explanations for this general trajectory in scholarship on the meaning of work. Below, we consider three potential reasons, including scholars' reliance upon existing theoretical perspectives, broader trends in the fields of organizational behavior and psychology, and the research methods available to scholars. We use our conclusions to suggest promising questions and areas of focus to guide future research.

One explanation for these patterns is that they are a result of the historical footprint of past meaning of work scholarship. The nature of the meaning of work is a vast and somewhat mystifying topic, and can seem akin to attempting to answer the question ''what is the meaning of life?''! Logically, pioneering scholars in this area approached the daunting task of understanding the meaning of work by testing distinct pieces of the puzzle before attempting to develop comprehensive models or theorize about the full set of sources (and their connections) that may contribute to the meaning of work. However, while this pattern of development is natural in a growing domain of study, we believe the literature has evolved to a point where we can begin to address more integrative questions.

A second explanation for the current nature of this literature is rooted in trends in the fields of organizational behavior and psychology. Much of the scholarship in organizational studies on meaning has developed from a psychological perspective, in which the individual experience of work takes precedence over social or cultural factors. There are compelling arguments to be made that the foci of social science in general have become increasingly intra-psychic over time (Emirbayer, 1997). For example, the ''cognitive revolution'' in psychology during the 1980s and 1990s (and beyond) has prompted movement away from the study or observation of social relationships and experiences, emphasizing instead a narrowed focus on cognitive and intra-psychic explanations for human behavior and attitudes (Rozin, 2001, 2006). This reductionism persists today with the field's increasing focus on biological, neurological, and chemical mechanisms for behavior. The implications of these trends for the meaning of work literature are that they promote investigation of micro-level and intrapersonal mechanisms while downplaying social or contextual sources of meaning and, therefore, inhibit more comprehensive understandings of the meaning of work.

A third explanation for the trajectory of this domain of study concerns the methodological tools that have been in wide use among scholars. Scholars in the social sciences have traditionally relied heavily on research methods and analytical tools modeling linear relationships and focusing on a limited subset of relationships at a given time. For example, much of the research on the meaning of work employs tools like linear regression or factor analysis to test the impact of antecedents on perceptions of meaning or meaningfulness, or to identify various dimensions of meaning. It is likely that, as with most disciplines, the most commonly used analytical tools guided the types of questions meaning of work scholars asked. Thus, it is conceivable that the lack of scholarship on the interactions between various sources and mechanisms of the meaning of work is due to the traditions of inquiry in this area of research. In the next section, we discuss how other research methodologies may provide valuable opportunities for future researchers to overcome this limitation.

### 5.3. New directions for research on the meaning of work

It is clear that opportunities abound for scholars interested in the meaning of work to extend and deepen this domain of study. Earlier, we noted several specific areas for future research on each source of meaning. In this section, we highlight more broadly what we believe are particularly fruitful avenues for meaning of work research in the future.

We have made several observations about the trajectory of meaning of work research, including the prominence of self-oriented mechanisms compared to externally oriented mechanisms and a heavy emphasis on intrapsychic

(especially cognitive) processes over social and cultural processes in the construction of meaning. These observations reveal new opportunities for research on the meaning of work. First, we encourage researchers to consider mechanisms and sources of meaning that implicate a broader set of psychological processes. For example, although evidence exists in the field of psychology for the fundamental role of positive affect in the experience of meaning (e.g., King et al., 2006), meaning of work researchers have all but ignored affective processes in favor of cognitive processes. Exploring the role of affect in perception of meaning and meaningfulness would broaden our understanding of how something comes to be experienced as meaningful.

Similarly, as previously noted, organizational behavior scholars have paid very little attention to the social and cultural factors that affect perceptions of meaningfulness. Putting a stronger focus on social and cultural factors (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Mead, 1934; Parsons, 1951) would greatly expand our understanding of how other persons and cultural norms matter for meaning. We see considerable opportunities to explore other sources of meaning, particularly those less proximate to the self. In a basic sense, the organizational literature on the meaning of work has largely ignored social, other-oriented, and community-based perspectives on the nature of work in favor of individual perspectives. We encourage researchers to actively stretch the boundaries of what is currently known about the sources and mechanisms of meaning and meaningfulness. Some scholars have already begun to stretch these boundaries, such as in new research focusing on the impact of employees' prosocial motives and behaviors in the experience of meaningful work (e.g., Cardador, 2009), or ways in which meaning is socially constructed (e.g., Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Sonenshein, 2006). We see enormous promise in the exploration of perspectives that position work and its meaning as societal or relational issues, applying these lenses to produce theory and research on the antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes of meaningful work.

In contemplating the future of meaning of work scholarship, we believe that the field is in need of more integrative and dynamic models that are representative of the complex interplay of factors contributing to the meaning employees make of their work. Perspectives on the meaning of work based on single antecedents constrain our understanding of the many sources from which employees draw meaning. One alternative is to apply a network perspective to the meaning of work. We propose that if the focus is moved from the connections between individuals and single sources of meaning to the interconnections between these different sources, new insights would emerge about how individuals make meaning of their work. This perspective aligns with other scholars' assertions that work – and life – cannot be perceived as meaningful unless there is some balance or contribution from multiple sources of meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Chalofsky, 2003). Exploring a ''web of meaning'' in this way has the potential to enrich theory about the meaning of work. We encourage theorists and researchers to pursue the development of more integrative models to build a more dynamic understanding of the meaning of work.

