The Meaning in Work Inventory: Validation of the Italian version and its association with sociodemographic variables

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❧ ABSTRACT. L'articolo presenta l'adattamento e la validazione del *Meaning in Work Inventory* (*ME-Work*), un questionario composto per la valutazione di tre moduli indipendenti riguardanti il senso al lavoro, ovvero; il lavoro come fonte di senso nella vita (modulo 1, n. item = 4), l'esperienza di lavoro come sensato e insensato (modulo 2, n. item = 6) e le fonti di senso al lavoro comprendenti le dimensioni di senso di coerenza, contributo, direzione e appartenenza (modulo 3, n. item = 12). Il contributo ne riporta dunque le caratteristiche psicometriche e l'esito della validazione basato su un campione di lavoratori italiani pari a 624 partecipanti. Oltre al processo di validazione, il contributo presenta l'esame delle differenze individuali su base sociodemografiche in riferimento ai tre moduli. L'articolo si conclude discutendo i risultati e i limiti dello studio oltre a presentare le implicazioni pratiche dello strumento.

❧ SUMMARY. *This paper introduces the Meaning in Work Inventory (ME-Work), a psychometric scale formed by examining meaning in work theories in analogy with the meaning in life research evidence. The ME-Work is a modular questionnaire aimed to assess three independent aspects of meaning in work, i.e., work as a source meaning (module 1), meaningful and meaningless work (module 2), and facets of meaning in work, namely, coherence, significance, purpose and belonging (module 3). An Italian sample of 624 participants completed a survey regarding personal and organizational characteristics in addition to the ME-Work. Both confirmatory analysis and structural equation modelling have been used to respectively assess psychometric properties of the Italian version of the ME-Work and the associations of the three modules. A series of MANOVAs examined socio-demographic differences in ME-Work dimensions. The contribution ends by discussing the results and limitations of the study. Further avenues for research and practice are presented.*

Keywords: *Meaningful work, Meaning in work, Validation*

IINTRODUCTION

Several authors have paid considerable attention to meaningful work which has emerged as a popular, powerful and influential construct within the science and practice of work and organizational studies. In turn, empirical studies dealing with meaningful work have been accumulated and a large amount of knowledge has been prompted by the application of several different approaches. In this respect, meaningful work is intended as a core construct which reflects its importance both at the individual, organizational and societal level (Lysova, Allan, Dik, Duffy & Steger, 2019). On the one side, work occupies a central position in human life, as primary source of meaning (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016), linked to living one's calling (Duffy, England & Dik, 2019a) and sense of individuation, purpose and contribution (Blustein, 2006; Blustein, Kenny, Di Fabio & Guichard, 2019). On the other side, employers and organizations consider the relevance of meaningful work as a source that serves for employee commitment and well-being (Michaelson, Pratt, Grant & Dunn, 2014).

Recent investigations within the psychology of working framework (Blustein, 2006; Blustein, 2013; Duffy, Blustein, Diemer & Autin, 2016) have largely presented meaningful work as a potential consequence of socioeconomic or cultural issue related to work and an indicator of securing decent work conditions (e.g., Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016; Blustein et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2019b). In this case, burgeoning number of authors have proposed meaningful work as a eudemonic psychological state and scientific evidence showed how it relates to multiple positive individual and organizational dimensions (Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling & Tay, 2019), such as meaning in life (Allan, Duffy & Douglass, 2015; Steger & Dik, 2013), psychophysical health (Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012), work volition, career adaptability, social connection, self-determination (Duffy et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2017), work-life enrichment (Allan, Autin & Duffy, 2016a; Lysova et al., 2019), proactive personality, work engagement (Allan et al., 2019), job performance (Allan, Duffy & Collisson, 2016b), organizational citizenship behaviours (Steger et al., 2012), and withdrawal intentions (Duffy et al., 2016). Therefore, an impetus to critically evaluate and develop empirical tools to assess meaningful work constructs arose within many academic fields (e.g., management studies, positive psychology, business ethics), resulting in the need for understanding about the best way to assess this construct

(Bailey et al., 2019a; Bailey, Yeoman, Madden, Thompson & Kerridge, 2019b; Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra & Beersma, 2017; Steger & Dik, 2013).

Bailey et al. (2019b) reviewed the current empirical literature about meaningful work which reveals that there are some principal complications in the contemporary measures of this construct. The presence of nonspecific items or items that conflate meaningful work with other constructs raised doubts among scholars about the measures' criterion validity. Besides, in quantitative approaches, some authors neglected factors that can ensure meaningful work experience, i.e., organizational and societal, calling for comprehensive measures of the working conditions for meaningful work (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). In fact, where authors focused solely on the individual experience, questions about sources and processes behind it remain unanswered. Likewise, where the focus is exclusively on the contextual factors, the individual subjective experience is minimized (Rosso et al., 2010). Additionally, meaningful work is intended as a positive experience that responds to the individual's quests for meaning in their work and life. However, empirical evidence of the extent to which work is experienced as meaningless are unclear and not yet examined (Bailey & Madden, 2019; Groeneveld, Leisink, Tummers & Den Dulk, 2011; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Likewise, the role of individual differences behind the working conditions is still not clear, since the current empirical examinations have rarely addressed how personal and organizational characteristics might affect meaningful work experiences (Hofmeister, 2019).

By contrast, according to Bailey et al. (2019b), the recent research within the humanistic perspective, has largely tried to consider a comprehensive framework covering both theories on meaning in work in managerial studies (i.e., Rosso et al., 2010) and findings from empirical research on meaning in life (Schnell, 2009; Schnell, Höge & Pollet, 2013). By viewing meaning in work in analogy with meaning in life, the latter model suggests a multidimensional measure of meaningful work and sources of meaning, as operationalised by the *Meaning in Work Inventory* (*ME-Work Inventory;* German name, SIBE; Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). ME-Work consists of three main modules through which it is possible to evaluate both working conditions for meaning in work, and the experience of meaningful work: (a) *facets of meaning*, or the perceived working conditions for meaning in work; (b) *meaningful and meaningless work* experiences, measured

independently of the facets; (c) if work is a source of meaning per se, i.e., *work as source of meaning*.

Given the extensive application of meaningful work in organizational science and practice, it is pivotal to have a clear conceptualization of this construct, and reliable and valid instrument to measure it. The present contribution intends to introduce the Italian version of the ME-Work Inventory by evaluating its psychometric proprieties with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and testing the hypothesized structures proposed by Schnell & Hoffmann (2020); the four facets of meaning serves as an indicator of one latent factor (H1), which successively predict the three dimensions of work as source of meaning (H2), meaningful and meaningless work (H3-4). On this basis, the overall structure (H5) of the three modules is in turn tested in order to provide evidence of the modular structure of the ME-Work.

This approach will be tested by analysing the case of Italian workers and observing the relative impact of personal and organizational characteristics on the dimensions of the ME-Work. Since the ME-Work is intended as a useable tool for researchers and practitioners, it becomes useful to understand its associations with personal and organizational characteristics. Results and implications for research are discussed, further avenues for practical use of the ME-Work as modular questionnaire are presented.