We propose that integrative perspectives on the meaning of work should recognize and model the interconnection of various sources of work meaning, move beyond self-based mechanisms, and openly re-evaluate the assumptions underlying theories about the meaning of work. More specifically, it seems important to map individuals' connections to multiple sources of meaning, as well as the simultaneous connections of these sources and their influence upon one another, and to build theory that explicitly considers these multiplex relationships. We also encourage researchers to test these relationships empirically, whether through quantitative or qualitative methods.

Meaning of work scholarship may also draw valuable insights from cross-cultural research, particularly the differentiation of independent and interdependent self-construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) as discussed earlier. These contrasting worldviews explicate the ways that people in different cultures (specifically Eastern vs. Western) conceptualize the self, others, and the interdependence of the two. While individuals with independent self-construals (i.e., a more Western view) seek to maintain independence from others by developing and expressing their unique attributes, those with interdependent self-construals (i.e., a more Eastern view) focus on the ''fundamental relatedness of individuals to each other'' (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 224). Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that these different worldviews have profound effects on people's cognitions, emotions, and motivations. It is notable that almost all of the scholarship on the meaning of work has been conducted by Western social scientists, who in turn have relied heavily on Western theories of work and meaning, using them to study Western populations. For example, as described above, when scholars trace the changing meanings of work through the ages, they almost always begin the narrative with ancient Greek thought, emphasize the impact of Christian theology, and end with the industrialization of Western societies. Given these lenses through which the meaning of work has been theorized, it is not surprising that scholars have emphasized ''independent'' understandings of how meaning is made, reminiscent of Western cultural values and traditions. Meaning of work scholars could gain valuable insights by approaching the meaning of work with an

interdependent lens, and from the perspectives of non-Western cultures, exploring the fundamental relatedness between the self and others, and the interaction and interdependence between the many sources of meaning (see also Nord et al., 1988).

Although we believe that individuals ultimately must decide for themselves what is or is not meaningful, individuals are also strongly influenced by the social and cultural forces and environments around them (Parsons, 1951). This is certainly also true with regard to individual perceptions of meaning. However, most of the extant research on the meaning of work has assumed that individual agency is the primary determinant of meaningfulness. Relaxing this assumption would open the door to underexplored mechanisms about how individual employees make meaning of or find meaningfulness in their work. For example, organizations are very strong contexts that carry unique systems of meaning which likely exert a powerful influence on how individuals interpret the meaning and meaningfulness of their work. Some scholars have already noted that meaning is socially as well as individually constructed (e.g., Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), and we see this question as a fruitful area of additional future research.

### 5.4. Conclusion

Although the extant research on the meaning of work has yielded tremendous insights into where meaning is found and how it is generated, there remains a world of possibilities for scholars interested in the meaning of work, with abundant opportunities to drive this area of study in new and exciting directions. We have sought to bring coherence to this disparate literature by uncovering the central sources of the meaning of work, explicating the core psychological and social mechanisms underlying perceptions of meaningfulness, and offering a theoretical framework to elucidate the main pathways through which meaningful work is created and maintained. It is our hope that this theoretical integration and review provides a clear organizing framework for the literature to date, and stimulates productive dialogue and scholarship that broadens theory and research on the meaning of work.

### Acknowledgements

### References

Alderfer, C. P. (1977). Group and intergroup relations. In J. R. Hackman & J. L. Suttle (Eds.), *Improving life at work* (pp. 227–296). Santa Monica, CA: Goodyear.

Amabile, T. M., Hill, K. G., Hennessey, B. A., & Tighe, E. M. (1994). The work preference inventory: Assessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66*(5), 950–967.

Aristotle. (2000). *Nicomachean ethics (R. Crisp, Trans.)*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Arthur, M. B., & Rousseau, D. M. (1996). *The boundaryless career: A new employment principle for a new organizational era*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Arvey, R. D., Harpaz, I., & Liao, H. (2004). Work centrality and post-award work behavior of lottery winners. *The Journal of Psychology, 138*, 404–420.

Ashforth, B. E., & Kreiner, G. E. (1999). "How can you do it?": Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity. *Academy of Management Review, 24*(3), 413–434.

Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(1), 20.

Baillie, P. H. F. (1993). Understanding retirement from sports—Therapeutic ideas for helping athletes in transition. *Counseling Psychologist, 21*(3), 399–410.

Bailyn, L. (1971). Career and family orientation of husbands and wives in relation to marital happiness. In A. Theodore (Ed.), *The professional woman* (pp. 545–567). Cambridge, MA: Schenckman.

Bakan, D. (1966). *The duality of human existence*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist, 44*, 1175–1184.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 1–26.

Baumeister, R. F. (1998). The self. In Gilbert, D. T., & Fiske, S. T. Eds. *Handbook of Social Psychology.* Vol. 1 (pp.680–740).New York: McGraw-Hill**.**

Baumeister, R. F. (1991). Work, work, work, work. *Meanings of Life* (pp. 116–144). New York: The Guilford Press.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497–529.

Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2002). The pursuit of meaningfulness in life. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *The handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 608–618). New York: Oxford University Press.

Bechky, B. (2003). Sharing meaning across occupational communities: The transformation of understanding on a production floor. *Organization Science, 14*(3), 312–330.

Bell, N. E., & Staw, B. M. (1989). People as sculptors versus sculpture: The roles of personality and personal control in organizations. In M. B. Arthur, D. T. Hall, & B. S. Lawrence (Eds.), *The handbook of career theory* (pp. 232–251). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the heart.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Berg, J. M., Grant, A. M., & Johnson, V. (2010a). When callings are calling: Crafting work and leisure in pursuit of unanswered occupational callings. *Organization Science, 21*, 973–994.

Berg, J. M., Wrzesniewski, A., & Dutton, J. E. (2010b). Perceiving and responding to challenges in job crafting at different ranks: When proactivity requires adaptivity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 31*, 158–186.

Besecke, K. (2001). Speaking of meaning in modernity: Reflexive spirituality as a cultural resource. *Sociology of Religion, 62*(3), 365–381.

Besharov, M. L. (2008). *Mission goes corporate: Understanding employee behavior in a mission-driven business.* Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.

Bhagat, R. S., & London, M. (1999). Getting started and getting ahead: Career dynamics of immigrants. *Human Resource Management Review, 9*(3), 349–365.

Blatt, R., & Camden, C. T. (2007). Positive relationships and cultivating community. In J. E. Dutton & B. R. Ragins (Eds.), *Exploring positive relationships at work: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 243–264). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Bono, J. E., & Judge, T. A. (2003). Self-concordance at work: Toward understanding the motivational effects of transformational leaders. *Academy of Management Journal, 46*(5), 554–571.

Brickson, S. L. (2005). Organizational identity orientation: Forging a link between organizational identity and organizations' relations with stakeholders. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 50*, 576–609.

Brickson, S. L. (2007). Organizational identity orientation: The genesis of the role of the firm and distinct forms of social value. *Academy of Management Review, 32*(3), 864–888.

Bridges, W. (1994). *Job shift.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing.

Brief, A. P. (2008). Money and the meaning of work. *Paper presented at the All-Academy Symposium: Changing the questions we ask: New directions in the meaning of work, Academy of Management Annual Meeting.*

Brief, A. P., & Aldag, R. J. (1989). The economic functions of work. In K. Rowland & G. R. Ferris (Eds.), *Research in personnel and human resources management.* Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Brief, A. P., & Atieh, J. M. (1987). Studying job stress: Are we making mountains out of molehills? *Journal of Occupational Behavior, 8*, 115–126.

Brief, A. P., Brett, J. F., Futter, D., & Stein, E. (1997). Feeling economically dependent on one's job: Its origins and functions with regard to worker well-being. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 27*, 1303–1307.

Brief, A. P., Konovsky, M. A., George, J., Goodwin, R., & Link, K. (1995). Inferring the meaning of work from the effects of unemployment. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 25*, 693–711.

Brief, A. P., & Nord, W. R. (1990a). *Meanings of occupational work.* Lexington: Lexington Books.

Brief, A. P., & Nord, W. R. (1990b). Work and meaning: Definitions and interpretations. In A. P. Brief & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Meanings of occupational work* (pp. 1–19). Lexington: Lexington Books.

Brief, A. P., & Nord, W. R. (1990c). Work and nonwork connections. In A. P. Brief & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Meanings of occupational work* (pp. 171–199). Lexington: Lexington Books.

Brief, A. P., & Nord, W. R. (1990d). Work and the family. In A. P. Brief & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Meanings of occupational work* (pp. 203–232). Lexington: Lexington Books.

Brief, A. P., Umphress, E. E., Dietz, J., Burrows, J. W., Butz, R. M., & Scholten, L. (2005). Community matters: Realistic group conflict theory and the impact of diversity. *Academy of Management Journal, 48*(4), 830–844.

Britt, T. W., Adler, A. B., & Bartone, P. T. (2001). Deriving benefits from stressful events: The role of engagement in meaningful work and hardiness. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 6*, 53–63.

Brown, S. P. (1996). A meta-analysis and review of organizational research on job involvement. *Psychological Bulletin, 120*(2), 235–255.

Bullock, H. E., & Waugh, I. M. (2005). Beliefs about poverty and opportunity among Mexican immigrant farm workers. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 35*(6), 1132–1149.

Bunderson, J. S., & Thompson, J. A. (2009). The call of the wild: Zookeepers, callings, and the dual edges of deeply meaningful work. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 54*, 32–57.

Burke, R. J. (2000). Workaholism and divorce. *Psychological Reports, 86*, 219–220.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership.* New York: Harper & Row.

Calder, B. J., & Staw, B. M. (1975). Self-perception of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 31*, 599–605.

Calvin, J. (1574). *Sermons of M. John Calvin upon the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians.* London: Lucas Harison and George Bishop.

Cameron, K. S., Dutton, J. E., & Quinn, R. E. (2003). *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Cardador, M. T. (2009). *Banking on meaningful work: How, why and when bankers experience meaningful work through helping others*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois.

Cardador, M. T., Pratt, M. G., & Dane, E. I. (2006). Do callings matter in medicine?: The influence of callings versus careers on domain specific work outcomes. *Paper presented at the Positive Organizational Scholarship Conference*.

Casey, C. (1995). *Work, self and society: After industrialism*. London: Routledge.

Castillo, J. J. (1997). Looking for the meaning of work. *Work and Occupations, 24*, 413–425.

Cha, S. E., & Edmondson, A. C. (2006). When values backfire: Leadership, attribution, and disenchantment in a values-driven organization. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*, 57–78.

Chalofsky, N. (2003). An emerging construct for meaningful work. *Human Resource Development International, 6*(1), 69–83.

Champoux, J. E. (1978). Perceptions of work and nonwork: A reexamination of the compensatory and spillover models. *Sociology of Work and Occupations, 5*, 402–422.

Champoux, J. E. (1981). A sociological perspective on work involvement. *International Review of Applied Psychology, 30*, 65–86.