Measures of meaning in work

Meaningful work measures can be classified into two main classes, namely, unidimensional and multidimensional scales – according to the authors' pre-operationalizations. Altogether, these scales have been showing some theoretical limitations (Bailey et al., 2019a; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Although their large use in different empirical settings and strong psychometrical properties, they do not answer the current call for insights on (a) the associations between meaning in work and meaning in life (Michaelson et al., 2014; Steger & Dik, 2013; Yeoman, Bailey, Madden & Thompson, 2019), (b) the role of other factors that are not taken into account in empirical investigations, e.g., self-connection (Rosso et al., 2010), social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), sense of belonging (Schnell, Höge & Weber, 2019), and personal and organizational characteristics (Rothmann, Weiss & Redelinghuys, 2019). Additionally, despite the positive impacts of meaningful work, work may

be experienced as meaningless and individuals may suffer the lack of valuable, worthwhile, and dignified work. However, questions about the extent to which work is experienced as meaningless are vague and not properly explored despite the large literature on meaningless work (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, Shantz & Soane, 2017; Groeneveld et al., 2011; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Yeoman et al., 2019).

The unidimensional strand aims at assessing the presence of meaningful work, whatever the sources and attributes of meaning are. In this approach, authors mainly consider the general model of Hackman & Oldham (1976) for a direct measure of the construct concerning its causes and effects. These scales do not distinguish facets and dimensions of meaningful work and use nonspecific items or items that cover other similar constructs (Bailey et al., 2019a; Bailey et al., 2019b; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017). Conversely, within the multidimensional strand, authors of different fields of research have engaged efforts to identify and validate measures able to capture both facets of meaning and dimensions of meaningful work experience. The main problem with multidimensional models is that of finding the right combination of measures to evaluate all the different aspects of meaningful work, in terms of facets of meaning and meaningful work features, and meaningful work appraisal.

For example, the *Work and Meaning Inventory* (*WAMI*) is a survey tool developed on the basis of the three-dimensional model by Steger et al. (2012) and aims at measuring meaningful work experience per se. These authors identified three dimensions: positive meaning, meaning making through work, and greater good motivation. These three dimensions are proposed to function together in the pursuit of meaningful work experiences and perceptions. However, although the WAMI has been considered as one of the sufficiently validated measures of meaningful work dimensions, the composed three-factor structure has proved limited replicability (Harzer & Steger, 2012; Puchalska-Kamińska, Czerw & Roczniewska, 2019). Moreover, the WAMI seems to show a lack in the comprehension of the individual and working conditions for meaningful work (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017).

By contrast, Lips-Wiersma & Wright (2012) developed the *Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale* (*CMWS*). This scale focuses on a four-dimensional model comprising *developing* the inner *self, expressing full potential, unity with others*, and *service to others* which are based on three existential dimensions: *individual-others, doing* and *being*, and *reality*

and *inspiration*. When balanced, these dimensions could lead to the experience of meaningful work. Although the CMWS aligns with the evaluation of features of work and individual contributions to the fit between the individual and work, it lacks an evaluation of the subjective experience of meaningful work (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017).

In the view of a deeper analysis of the meaningful work, the new developed German questionnaire *Meaning in Work Inventory* (*ME-Work*; Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020) captures a broad spectrum of meaning components in the context of work. The ME-Work is an expansion of the already existing *Meaningful Work Scale* (German: *Berufliche Sinnerfüllung*, in Höge & Schnell, 2012; Schnell et al., 2013). In contrast to existing scales, the ME-Work offers both dimensional and direct measures of meaningful work by assessing perceived working conditions for meaningful and meaningless work, as well as the evaluation of the extent to which work is experienced as a source of meaning per se. As noted, it embraces a dual theoretical justification. Firstly, the multidimensional model finds its basis in extensive research on meaning in life in relation to meaning in work. Authors have identified the facets of meaning in work in analogy with the facets of meaning in life and addressed the call for empirical insights on the relation between meaning in work and life satisfaction, life meaning and general health (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). Secondly, these facets are posited in reference to widely accepted and adopted theories of meaning in work in managerial studies (i.e., Rosso et al., 2010), thus stressing the theoretical framework underpinning the questionnaire.

The Meaning in Work Inventory

As noted, the ME-Work aims at assessing (a) the presence of four facets of meaning in work, (b) the subjective experience of meaningfulness and meaninglessness in work, and (c) work as source of meaning per se. This questionnaire has been developed with reference to the largely acknowledged theoretical model of Rosso et al. (2010) and the evidence produced in empirical research on meaning in life (Schnell, 2020).

On the one hand, Rosso et al. (2010), in their integrative review, offered a theoretical conception of what meaning in work is and what makes work meaningful, the *mechanisms* and *pathways*. The authors argued that the strikingly different

things that work can mean for each worker are rooted in four core sources: self, other persons, the work context, and spiritual life. Accordingly, the authors identified pathways by which work is made and maintained meaningful. As for psychological and social mechanisms underlying the sense of value of one's work, they suggested authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, cultural and interpersonal sense-making. Then, Rosso et al. (2010) proposed four central pathways emerging from the encounter of two core dimensions of self-others, and agency-communion. First, the intersection between self and agency reflects the *individuation* path which represents self-efficacy and self-esteem as indicators of a valuable and worthy self. Second, the match between agency and others reflects the pathway named *contribution* which refers to the significance and the perceived impact of workers' actions and to the sense of interconnection or rather doing something in service of something greater than the self-transcendence. Moreover, linking others with communion represents the third pathway, namely *self-connection* or the sense of self created by the coherence between self and work role. The combination of self and communion indicates the last path, namely, *unification* which reflects a sense of belongingness and harmony with other beings and principles.

On the other hand, the literature on meaning in life suggests that the experience of meaning can be further understood by distinguishing several facets. By introducing the *Sources of Meaning and Meaning in Life Questionnaire* (*SoMe*), Schnell (2009, 2014) proposed that the subjective experience of meaningfulness is based on evaluation processes with regards to four criteria: coherence, significance, purpose, and belonging. George and Park (2016) proposed a tripartite view, including comprehension, purpose, and mattering. Both models overlap largely, since mattering and significance as well as purpose and purpose denote similar constructs, and coherence refers to both consistency and comprehensibility (Schnell, 2020). The fourth facet in Schnell's model, belonging, is not part of George and Park's model, but has been identified as a crucial fourth facet in concepts of meaning in work (Bailey et al., 2017; Rosso et al., 2010; Schnell et al., 2013). The experience of meaningful work is thus suggested to result from the perception of one's work as enabling coherence, significance, purpose, and belonging.