Childs, J. M. (1995). *Ethics in business: Faith at work*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Ciulla, J. B. (2000). *The working life: The promise and betrayal of modern work*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Claes, R., & Ruiz-Quintanilla, S. A. (1994). Initial career and work meanings in seven European countries. *The Career Development Quarterly, 42*(4), 337–352.

Clark, S. C. (2000). Work/family border theory: A new theory of work/life balance. *Human Relations, 53*(6), 747–770.

Constantine, M. G., Miville, M. L., Warren, A. K., Gainor, K. A., & Lewis-Coles, M. E. (2006). Religion, spirituality, and career development in African American college students: A qualitative inquiry. *The Career Development Quarterly, 54*, 227–241.

Costa, D. L. (1998). *The evolution of retirement: An American economic history, 1880–1990*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Crocker, J., & Park, L. E. (2004). The costly pursuit of self-esteem. *Psychological Bulletin, 130*, 392–414.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

Curlin, F. A., Dugdale, L. S., Lantos, J. D., & Chin, M. H. (2007). Do religious physicians disproportionately care for the underserved? *Analysis of Family Medicine, 5*(4), 353–360.

D'Abate, C. P. (2005). Working hard or hardly working: A study of individuals engaging in personal business on the job. *Human Relations, 58*(8), 1009–1032.

Dalai Lama, & Cutler, H. C. (1998). *The art of happiness: A handbook for living*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Davidson, J. C., & Caddell, D. P. (1994). Religion and the meaning of work. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 33*(2), 135–147.

de Charms, R. (1968). *Personal causation: The internal affective determinants of behavior*. New York: Academic Press.

Deci, E. L. (1975). *Intrinsic motivation*. New York: Plenum.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*, 227–268.

Dekas, K. H. & Baker, W. E. (2010). *Investigating the origins of work orientations*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan.

DeVoe, S. E., & Pfeffer, J. (2007). When time is money: The effect of hourly payment on the evaluation of time. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 104*, 1–13.

Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. E. (1999). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin, 125*, 276–302.

Dik, B. J., & Duffy, R. D. (2009). Calling and vocation at work. *The Counseling Psychologist, 37*(3), 424–450.

Dobrow, S. R. (2004). Extreme subjective career success: A new integrated view of having a calling. *Paper presented at the Best Paper Proceedings of the Academy of Management Conference*.

Dobrow, S. R. (2006a). The dark side of calling: Career tunnel vision. *Paper presented at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting*.

Dobrow, S. R. (2006b). *Having a calling: A longitudinal study of young musicians*. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.

Dorfman, L. T., & Kolarik, D. C. (2005). Leisure and the retired professor: Occupation matters. *Educational Gerontology, 31*(5), 343–361.

Douglas, K., & Carless, D. (2009). Abandoning the performance narrative: Two women's stories of transition from professional sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 21*(2), 213–230.

Dubin, R. (1956). Industrial workers' worlds: A study of the "central life interests" of industrial workers. *Social Problems, 3*, 131–142.

Dupré, J., & Gagnier, R. (1996). A brief history of work. *Journal of Economic Issues, 2*, 553–559.

Dutton, J. E., & Heaphy, E. (2003). The power of high quality connections. In K. Cameron, J. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 263–278). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Dutton, J. E., & Ragins, B. R. (Eds.). (2007). *Exploring positive relationships at work: Building a theoretical and research foundation*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Dutton, J. E., Worline, M., Frost, P., & Lilius, J. (2006). Explaining compassion organizing. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 51*(1), 59–96.

Edwards, J. R., & Rothbard, N. P. (1999). Work and family stress and well-being: An examination of person-environment fit in the work and family domains. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 77*(2), 85–129.

Edwards, J. R., & Rothbard, N. P. (2000). Mechanisms linking work and family: Clarifying the relationship between work and family constructs. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 178–199.

Elangovan, A. R., Pinder, C. C., & McLean, M. (2010). Callings and organizational behavior. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 76*(3), 428–440.

Elsbach, K. D. (2003). Relating physical environment to self-categorizations: Identity threat and affirmation in a non-territorial office space. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 48*(4), 622.

Emirbayer, M. (1997). Manifesto for a relational sociology. *American Journal of Sociology, 103*(2), 281–317.

England, G. W., & Misumi, J. (1986). Work centrality in Japan and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 17*(4), 399–416.

England, G. W., & Whitely, W. T. (1990). Cross-national meanings of working. In A. Brief & W. Nord (Eds.), *Meanings of occupational work* (pp. 65–106). Lexington: Lexington Books.

Furnham, A. (1990). *The Protestant work ethic: The psychology of work-related beliefs and behaviors*. London: Routledge.

Frankl, V. E. (1959). *Man's search for meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Fried, Y., & Ferris, G. R. (1987). The validity of the job characteristics model: A review and meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology, 40*, 287–322.

Gallup, G., Jr. (1984). Religion in America. *Gallup Report  March.*

Gandal, N., Roccas, S., Sagiv, L., & Wrzesniewski, A. (2005). Personal value priorities of economists. *Human Relations, 58*(10), 1227–1252.

Gecas, V. (1982). The self-concept. *Annual Review of Psychology, 8*, 1–33.

Gecas, V. (1991). The self-concept as a basis for a theory of motivation. In J. A. Howard & P. L. Callero (Eds.), *The self-society dynamic: Cognition, emotion, and action* (pp. 171–187). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Giacalone, R. A., Jurkiewicz, C. L., & Fry, L. W. (2005). From advocacy to science: The next steps in workplace spirituality research. In R. F. Paloutzian & C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality* (pp. 515–528). New York: Guilford.

Gill, F. (1999). The meaning of work: Lessons from sociology, psychology, and political theory. *Journal of Socio-Economics, 28*, 725–743.

Grant, A.M. (2007). Relational job design and the motivation to make a prosocial difference. *Academy of Management Review, 32*(2), 393–417.

Grant, A. M. (2008a). Employees without a cause: The motivational effects of prosocial impact in public service. *International Public Management Journal, 11*, 48–66.

Grant, A. M. (2008b). The significance of task significance: Job performance effects, relational mechanisms, and boundary conditions. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*(1), 108–124.

Grant, A. M., Campbell, E. M., Chen, G., Cottone, K., Lapedis, D., & Lee, K. (2007). Impact and the art of motivation maintenance: The effects of contact with beneficiaries on persistence behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 103*, 53–67.

Grant, A. M., Dutton, J. E., & Rosso, B. D. (2008). Giving commitment: Employee support programs and the prosocial sensemaking process. *Academy of Management Journal, 51*(5), 898–918.

Grant, D., O'Neil, K., & Stephens, L. (2004). Spirituality in the workplace: New empirical directions in the study of the sacred. *Sociology of Religion, 65*(3), 265–283.

Greenberg, C. (1953). Work and leisure under industrialism. *Commentary, 16*, 54–62.

Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. (2003). When work and family collide: Deciding between competing role demands. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 90*, 291–303.

Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. (2006). When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment. *Academy of Management Review, 31*, 72–92.

Griffin, R. W. (1983). Objective and social sources of information in task redesign: A field experiment. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 28*, 184–200.

Hackman, J. R. (1987). The design of work teams. In J. Lorsch (Ed.), *Handbook of organizational behavior* (pp. 315–342). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Hackman, J. R., & Lawler, E. E. (1971). Employee reactions to job characteristics. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 55*, 259–286.

Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work: Test of a theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 16*, 250–279.

Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1980). *Work redesign*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Hall, D. T., & Chandler, D. E. (2005). Psychological success: When the career is a calling. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26*, 155–176.

Hardy, L. (1990). *The fabric of this world: Inquiries into calling, career choice, and the design of human work*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Harpaz, I. (1990). *The meaning of work in Israel: Its nature and consequences*. New York: Praeger.

Harpaz, I., & Fu, X. (1997). Work centrality in Germany, Israel, Japan, and the United States. *Cross-Cultural Research, 31*(3), 171–200.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1807). *Phenomenology of spirit (A. V. Miller, Trans.)*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Heine, S. J., Proulx, T., & Vohs, K. D. (2006). The meaning maintenance model: On the coherence of social motivations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 10*(2), 88–110.

Highhouse, S., Zickar, M., & Yankelevich, M. (2010). Would you work if you won the lottery? Tracking changes in the American work ethic. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 95*(2), 349–357.

Hill, P. C., & Pargament, K. I. (2003). Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality. *American Psychologist, 58*(1), 64–74.

Hogg, M. A. (1992). *The social psychology of group cohesiveness: From attraction to social identity*. New York: Harvester-Wheatsheaf.

Hogg, M. A., & Terry, D. J. (2000). Social identity and self-categorization processes in organizational contexts. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 121.

Homans, G. C. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology, 63*, 597–606.

Howell, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1993). Transformational leadership, transactional leadership, locus of control, and support for innovation: Key predictors of consolidated-business-unit performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 78*(6), 891–903.

Hulin, C. L., & Blood, M. R. (1968). Job enlargement, individual differences and worker responses. *Psychological Bulletin, 69*, 41–55.

Ilgen, D. R., & Hollenbeck, J. R. (1992). The structure of work: Job design and roles. In Dunnette, M. D., & Hough, L. M. Eds. *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology.* Vol. 2 (pp.165–207). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press**.**

Jahoda, M. (1982). *Employment and unemployment: A social-psychological analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Judge, T. A., Locke, E. A., & Durham, C. C. (1997). The dispositional causes of job satisfaction: A core evaluations approach. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 19*, 151–188.

Kabanoff, B. (1980). Work and nonwork. A review modes, methods and findings. *Psychological Bulletin, 88*, 60–77.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal, 33*(4), 692–724.

Kahn, W. A. (2007). Meaningful connections: Positive relationships and attachments at work. In J. E. Dutton & B. R. Ragins (Eds.), *Exploring positive relationships at work: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 189–206). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Kanungo, R. N. (1982). Measurement of job and work involvement. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 67*(3), 341–349.

Katz, D., & Kahn, R. L. (1966). *The social psychology of organizations*. New York: Wiley.

Katz, D., & Kahn, R. L. (1978). *The social psychology of organizations* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.

King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., Krull, J., & Del Gaiso, A. K. (2006). Positive affect and the experience of meaning in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*, 179–196.

Kirchmeyer, C. (1992). Nonwork participation and work attitudes: A test of scarcity vs. expansion models of personal resources. *Human Relations, 45*, 775–795.

Klein, K. J., & D'Aunno, T. A. (1986). Psychological sense of community in the workplace. *Journal of Community Psychology, 14*, 365–377.

Kluckhohn, C. (1951). Values and value-orientations in the theory of action: An exploration in definition and classification. In T. Parsons & E. Shils (Eds.), *Toward a general theory of action* (pp. 388–433). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kluckhohn, F. R., & Strodtbeck, F. L. (1961). *Variations in value orientations*. Evanston, IL: Row Peterson & Co.