More specifically, the facet *coherence* is intended as consistency regarding the individual self-concept and the work role assigned. When both match, there is an

interconnection between one's identity and purpose, and the work-role itself (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). A sense of *significance* matches the pathway of contribution (Rosso et al., 2010). It refers to the perceived impact of one's actions as well as to transcendence. Moreover, the sense of *purpose* denotes a general sense of orientation, or purpose, which, ideally, is manifest in an organization's mission, vision, and ethos (Beadle & Knight, 2012). The fourth facet, a sense of *belonging*, describes a sense of unification, being part of something greater than the self. It is based on a corporate culture that emphasises cohesion and care for one another (Bailey et al., 2017), also known as socio-moral climate (Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2020).

A subjective experience of these four facets contributes to a general sense of work being meaningful. Similarly, when the four facets (or some of them) are perceived as lacking, work is perceived as meaningless (Schnell et al., 2013, 2019). Finally, and beyond the experience of meaningfulness, work can serve as a source of meaning too. The ME-Work also measures this additional dimension. It can be experienced when working conditions not only enable a sense of coherence, significance, purpose, and belonging, but also allow for realising personal potential and values (Schnell, 2020). According to the theoretical model of Rosso et al. (2010), work is a source of meaning when a job corresponds to how individuals view themselves and their orientations to work, regardless to the working condition: Thus, the focus is on the self in reference to a job that provides a sense of self-actualization, self-development, self-connection and social identity (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Martela & Pessi, 2018; Michaelson et al., 2014; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010).

As noted, only a few contributions have considered both facets of meaning and its subjective experience (Bailey et al., 2019b; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017). While some authors included specific measures of meaningful work mapping comprehensive facets, others focused on the degree of experienced meaning in work, and relationships with behavioural and organizational outcomes. The ME-Work, in contrast, is characterized by a modular nature. The three modules, i.e., module 1 – coherence, significance, purpose and belonging – named facets of meaning, module 2 – experience of meaningful and meaningless work –, and module 3 – work as source of meaning – allow to capture both conditions of meaning and subjective experiences. Accordingly, the modular nature has been tested via CFA to empirically confirm the theoretical differentiation which has

shown good fit indices, $\chi^2_{(223)} = 452.58$, $p<.001$ CFI = .950, RMSEA = .061, SRMR = .050. Moreover, by a psychometrical point of view, Schnell and Hoffmann (2020) study on ME-Work has largely presented evidence of its use by examining both linked construct and incremental validity. On the one hand, convergent validity examinations reported significant correlations at $p<.01$, between ME-Work scales and related measures, precisely; life meaningfulness ($r = .53$), job satisfaction ($r = .44$), socio-moral climate scales ($r = .32$), WAMI ($r = .79$) and professional efficacy ($r = .44$). Likewise, during discriminant validity examinations, substantial negative correlations at $p<.01$ were found between ME-Work scales and crisis of meaning ($r = -.38$), general mental distress ($r = -.37$), emotional exhaustion ($-.31$) and cynicism ($-.53$). On the other hand, Schnell and Hoffmann (2020) examined the incremental validity by analysing the predictive power of ME-Work of general mental distress and professional efficacy in addition to the work-related characteristics. They found that ME-Work modules substantially further explained the variance of the outcome variables. Besides, the predictive power of the ME-Work was compared with the WAMI. Here, the authors found that the ME-Work scales of meaningful work, work as a source of meaning, significance purpose and belonging dimensions highly overlapped with WAMI total score. According to Schnell and Hoffmann, this is mostly due to the fact that the WAMI comprehends similar dimensions to ME-Work's meaningful work, work as source of meaning and significance although they are not easily distinguishable in structural analysis while the ME-Work shows a higher degree of differentiation.

The present contribution

The present contribution reports the Italian adapted version of the ME-Work Inventory, showing its psychometric properties on a large sample of $N = 624$ participants of different jobs. The ME-Work consists of 22 items and two parallel versions are available; one for employees (version A) and one for freelancers (version B). In version B, the total number of items is reduced to $N = 16$, as for people who are self-employed, they may have a different experience of *belonging* and *purpose* which cannot be applied here. As first step, the factor structure and reliability of the ME-Work are determined. The second part of the study provides evidence of the theoretical framework scale by testing the factorial model

of the ME-Work. According to the theoretical framework (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020), the three modules are connected as follows: facets of meaning in work serve as indicators of a latent construct (H1) which predicts the dimension of work as source of meaning (H2), meaningful work (H3), and meaningless work (H4). After testing each model individually, the all-comprehensive model is tested (H5).

As noted above, Schnell & Hoffmann's study (2020) provided evidence of the construct and incremental validity of the ME-Work Inventory. However, although the main interest in meaningful work is in how it influences individuals' work behaviour, and proximal and distal outcomes (Allan et al., 2019), a few studies have considered other potential aspects related such as individual and organizational characteristics that contribute to meaningful work and its components (Duffy et al., 2016; Lysova et al., 2019; Tommasi, Ceschi & Sartori, 2020). As Bailey et al. (2019b) argued, there is a relative paucity of research on the relationship between meaningful work and sociodemographic variables such as personal and organizational characteristics. These refer to demographic differences like gender, age, and religious orientation, and to work and organizational differences, such as work orientation (job, career and calling), tenure, and professional role (Yeoman et al., 2019). Therefore, evidence of appropriate psychometric properties allows to test associations between ME-Work and personal and organizational characteristics. In fact, the ME-Work approach was tested by analysing the Italian case with the examination of how the ME-Work dimensions and scales resemble or differ based on personal and organizational characteristics. Then, the preliminary results of both exploratory and inferential studies are discussed. These provide initial insights on the applications of the ME-Work Inventory offering significant contributions for theoretical reflections, research-building, and practical implications.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Participants are 624 Italian workers (62.3% females, average age 39.84, SD = 12.44, 19-71 years, average of years of work 13.75, SD = 12.83, 0-48). They were invited via emails to voluntary fill in the online questionnaire. In the email text, they were informed about the study and asked to contribute.

A link to access the online survey was reported allowing participation at a time convenient to them. After reading the description of the study, and privacy rules, they were asked to sign the informed consent in order to use the data for the purpose of the study. Completion of the questionnaire took about five minutes. Lastly, participants reported whether they were interested in completing the questionnaire a second time after four weeks. Altogether, 11.22% (N = 70) filled in the questionnaire a second time. All data were anonymized right after collection and a unique numerical ID was assigned to each completed questionnaire.

The study has been evaluated and approved by the ethical committee of the Department of Human Sciences of Verona University (n. 201930) in accordance to the declaration of Helsinki.

Instruments

Personal and organizational characteristics.

In addition to common demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, education, and nationality), participants were asked to report also specific socio-demographic characteristics. These included religion (1 = atheist, 2 = agnostic, 3 = believer, and 4 = religion indifferent; cf. Steger, 2019), generational cohorts (born 1946-1964 = baby boomers, born 1965-1981 = generation X, and born 1982-2002 = generation Y; cf. Lips-Wiersma et al., 2019; Twenge, 2010; Weeks & Schaffert, 2019) psycho-physical health (1 = bad health to 5 = excellent; cf. Allan et al., 2019).

For organizational characteristics, after indicating their contract, weekly working hours, and years of work, they reported their perceived remuneration (1 = adequate, 2 = inadequate) and information about their specific job (i.e., type of job, job activities and job sector). Finally, respondents were asked to report their work orientation. By using the scale by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidle & Tipton (1986), three descriptions of work orientation were presented, i.e., job, career and calling. This classification was included according to the large discussed role played by individual work orientation for meaningful work experiences (Steger et al., 2012). Participants indicated on a 4-point scale the extent to which each orientation represented them (1 = not at all like me, 4 = very much). The scores were obtained with the method proposed by Wrzesniewski et al. (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997). Following these guidelines, after

deleting the data of participants who misunderstood the instructions and rated only one paragraph, the presence of the three groups was assessed statistically by the *k*-means cluster analysis, i.e., job, career, and calling.

Meaning in Work Inventory.

The ME-Work for employees consists of 22 items to measure seven scales altogether. Thirteen items operationalize the four facets identified in the theoretical model previously proposed: *coherence* (e.g., "My job corresponds to my interests"), *significance* (e.g., "My work makes the world a little bit better"), *purpose* (e.g., "My employer cares about the welfare of society"), and *belonging* (e.g., "We are a great team at work"). The remaining ten items make up the scales to measure *meaningful work* (3-items, e.g., "My work seems meaningful to me"), *meaningless work* (3-items, e.g., "My professional activities seem meaningless to me"), and *work as source of meaning* (4-items, e.g., "My work activity gives meaning to my life"). As noted above, the original scale involves a unique version for freelancers that includes only two facets of meaning, i.e., coherence and significance (16 items).

Responses are given on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). However, in the Italian data collection responses were given on 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). In contrast to the original instructions, and in line with another early investigation on meaning in work in Italy (Di Fabio et al., 2016), this decision was made in order to allow participants to have a neutral option. In fact, a midpoint can indicate indifference, ambivalence and many other positions (Yorke, 2001). During a preliminary assessment it is important to establish whether participant have a formal way to indicate when an item cannot be applied to them via odd-points Likert scale. By contrast, adding an even-points Likert scale could have produced a biased opinion due to a general acquiescence bias for the willingness to be on the positive side rather than accurate (Brancato et al., 2006).

According to the modular nature of the ME-Work, the first module assesses the four facets of meaningful work; module two assesses the degree of experienced meaningful and meaningless work. Work as source of meaning constitutes the third module. These three modules cover different facets of meaning in work and can be used independently. Module 1 and module 2 can be combined to assess the experience of work as meaningful and meaningless. Work as source of meaning, module 3, assesses an additional aspect, i.e. the degree to which work contributes to a person's meaning in life.

Since the ME-Work has originally been developed in German, it has been translated by back-translation into Italian for the current ME-Work validation study.

Data analysis

The validation of the scale involved both assessment of consistency and confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). The factorial structures have been evaluated based on χ^2 and fit indices, i.e. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Parsimony unbiased Goodness-of-fit Index (PGFI), Parsimony Normed-fit Index (PNFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (Hu & Bentler, 1998). For a structural evaluation of the ME-Work inventory, a structural equation model (SEM) was used to test the degree to which the four facets of meaning relate to the three scales of work as source of meaning, meaningful work and meaningless work, namely, the overall theoretical model. As a first step the associations between facets of meaning (H1) and, work as source of meaning (H2), meaningful work (H3), and meaningless work (H4) were tested. Then, four models were involved during the model testing procedure of the theoretical model underpinning the ME-Work (H5). Model 1 included the paths from facets of meaning in work to work as source of meaning and meaningful work. Model 2 tested the paths from facets of meaning in work to work as source of meaning and meaningless work. Model 3 comprised all the paths included in models 1 and 2. This model tested whether facets of meaning in work positively predicted work as source of meaning and meaningful work, but negatively meaningless work. Model 4 included meaningful work as a mediator between facets and work as source of meaning as a possible explanation of the relation between working conditions for meaningful appraisals and work as source of meaning in life. Moreover, a χ^2 difference test and established fit indices, including RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), were used to evaluate and compare the different models.). 2000 bootstrap resamples have been used to obtain *p*-values and confidence intervals for indirect effects.

Finally, the associations between dimensions and personal and organizational characteristics have been tested with multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA). The factor means for the seven dimensions have been considered in separate MANOVA for each characteristic, controlling for the effects of the other characteristics.

Analyses have been conducted using SPSS (version 22) and the additional module for analysis of moment structure (AMOS).

RESULTS

ME-Work structural models and consistency

As a preliminary step, descriptive statistics of the ME-Work Inventory were calculated. The skewness (range: −1.24-1.22) and kurtosis (range: −.978-3.146) values for each item were tested to not exceed +/−2, thus supporting normality assumptions (Trochim & Donnelly, 2010).

As a second step, confirmatory factor analyses have been carried out to test the theoretical models. Firstly, the module of the hypothesized (H1) second-order structure of the four facets of meaning was tested with three comparative models (see Table 1); a one-factor model (A.1), a four-factors model treating all the facets of meaning in work as separate factors

(A.2), and one model with a second order factor and four first-order factors (A.3). During the CFA, by the examination of item loadings, no items were discarded except one of the items in the purpose dimension, i.e., "At my workplace, profit comes before humanity" showed that be loaded too weakly on the factor purpose as in the others. After discarding this item, the latter CFA showed acceptable fit indices. Then, the three models were tested. Model A.1 did not show acceptable fit indexes, while fit indices of both model A.2 and A.3 were acceptable. According to the range of indices, model A.2 was considered as the final model for facets of meaning.

Regarding the scales of meaningful and meaningless work, a 2-factor model has been tested (see Table 1, model B.1). The model was acceptable with a negative covariance between the scales (β = −.59). Likewise, the 1-factor model for the scale of work of source meaning showed good fit (model C.1 in Table 1). Then, internal consistency of each dimension was calculated with the Cronbach's alpha test showing a good level of reliability; work as source of meaning α = .86; meaningful work α = .88; meaningless work α = .89; coherence α = .79; significance α = .86; purpose α = .77;

Table 1 – Model testing of ME-Work dimensions and scales

Model	χ^2	*df*	CFI	PGFI	PNFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Facets of meaning							
A.1	1652.26	65	.505	–	.37	.20	.14
A.2	162.70	48	.963	.59	.70	.06	.047
A.3	219.16	61	.951	.61	.71	.07	.059
Meaningful and meaningless work							
B.1	55.26	19	.989	.38	.53	.06	.02
Work as source of meaning							
C.1	22.104	2	.983	.20	.19	.13	.03

Note. Model A.1, 1-factor solution, model A.2, 4-factor solution, model A.3, second-order factor solution.
Legenda. df = degree of freedom; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; PGFI = Parsimony unbiased Goodness-of-fit Index; PNFI = Parsimony Normed-fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

belonging α = .78. Besides, scales and dimensions showed a high short-term stability (4-weeks test-retest stability coefficients average .55 for the scales, .58 for dimensions).