Koch, S. (1956). Behavior as 'intrinsically' regulated: Work notes towards a pre-theory of phenomena called 'motivational. In M. R. Jones (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation* (pp. 42–87). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Korotkov, D. L. (1998). The sense of coherence: Making sense out of chaos. In P. T. P. Wong & P. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning: A handbook of psychological research and clinical applications* (pp. 51–70). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kram, K. E. (1983). Phases of the mentor relationship. *Academy of Management Journal, 26*(4), 608–625.

Krau, E. (1981). Immigrants preparing for their second career: The behavioral strategies adopted. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 18*, 289–303.

Krau, E. (1984). Commitment to work in immigrants: Its functions and peculiarities. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 24*(3), 329–339.

Kreiner, G. E., Hollensbe, E. C., & Sheep, M. L. (2006). Where is the "me" among the "we"? Identity work and the search for optimal balance. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*(5), 1031–1057.

Leana, C. R. (2007). Low wage work and work organizations: A critical research and policy frontier. *Paper presented at Interdisciplinary Committee on Organizational Studies seminar.*

Leana, C. R., Appelbaum, E., & Shevchuk, I. (2009a). Work process and quality of care in early childhood education: The role of job crafting. *Academy of Management Journal, 52*(6), 1169–1192.

Leana, C. R., Stiehl, E., & Mittal, V. (2009). *Organizational behavior and the working poor*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Pittsburgh.

Leary, M. R., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Interpersonal functions of the self-esteem motive: The self-esteem system as sociometer. In M. H. Kernis (Ed.), *Efficacy, agency, and self-esteem* (pp. 123–144). New York: Plenum.

Levinson, H. (1965). Reciprocation: The relationship between man and organization. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 9*(4), 370–390.

Levoy, G. (1997). *Callings: Finding and following an authentic life*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Lips-Wiersma, M. (2002). The influence of spiritual "meaning-making" on career behavior. *The Journal of Management Development, 21*(7/8), 497–519.

Lips-Wiersma, M., & Morris, L. (2009). Discriminating between 'meaningful work' and the 'management of meaning'. *Journal of Business Ethics, 88*, 491–511.

Locke, E. A., & Taylor, M. S. (1990). Stress, coping, and the meaning of work. In A. P. Brief & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Meanings of occupational work* (pp. 135–170). Lexington: Lexington Books.

Lodahl, T. M., & Kejner, M. (1965). The definition and measurement of job involvement. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 49*(1), 24–33.

Lundberg, C. D., & Peterson, M. F. (1994). The meaning of working in U.S. and Japanese local governments at three hierarchical levels. *Human Relations, 47*, 1459–1487.

Luther, M. (1520). Treatise on good works (W. A. Lambert, Trans.). In Atkinson, J. (Ed.). *The Christian in Society I* (Vol. 44). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Lyons, P. (2008). The crafting of jobs and individual differences. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 23*, 25–36.

Maitlis, S., & Lawrence, T. (2007). Triggers and enablers of sensegiving in organizations. *Academy of Management Journal, 50*, 57–84.

Markus, H. R. (1977). Self-schemata and processing information about the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 35*, 63–78.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98*(2), 224–253.

Marx, K. (1867). *Capital* (Vol. 1). New York: Penguin Books. (1976).

Marx, K. (1964a). *Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844*. New York: International Publishing.

Marx, K. (1964b). *The communist manifesto*. New York: Penguin Books.

Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being* (2nd ed.). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Maslow, A. H. (1971). *The farther reaches of human nature*. New York: The Viking Press.

Masten, A. S., & Reed, M. J. (2002). *Resilience in development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

May, D. R., Gilson, L., & Harter, L. M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 77*, 11–37.

Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mischel, W. (1977). The interaction of person and situation. In D. Magnusson & N. S. Endler (Eds.), *Personality at the crossroads: Current issues in interactional psychology* (pp. 333–352) Hillsdale, NJ.

Misumi, J. (1990). The Japanese meaning of work and small group activities in Japanese industrial organizations. *International Journal of Psychology, 25*, 819–832.

Moltz, R. (1993). Germany. In R. B. Peterson (Ed.), *Managers and national culture: A global perspective*. Westport, CT: Quorum.

MorBarak, M. E. (1995). The meaning of work for older adults seeking employment: The generativity factor. *International Journal of Aging & Human Development, 41*(4), 325–344.

Morse, N. C., & Weiss, R. S. (1955). The function and meaning of work and the job. *American Sociological Review, 20*(2), 191–198.

MOW. (1987). *International Research Team*. The meaning of working, New York: Academic Press.

Myers, D. G., & Diener, E. (1995). *Who is happy? Psychological Science, 6*(1), 10–19.

Near, J. P., Rice, R. W., & Hunt, R. G. (1980). The relationship between work and nonwork domains: A review of empirical research. *Academy of Management Review, 5*(3), 415.

Nippert-Eng, C. E. (1996). *Home and work: Negotiating boundaries through everyday life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nord, W. R., Brief, A. P., Atieh, J. M., & Doherty, E. M. (1988). Work values and the conduct of organizational behavior. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 10*, 1–42.

Nord, W. R., Brief, A. P., Atieh, J. M., & Doherty, E. M. (1990). Studying meanings of work: The case of work values. In A. P. Brief & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Meanings of occupational work* (pp. 21–64). Lexington: Lexington Books.

Novak, M. (1996). *Business as a calling: Work and the examined life*. New York: The Free Press.

O'Brien, G. E. (1986). *Psychology of work and unemployment*. Chichester, England: Wiley and Sons.

Oldham, G. R. (1976). Job-characteristics and internal motivation: The moderating effect of interpersonal and individual variables. *Human Relations, 29*(6), 559–568.