Associations between facets of meaning and work as source of meaning

With the purpose of testing the associations between the four facets of meaning and work as source of meaning (H2), the initial phase of the analysis evaluated the covariance of the latent factors. Given the affirmative evidence of the structures, the analysis of a unique model revealed that each facet of meaning was positively related with work as source of meaning (see Table 2) which led to test the predictive model of the dimension of work as source of meaning. According to the model, taken together into a single second-order factor, the four dimensions positively predicted work as source of

meaning, ($\chi^2_{(99)}$ = 328.511; CFI = .953, RMSEA = .061, TLI = .943, SRMR = .059, β = .97).

Associations between facets of meaning and meaningful and meaningless work

Following the predicted model, the latter's associations (H3-4) were tested. Firstly, each path was considered separately in order to test if facets of meaning positively predicted meaningful work (path 1), negatively predicted meaningless work (path 2). Following the previous analysis, after testing the covariance between meaningful work and facets of meaning (see Table 2), the path from the second order factor of the four facets also predicted meaningful work; $\chi^2_{(85)}$ = 276.136; CFI = .957, RMSEA = .060, TLI = .943, SRMR = .057, β = .79. Likewise, meaningless work showed to have a strong negative covariance with the four facets (see Table 2),

Table 2 – Mean of item factor loadings of ME-Work dimensions, reliabilities and latent factor covariances

Personal variables	Work as source of meaning	Meaningful work	Meaningless work	Coherence	Significance	Purpose	Belonging
Factor loadings							
N. items	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
M (*SD*)	.78(.10)	.80(.03)	.81(.06)	.78(.10)	.74(.22)	.71(.16)	.70(.09)
Latent factor covariance							
2. Meaningful work	.65***						
3. Meaningless work	−.54***	−.60***					
4. Coherence	.82***	.63***	−.55***				
5. Significance	.63***	.53***	−.37***	.52***			
6. Purpose	.48***	.38***	−.36***	.36***	.42***		
7. Belonging	.35***	.31***	−.34***	.34***	.21***	.35***	

*Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.*

as shown by a significant predictive path model from facets to meaningless work: $\chi^2_{(85)}$ = 254.244; CFI = .962, RMSEA = .057, TLI = .953, SRMR = .056, β = −.67.

Model testing

At the third stage, the degree to which the facets of meaning in work predicted the overall experiences of meaningful work and meaningless work as well as the degree of work as source of meaning (H5, see Figure 1) were assessed. During the model testing, covariates, i.e., gender and age were considered but no significant effects have been found. Thus, covariates were not included during the final model testing.

Firstly, a model with meaningful work and work as source of meaning (1) was tested separately from the model with meaningless work and work as source of meaning (2). Both models were acceptable; model 1: $\chi^2_{(146)}$ = 455.255; CFI = .951, RMSEA = .058, TLI = .943, SRMR = .056, $β_{work\ as\ source\ of\ meaning}$ = .94, $β_{meaningful\ work}$ = .72; model 2: $\chi^2_{(146)}$ = 433.66; CFI = .954, RMSEA = .056, TLI = .946, SRMR = .059, $β_{work\ as\ source\ of\ meaning}$ = .94, $β_{meaningless\ work}$ = −.60. In order to test the hypothesis of possible mediation, meaningful work was included as a mediator in model 1. Coefficients suggested multicollinearity between the second order factor of the facets of meaning and work as source of meaning (β = 1.19), as also indicated by an ensuing negative association between meaningful work and work as source of meaning (β = −.27). Therefore, and following the theoretical model (see Figure 1), model 1 and 2 were combined to test the

Figure 1 – Final path model with latent factors with the second order factor of the four sources predicting work as source of meaning, meaningful work and meaningless work
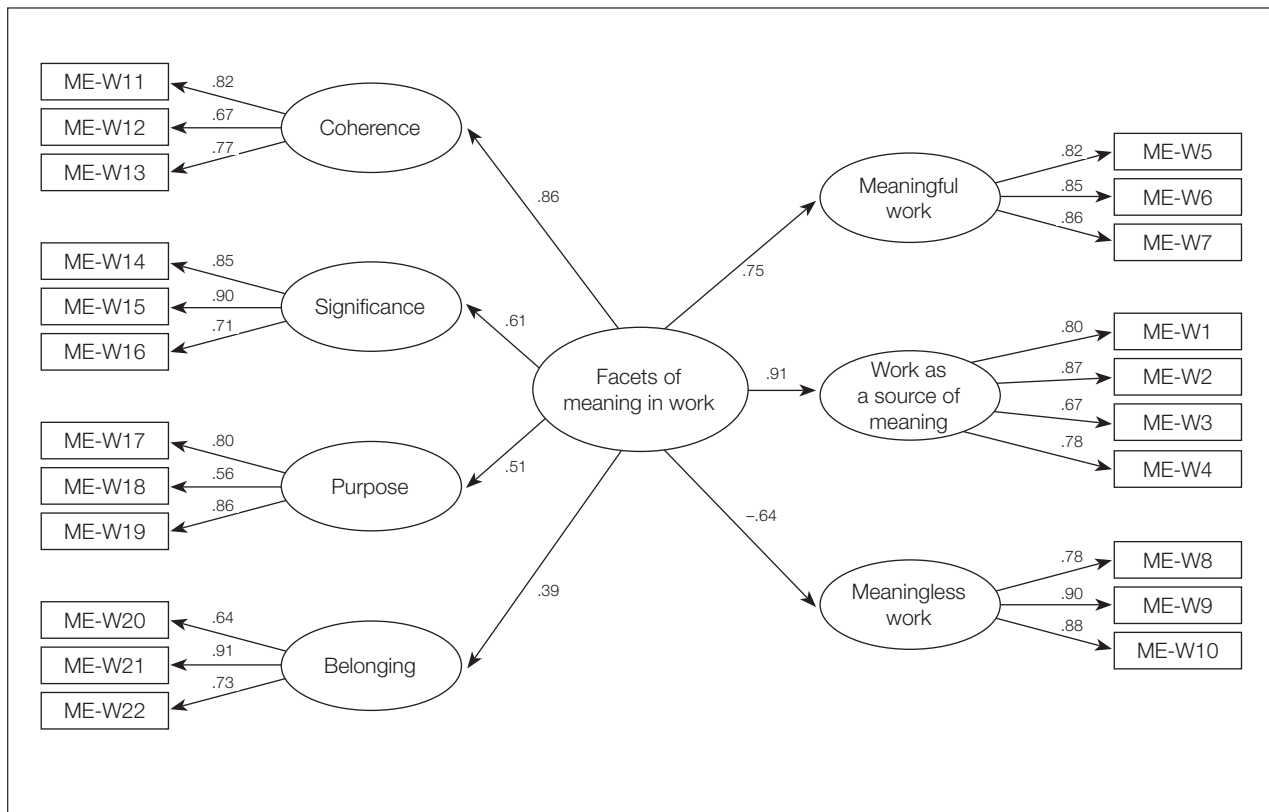
Note. $\chi^2_{(202)}$ = 591.38; CFI = .950, RMSEA = .056, TLI = .942, SRMR = .056.

modular character of the ME-Work Inventory that resulted to be significant with acceptable fit indices.

Associations of ME-Work Inventory with personal and organizational characteristics

Table 3 reports the 6 panels of the associations between mean scores of the ME-Work and the subgroups of gender, generational cohorts, marital status, religion, and education. At the top panels, this table shows that for gender and generational cohorts there were not significant differences. For marital status, those who reported to be divorced or widowed, showed respectively lower and higher levels for work as source of meaning, meaningful work, meaningless work, coherence, purpose and significance, while partnered participants had the highest score in the dimension of belonging. For religious orientation, the group of believers yielded the highest levels on each dimension and scale, except for meaningless work. Agnostics reported the highest score in meaningless work, by contrast, and significantly lower levels in the other mean scores. The fifth panel reports the significant differences for education. Those who reported high school diploma degree or less, significantly differed from other participants concerning their levels of work as source of meaning and coherence. By contrast, despite the higher level for work as source of meaning, participants with a PhD showed the highest level of meaningless work experience, and the lowest level of meaningful work, significance, purpose, and belonging. All in all, participants with a master's degree reported to have the highest levels in the ME-Work mean scores.

Moreover, associations between ME-Work and organizational characteristics were considered (see Table 4). The top panel reports the significant differences for collar in which pink-collars showed significant higher levels for each dimension and scale, except for meaningless work that was significantly lower, and belonging, where the highest level was reported by blue collars. Conversely, blue collars had lower levels for work as source of meaning, meaningful work, and coherence. Regarding job contract, only one significant difference was established: meaningless work was higher for short-term contract employees. Besides, regarding differences in perceived remuneration, participants who perceived their remuneration as high showed significant lower levels

of work as source of meaning and meaningful work, and higher levels of meaningless work. Regarding the facets of meaning, they showed significant lower levels for purpose and belonging in comparison with respondents with low perceived remuneration. The fourth panel reports differences pertaining to work orientations (i.e., job, career, calling). Respondents who saw their work as a calling had significantly higher levels in all scales apart from meaningless work, which was significantly lower. Participants who reported a job orientation, conversely, had the highest levels of meaningless work and significantly lower levels in all other ME-Work dimensions.

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed at providing and presenting support for the use of the Italian version of the *Meaning in Work Inventory*. Based on an extensive theoretical background, the ME-Work is a modular questionnaire relevant both for research and practice, consisting of three different modules: facets of meaning (1), meaningful and meaningless work (2), and work as source of meaning (3). Module 1 considers four different facets of meaning; coherence, significance, purpose and belonging. When supported by work and organizational context, these facets are assumed to contribute to the experience of meaningful work; their non-fulfilment is assumed to create a sense of work being meaningless. Module 2 measures meaningful work and meaningless work as the subjective perception of both qualities. In line with the underlying assumptions, modules 1 and 2 were highly correlated. Regardless of facets and perception of meaning, module 3 measures the experience of work as a source of meaning per se. It operationalizes the personal experience of work providing a sense of self-actualization, self-development, and social identity.

Results of the hypotheses testing via the CFA offered extensive evidence of the multidimensional structure of the four facets of meaning in work module. The model with a second order factor and treating all the facets of meaning in work as four first-order factors was supported by testing the first hypothesis. Indeed, this model describes a module that measures facets of meaning in work as defined by coherence, significance, purpose and belonging. At the same time, these four facets of meaning in work showed to have higher correlations. Moreover, assumed factor structures of

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Table 3 – Mean of the seven dimensions of the ME-Work Inventory in subgroups of gender, generational cohorts, marital status, religion and education

Personal variables	Work as source of meaning	Meaningful work	Meaningless work	Coherence	Significance	Purpose	Belonging	Wilks λ
Gender (F)	.03	.53	.54	1.09	.38	.42	.06	
Female ($n = 389$)	3.43	3.97	2.06	3.43	3.51	3.27	3.85	L = 995 F = .401
Male ($n = 235$)	3.42	3.93	2.11	3.35	3.47	3.23	3.87	
Generational cohorts (F)	1.14	.82	2.13	.82	.81	.82	.17	
1946-1964 ($n = 73$)	3.49	3.99	2.16	3.45	3.50	3.29	3.87	L = .964 F = 1.590
1965-1981 ($n = 230$)	3.38	3.93	2.01	3.35	3.47	3.21	3.84	
1982-2002 ($n = 304$)	3.38	3.90	1.99	3.38	3.62	3.33	3.83	
Marital status (F)	2.85**	1.88**	1.39**	3.69**	1.59**	1.96**	1.85**	
Single ($n = 295$)	3.42	3.93	2.15	3.34	3.45	3.21	3.85	
Partnered ($n = 261$)	3.49	4.00	2.03	3.50	3.55	3.32	3.91_a	L = .943 F = 1.73
Divorced ($n = 50$)	3.10_b	3.79_b	1.91_b	3.10_b	3.35_b	3.07_b	3.66_b	
Widower ($n = 18$)	3.60_a	4.13_a	2.17_a	3.63_a	3.80_a	3.50_a	3.74	
Religion (F)	.77	1.292*	3.070*	1.238	4.427**	.482	4.322***	
Atheist ($n = 137$)	3.40	3.96	2.12	3.40	3.42	3.21	3.83	L = .961 F = 1.501
Agnostic ($n = 77$)	3.35	3.79_b	2.30_a	3.26	3.32_b	3.20	3.65_b	
Believer ($n = 312$)	3.48	4.00_a	2.01_b	3.43	3.60_a	3.28	3.91_a	
Education (F)	4.816***	1.341	5.065***	5.026***	3.146**	2.079	5.429***	
Secondary school ($n = 64$)	3.27_b	3.95	2.09	3.29_c	3.61	3.29	3.90	
High school ($n = 284$)	3.28_c	3.91	2.05_c	3.23_b	3.32_b	3.23	3.89	L = .824 F = 3.432
Bachelor ($n = 74$)	3.57	4.09_a	2.07	3.57	3.73	3.21	3.86	
Master ($n = 86$)	3.76_a	4.05	1.91	3.66_a	3.74_a	3.45	3.94	
PhD ($n = 69$)	3.53	3.83_b	2.47_a	3.60	3.54	3.10	3.48_b	
Other ($n = 40$)	3.58	4.08	1.94_b	3.49	3.55	3.24	4.03_a	

Note. Total amount of participants N = 624. Each cell reports the mean of the subgroup per each of the ME-Work inventory dimension. Mean with subscripts indicate a significant difference that is labelled in alphabetic order to indicate the highest score.
*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.