Olson-Buchanan, J. B., & Boswell, W. R. (2006). Blurring boundaries: Correlates of integration and segmentation between work and nonwork. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 68*(3), 432–445.

Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. New York: Free Press.

Peterson, C., Park, N., Hall, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2009). Zest and work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 30*, 161–172.

Pfeffer, J. (2006). Working alone: What ever happened to communities? In E. E., Lawler, III & J. O'Toole (Eds.), *America at work: Choices and challenges* (pp. 3–21). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pfeffer, J., & DeVoe, S. E. (2009). Economic evaluation: The effect of money and economics on time use attitudes. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 30*(3), 500–508.

Piccolo, R. F., & Colquitt, J. A. (2006). Transformational leadership and job behaviors: The mediating role of core job characteristics. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*(2), 327–340.

Pinder, C. C. (1984). *Work motivation: Theory, issues, and applications*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company.

Podolny, J. M., Khurana, R., & Hill-Popper, M. (2005). Revisiting the meaning of leadership. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 26*, 1–36.

Poloma, M. M., & Pendleton, B. F. (1990). Religious domains and general well-being. *Social Indicators Research, 22*, 255–276.

Pratt, M. G. (2000). The good, the bad, and the ambivalent: Managing identification among Amway distributors. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 45*(3), 456–493.

Pratt, M. G., & Ashforth, B. E. (2003). Fostering meaningfulness in working and at work. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 309–327). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K. W., & Kaufmann, J. B. (2006). Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*(2), 235–262.

Price, C. A. (2000). Women and retirement: Relinquishing professional identity. *Journal of Aging Studies, 14*(1), 81–101.

Ragins, B. R., & Verbos, A. K. (2007). Positive relationships in action: Relational mentoring and mentoring schemas in the workplace. In J. E. Dutton & B. R. Ragins (Eds.), *Exploring positive relationships at work: building a theoretical and research foundation*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Rapaport, R., & Bailyn, L. (1998). *Rethinking life and work*. Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communications.

Roberson, L. (1990). Functions of work meanings in organizations: Work meanings and work motivation. In A. P. Brief & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Meanings of occupational work* (pp. 107–134). Lexington: Lexington Books.

Robinson, B. E., Carroll, J. J., & Flowers, C. (2001). Marital estrangement, positive affect, and locus of control among spouses of workaholics and spouses of nonworkaholics: A national study. *American Journal of Family Therapy, 29*(5), 397–410.

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Rokeach, M. (1960). *The open and closed mind*. New York: Basic Books.

Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York: Free Press.

Ros, M., Schwartz, S. H., & Surkiss, S. (1999). Basic individual values, work values, and the meaning of work. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 48*(1), 49–71.

Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the self*. New York: Basic Books.

Rosso, B. D. (2010). *Do we really get what we give? Exploring the relationship between prosocial behavior and meaningfulness at work*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan.

Rothbard, N. P. (2001). Enriching or depleting? The dynamics of engagement in work and family roles. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 46*, 655–684.

Rozin, P. (2001). Social psychology and science: Some lessons from Solomon Asch. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 5*(1), 2–14.

Rozin, P. (2006). Domain denigration and process preference in academic psychology. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 1*(4), 365–376.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). To be happy or to be self-fulfilled: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. In Fiske, S. (Ed.). *Annual Review of Psychology*. Vol. 52 (pp.141–166). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, Inc.

Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L., & Grolnick, W. S. (1995). Autonomy, relatedness, and the self: Their relation to development and psychopathology. In Cicchetti, D., & Cohen, D. J. Eds. *Developmental Psychopathology: Theory and Methods*. Vol. 1 (pp.618–655). New York: Wiley.

Ryff, C. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*, 1069–1081.

Salancik, G. R, & Pfeffer, J. (1978). A social information processing approach to job attitudes and task design. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 23*, 224–252.

Sandelands, L. E. (2003). *Thinking about social life*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Schwartz, B. (1986). *The battle for human nature: Science, morality, and modern life*. New York: Norton.

Schwartz, B. (1994). *The costs of living: How market freedom erodes the best things in life*. New York: Norton.

Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theory and empirical tests in 20 countries. In Zanna, M. P. (Ed.). *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. Vol. 25 (pp.1–65). New York: Academic Press.

Scott, T. L. (2002). Choices, constraints, and calling: Conservative Protestant women and the meaning of work in the U. S. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 22*, 1–38.

Scott Morton, F. M., & Podolny, J. M. (2002). Love or money? The effects of owner motivation in the California wine industry. *Journal of Industrial Economics, 50*(4), 431–456.

Seligman, M. E. P. (1975). *Helplessness*. San Francisco: Freeman.

Seo, M., Barrett, L. F., & Bartunek, J. M. (2004). The role of affective experience in work motivation. *Academy of Management Review, 29*, 423–439.

Shamir, B. (1991). Meaning, self and motivation in organizations. *Organization Studies, 12*(3), 405–424.

Sheldon, K. M., & Elliott, A. J. (1998). Goal striving, need satisfaction and longitudinal well-being: The self-concordance model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*, 482–497.

Sheldon, K. M, Ryan, R. M., Rawsthorne, L. J., & Ilardi, B. (1997). Trait self and true self: Cross-role variation in the Big-Five personality traits and its relations with psychological authenticity and subjective well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*, 1380–1393.

Sheldon, K. M., Turban, D. B., Brown, K. G., Barrick, M. R., & Judge, T. A. (2003). Applying self-determination theory to organizational research. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management, 22*, 357–393.

Smircich, L., & Morgan, G. (1982). Leadership: The management of meaning. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 18*(3), 257–273.

Snir, R., & Harpaz, I. (2002). Work-leisure relations: Leisure orientation and the meaning of work. *Journal of Leisure Research, 34*(2), 178–203.

Snir, R., & Harpaz, I. (2006). The workaholism phenomenon: A cross-national perspective. *Career Development International, 11*(5), 374–393.

Sonenshein, S. (2006). Crafting social issues at work. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*(6), 1158–1172.

Spence, A. M., & Zeckhauser, R. (1971). Insurance, information, and individual action. *American Economic Review, 61*, 380–387.

Spreitzer, G.M. (1996). Social structural characteristics of psychological empowerment. *Academy of Management Journal, 39*(2), 483–504.

Spreitzer, G. M., Sutcliffe, K. M., Dutton, J. E., Sonenshein, S., & Grant, A. M. (2005). A socially embedded model of thriving at work. *Organization Science, 16*(5), 537–549.

Staw, B. M. (1976). *Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.

Staw, B. M. (1984). Organizational behavior: A review and reformulation of the field's outcome variables. *Annual Review of Psychology, 35*, 627–666.

Steger, M. F., Pickering, N. K., Shin, J. Y., & Dik, B. J. (2010). *Calling in work: Secular or sacred? Journal of Career Assessment, 18*(1), 82–96.

Stinchcombe, A. L. (1991). The conditions of fruitfulness of theorizing about mechanisms in social science. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 21*(3), 367–388.

Sullivan, S. C. (2006). The work-faith connection for low-income mothers: A research note. *Sociology of Religion, 67*(1), 99–108.

Super, D. E., & Šverko, B. (1995). *Life roles, values, and careers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Šverko, B., & Vizek-Vidović, V. (1995). Studies on the meaning of work: Approaches, models, and some of the findings. In D. E. Super & B. Šverko (Eds.), *Life roles, values, and careers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Swann, W. B., Jr., Johnson, R. E., & Bosson, J. (2009). Identity negotiation at work. In Staw, B., & Brief, A. Eds. *Research in organizational behavior*. Vol. 29 (pp.81–109). Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–48). Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1985). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In Worchel, S., & Austin, W. G. Eds. *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Vol. 2 (pp.7–24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Thompson, J. A., & Bunderson, J. A. (2001). Work-nonwork conflict and the phenomenology of time: Beyond the balance metaphor. *Work and Occupations, 28*(1), 17–39.

Thompson, J. A., & Bunderson, J. S. (2003). Violations of principle: Ideological currency in the psychological contract. *Academy of Management Review, 28*, 571–586.

Vaill, P. B. (1991). *Managing as a performing art: New ideas for a world of chaotic change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Vecchio, R. P. (1980). The function and meaning of work and the job: Morse and Weiss (1955) revisited. *Academy of Management Journal, 23*(2), 361–367.

Vohs, K. D., Mead, N., & Goode, M. (2006). The psychological consequences of money. *Science, 314*, 1154–1156.

Voydanoff, P. (1987). *Work and family life*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Walsh, J. P., Weber, K., & Margolis, J. D. (2003). Social issues and management: Our lost cause found. *Journal of Management, 29*(6), 859–881.

Weaver, G. R., & Agle, B. R. (2002). Religiosity as an influence on ethical behavior in organizations: A theoretical model and research agenda. *Academy of Management Review, 27*(1), 77–97.

Weber, M. (1904). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (T. Parsons, Trans.)*. New York, NY: Scribners.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weiss, J. W., Skelley, M. F., Haughey, J. C., & Hall, D. T. (2004). Calling, new careers and spirituality: A reflective perspective for organizational leaders and professionals. In M. L. Pava & P. Primeaux (Eds.), *Spiritual intelligence at work: Meaning, metaphor and morals* (pp. 175–201). Amsterdam: Elsevier, Ltd.

White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review, 66,* 297–333.

Whitely, W., Peiro, J., & Sarchielli, G. (1992). Work socialization of youth: Theoretical framework, research methodology and practical implications. *International Review of Social Psychology, 5,* 9–36.

Whyte, W. H. (1956). *The organization man.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Wiener, Y. (1988). Forms of value systems: A focus on organizational effectiveness and cultural change and maintenance. *Academy of Management Review, 13*(4.), 534–545.

Wrzesniewski, A. (1999). *Jobs, careers, and callings: Work orientation and job transitions.* Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan.

Wrzesniewski, A. (2003). Finding positive meaning in work. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Wrzesniewski, A., Dekas, K., & Rosso, B. (2009). Calling. In S. J. Lopez & A. Beauchamp (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of positive psychology* (pp. 115–118). Blackwell Publishing.

Wrzesniewski, A., & Dutton, J. E. (2001). Crafting a job: Revisioning employees as active crafters of their work. *Academy of Management Review, 26*(2), 179–201.

Wrzesniewski, A., Dutton, J. E., & Debebe, G. (2003). Interpersonal sensemaking and the meaning of work. In Kramer, R. M., & Staw, B. M. Eds. *Research in Organizational Behavior.* Vol. 25 (pp.93–135). **.**

Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C., Rozin, P., & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, careers, and callings: People's relations to their work. *Journal of Research in Personality, 31,* 21–33.

Wuthnow, R. (1994). *Sharing the journey: Support groups and America's new quest for community.* New York: Free Press.

Wuthnow, R. (1995). *Learning to care.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Wuthnow, R. (2004). *Saving America? Faith-based services and the future of civil society* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Young, P. T. (1971). *Motivation and emotion : a survey of the determinants of human and animal activity.* New York: John Wiley.