Table 4 – Mean of the seven dimensions of the ME-Work Inventory in subgroups of collar, contract, perceived remuneration, and work orientation

Personal variables	Work as source of meaning	Meaningful work	Meaningless work	Coherence	Significance	Purpose	Belonging	Wilks λ
Collar (F)	11.103***	7.387***	4.462**	12.134***	26.847***	1.35	2.17	
White (n = 246)	3.42$_a$	3.93	2.19	3.49	3.33$_b$	3.21	3.78	
Blue (n = 245)	3.28$_b$	3.87	2.07	3.19$_b$	3.40	3.25	3.92	L = .856 F = 7.122
Pink (n = 133)	3.72	4.14$_a$	1.89$_a$	3.60$_a$	3.97$_a$	3.36	3.87	
Contract (F)	2.82	1.82	4.889*	1.20	.00	1.78	3.30	
Long term (n =453)	3.39	3.97	2.03	3.37	3.49	3.23	3.89	L = .958 F = 3.903
Short term (n = 171)	3.52	3.89	2.21$_a$	3.46	3.50	3.33	3.77	
Perceived remuneration (F)	12.340***	1.926*	17.421***	3.403	.855	44.420***	8.727**	
Low (n = 256)	3.55$_a$	4.02$_a$	1.89	3.48	3.55	3.50$_a$	3.96$_a$	L = .910 F = 7.998
High (n = 319)	3.29	3.90	2.21$_a$	3.34	3.48	3.03	3.78	
Work orientation (F)	37.889***	10.624***	22.458***	25.204***	8.798***	7.420***	5.933**	
Calling (n = 112)	3.94$_a$	4.27$_a$	1.54$_b$	3.93$_a$	3.88$_a$	3.49$_a$	4.02$_a$	
Career (n = 226)	3.40	3.87	2.05	3.27$_b$	3.50	3.20	3.86	L = .651 F = 7.68
Job (n = 71)	2.65$_b$	3.61$_b$	2.74$_a$	2.03$_c$	3.06$_b$	2.90$_b$	3.53$_b$	

Note. Total amount of participants N = 624. Each cell reports the mean of the subgroup per each of the ME-Work inventory dimension. Mean with subscripts indicate a significant difference that is labelled in alphabetic order to indicate the highest score.
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.*

the scales were supported. Then, affirmative answers of the CFA allowed to test the hypothesized associations (H2, H3-4, H5) between the ME-Work modules. The overall model of the ME-Work inventory (see Figure 1) was tested according to the fifth hypothesis, and after having considered each predictive model separately, i.e., facets of meaning to work as source of meaning (H2), meaningful work (H3) and meaningless work (H4). The results were consistent with the literature and the original German validation (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). Firstly, the subjective appraisals of work as meaningful or meaningless were highly correlated with the perception of certain work and organizational conditions, namely, coherence, significance, purpose and belonging. The regression path from the second order factor of facets of meaning positively predicted the dimension of meaningful work, supporting the conceptualization of work as meaningful when it provides a sense of individuation, contribution, purpose and belongingness (Rosso et al., 2010). Likewise, meaningless work was negatively predicted by the four facets. This indicates that workers report their work to be meaningless when they perceive a lack of coherence, significance, purpose, or belonging. Work then turns into a frustratingly empty and pointless occupation (Schnell et al., 2019).

Moreover, the affirmative results of the overall model have shown how the four facets of meaning in work play an important role in the experience of work as source of meaning. When a person acknowledged their job as sustaining their needs for personal growth and self-actualization, the four facets of meaning were also marked. This finding suggested an alternative path to work as source of meaning with a potential mediation by meaningful work. Therefore, a mediation was tested but discarded due to issues of multicollinearity.

Associations between ME-Work and personal and organizational characteristics

A series of MANOVA were carried out with the aim to explicitly address individual differences with regard to gender and other demographic variables. Gender and generational differences did not show significant differences, which is consistent with the current literature on meaning in work. For example, within the literature on generational-cohorts and meaningful work, Weeks & Schaffert (2019) have made

a significant effort to comprehend the different prioritization of the facets of meaning in work among generational cohorts. Their results indicated that the only significant differences were found within the cohorts and not between cohorts. Thus, the present results confirm previous research by indicating that meaning in work represents something that is common to workers of all ages and genders (Lips-Wiersma, Wright & Dik, 2016; Weeks & Schaffert, 2019). Notwithstanding this, several other personal characteristics have shown substantial associations with meaning in work scores. We established significant differences for marital status and religious orientation, which demonstrated the linkage between work and non-work domains (Tommasi et al., 2020). To begin with, partnered participants reported higher levels of belonging at work. Likewise, widowed or divorced participants reported lower levels in facets of meaning and meaningful work and higher levels in meaningless work (Oelberger, 2019). These findings tie in with studies that established higher degrees of meaning in life among married individuals, and higher crises of meaning among people living without a partner (Schnell, 2014, 2020). In religious orientation, agnostics reported lower levels in each dimension except for the meaningless work scale. Several studies have shown a closeness between meaning in work and religion, where work is discussed as something more than a mere survival wish for people with a religious orientation (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Martela & Pessi, 2018; Ward & King, 2017). In line with this, the agnostic orientation might be considered as a tendency of being highly sceptical or perhaps even indifferent (Schnell & Keenan, 2011) which might affect the appraisal of meaning in work.

When comparing levels of education, participants with lower education levels reported lower scores of work as source of meaning and coherence. These results seem to confirm that lower educated individuals tend to have an instrumental orientation to work (Mottaz, 1981). Respondents with higher education reported lower levels of meaningful work and higher levels of meaningless work. This is in contrast with previous studies on meaningful work. For most part of the literature, higher education is associated with high economic success which is assumed to positively influence the experience of work as meaningful (Rothmann et al., 2019).

Analyses of organizational characteristics established differences between white, blue- and pink-collar workers confirming previous literature (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016).

In the current sample, pink-collars were those who reported higher levels in all scales. When compared with the pink-collars, the blue-collars were those with lower levels in work as source of meaning, meaningful work and coherence. Additionally, within the contract subgroups there were no significant difference despite for meaningless work, which was higher in short-term workers. Not surprisingly, this result suggests that adverse and uncertain working conditions due to temporal limitations of work might curb positive experiences of work. Additionally, significant differences have been found for remuneration. Those who perceived their work as less remunerated reported high levels of significance for each of the variables included in the ME-Work. This seems to reverberate the claim of several research studies on low-paid jobs where individuals may find a meaning beyond financial reward (Hu & Hirsh, 2017; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Further analyses on work orientation also confirmed the previous literature (Steger et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In fact, people who viewed their work as a calling reported the highest levels in each ME-Work scale, while job orientation had the highest level in meaningless work and the lowest level in the other scales.

Limitations and implications for research and practice

The current study has provided support for a use of the Italian version (see Appendix) of the ME-Work Inventory. However, some limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the original validation of study of the ME-Work by Schnell & Hoffman (2020) employed several measures for construct validation and only the work orientation scale was included as an additional measure in the present study. This is mostly due to the interest in the associations between meaningful work dimensions and personal and organizational variables. Moreover, because of time fatigue concerns in the primary evaluation of the meaning in work construct in the Italian context, a shorter questionnaire has been preferred to reduce the risk of fake responses. Moreover, in work and organizational studies, it is interesting to note the associations with specific behavioural and organizational outcomes. For further studies, it would be interesting to replicate the study by the application of a longitudinal design with the intention to assess ME-Work relations and its associations with these outcomes. Besides, the current

classification of work orientations is turning under a renovate contestation by the scientific community. A support for two more classes of working orientation is advanced, namely: social embeddedness (belongingness), and busyness (filling idle time with activities) (Willner, Lipshits-Braziler & Gati, 2020). This is to say that singular patterns in the data collected were noted. In fact, respondents in some cases categorized themselves as both career and calling orientated, thus suggesting a fourth class of orientation. In other cases, respondents showed to be surprisingly indifferent by classifying themselves as little interested in job, career and calling. Therefore, further investigation might include a different categorization for work orientation for comparison with ME-Work.

Secondly, the current study initially aimed at validating the parallel ME-Work version for freelancers, however, only $N = 68$ freelancers participated in the study which is in contrast with the convention for sample size requirements for CFA (Wolf, Harrington, Clark & Miller, 2013). Therefore, the collected freelancers' sample was not included in the analysis. Further evaluation of the ME-Work could address this issue in order to assess the factorial structure and the personal and organizational variables that might have a relevance for this kind of workers. Finally, the current study has used a 5-point Likert scale to avoid uncertainty in respondents. In the future it is suggested to consider the use of a 6-point Likert scale as recommended by the scale authors (Schnell et al., 2013; Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020).

As research on meaningful work progresses in the light of many disruptive challenges within the labour market, according to the psychology of working theory (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016; Duffy et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2019b) numerous authors are trying to heighten attention on practices to help individuals yearn meaning and connection in their work. This is the case for the long burgeoning amount of studies interested in constructing decent work and decent lives (Blustein et al., 2019). Therefore, in view of the rapidly work changes, scholars' efforts are needed to foster new developments for the pursuit of meaningful work (Lysova et al., 2019) by the employment of valid and useful assessment tools. It is in this context that the ME-Work has been proposed stressing the importance on meaningful work and deriving such a measure from findings on meaning in life (Schnell, 2020) and meaning in work (Rosso et al., 2010; Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). Therefore, beside the limitations and implications for further studies, a variety of possible

applications of the ME-Work in research and practice can be presented (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). When compared with other measures, the ME-Work stands out as offering both economical as well as differentiated modules, by capturing four dimensions facets of meaning as they are discussed in several theoretical contributions. Its applications in organizational and managerial settings can lead to richer interpretations and descriptions about how and to what extent workers of an organization perceive a meaning in their job. Firstly, insights from individual scores of coherence, significance, purpose and belonging can lead to practical implications as the creation of conditions for meaningful work provision. Although meaning cannot be supplied and managed by top-down practice, and normative conditions could not reflect a subjective experience of meaning in work (Bailey et al., 2019a; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Michaelson et al., 2014), it can be supposed that meeting certain objective characteristics may lead to higher levels of meaningful work. For instance, assessment of the facets of meaning could inform career guidance in the work setting. Person-job fit, and contextual factors conditions could thus be promoted, as well as the strengthening of individual professional profiles, competences, and empowerment (Duffy et al., 2019; Schnell et al., 2013). Moreover, significance or the sense of contribution may be fostered by sustaining task varieties and the overall significance of working activities (Allan et al., 2016b), promoting their effects of prosocial impact (Martela & Riekki, 2018). Likewise, belonging represents a significant concern in organizational setting. As for purpose, managerial and organizational policies might promote a socio-moral climate, prosocial activities and practices and facilitate relatedness, trust and a sense of community (Weber et al., 2020). Finally, practitioners might use the ME-Work to assess the distribution of the four facets and their absolute values in the organizational context and professional job sectors. On this basis, they could be able to devise training interventions by the adoption or adaptation of specific approaches following the evidence of facets' distribution and prevalence.

Due to its modular nature, the ME-Work Inventory is likely to be a useful tool for personnel assessment and selection, human resources managerial practice and project training development. For instance, the work as source of meaning scale might help in career assessment and in personnel selection to have a rich comprehension of the subjective pursuit of meaning and the personal meaning attributed to one's work of workers. Likewise, in devising a training project, the use of meaningful work and/or meaningless work scales can offer an examination of the risk of the existential erosion of workers as well as the workers' interests in meaning (Bailey et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

As with all the literature on meaningful work, the present contribution hopes that appropriate research would help to improve job quality and support individual lives and wellbeing. It is apparent that the constant labour and economic transformation will increase in the future impacting on the individual quest for meaning in work. Since the beginning of 2020, the SARS-COV 2 pandemic has been putting all the job sectors and workers (employees, employers, freelancers) in a sudden, renovated and uncertain working state. Thus, a new avenue of questions on meaning in work will be opened for research and practice. Besides the theoretical grounds, the ME-Work is thought as a feasible and versatile assessment tool focused on the personal experience of work and organizational provisions for meaning in work. The contribution has shown its relevance for the comprehension of several conditions of work and workers in the pursuit of meaningfulness. Then, the ME-Work might be used for investigating separated aims of the research and practice, overcoming potential barriers of mobility limitations, and involving different ways of research on the psychology of workers and job quality.

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APPENDIX

ME-Work Inventory Italian version

1. Mi posso realizzare attraverso il mio lavoro.
2. Il mio lavoro mi riempie di significato.
3. Nel mio lavoro ci sono possibilità di crescita personale.
4. La mia attività lavorativa dà un senso alla mia vita.
5. Le attività che svolgo a lavoro mi appaiono significative.
6. Vedo un senso nel mio lavoro.
7. Il mio lavoro mi appare sensato.
8. Per quanto concerne il mio lavoro, mi trovo in una crisi di senso.
9. Quando penso alla mia attività lavorativa, sento un senso di vuoto.
10. Soffro del fatto di non riuscire a trovare un senso nel mio lavoro.
11. La mia attività lavorativa corrisponde ai miei interessi.
12. Il ruolo che ricopro a lavoro si adatta alle mie qualità.
13. Le mie attività lavorative si adattano a ciò che mi sono prefisso di fare nella mia vita.
14. Il mio lavoro rende un po' migliore il mondo.
15. Attraverso la mia attività lavorativa do un prezioso contributo alla società.
16. Il mio lavoro arricchisce la vita di altre persone.
17. Il mio datore di lavoro fa qualcosa per risolvere problemi sociali.
18. Per il mio datore di lavoro è più importante che i compiti vengano svolti accuratamente piuttosto che nel minor tempo possibile.
19. Il mio datore di lavoro pensa al bene della società.
20. Sono ben inserito nella comunità lavorativa.
21. In compagnia dei miei colleghi mi sento bene.
22. Faccio parte di un team lavorativo eccezionale.

Note. Work as source of meaning: 1, 2, 3, 4; Meaningful work: 5, 6, 7; Meaningless work: 8, 9, 10; Coherence: 11,12,13; Significance: 14, 15, 16; Purpose: 17, 18, 19; Belonging: 20, 21, 22.