

# NOMOLOGICAL NETWORK OF MEANINGFULNESS MECHANISMS

## Abstract

The existential dilemma of meaningfulness has prompted humans to frame and foster a comprehensive definition of meaningfulness for better facilitation of their survival. Fragmented research in this domain captivated our attention and inspired us to venture into the field to explore the antecedents and moderators affecting meaningfulness. By virtue of multiple propositions and a conceptual model, we endeavour to clarify the underlying relationships between different mechanisms viz. authenticity, self-efficacy, goals, self-esteem, belongingness, sense-making and meaningfulness and consequently propound the loci of meaningfulness after careful scrutinization of the existing literature. The article culminates via discussions, implications and scopes for future research.

**Keywords:** Meaningfulness, Meaning, Meaning in Life, Meaning of Work

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## Introduction

Meaningfulness seems to be the core subjective experience for human beings driving their other related experiences ranging from happiness to well-being, engagement to satisfaction and positive affects to higher productivity (Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra, & Beersma, 2017; Rosso et al., 2010; Veltman, 2016; Weinstein & Cleanthous, 1996; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992; Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). However, nobody seems to have formulated an easy recipe to create meaningfulness. Practical difficulty of creating or finding meaningfulness in one's life also seems to be the reflection of existing theoretical pluralism (Park, 2010; Rosso et al., 2010; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017) that exists in the research around meaningfulness. The field looks divided in discussing the exact definition of meaningfulness and its scope ranging from situations, work

or life. The sector of meaningfulness also seems to capture it's measurements from simple single item scales to diverse complex multi-dimensional scales. There appears to be disagreement as to whether meaning is constructed, created, or found. Multiple theories suggest distinct yet overlapping components about what exactly contributes to meaningfulness. On this backdrop of theoretical ambiguity, any attempt to theorize certain aspects of meaningfulness would help this domain to move forward in a more constructive manner. In this effort, we use mechanisms proposed by Rosso et al. (2010) to propose a nomological network of meaningfulness mechanisms. We start this paper by illuminating our current understanding about the concept of meaningfulness through discussions about recent scholarly conversations in this area. We anchor our paper by proposing meaningfulness as a distinct positive subjective experience emerging from deeper connections between the inner world of conceptions and the outer world of expressions and hence delineate it from other related experiences. Post this, we build a theory of meaningfulness by organizing various meaningfulness mechanisms. Towards the end, we discuss possibilities for integration of various theoretical strands in the meaning literature by capturing them through an integrative framework of loci of meaningfulness.

## **Theoretical Review: Meaningfulness**

### ***Importance of Meaningfulness***

Over time, meaning has been conceptualised in terms of various scopes – in the context of life, work, situations etc. Meaningfulness is supreme and more desired than happiness or wealth (King & Napa, 1998). The Kelly Global Workforce Index (2009) mentions over 50% of young workers would accept a reduced wage or diminished role if their work contributed to something “more important and meaningful”, which makes it all the more noteworthy to understand why

young workers “talk incessantly about meaning,” quoting the lack of meaningfulness as the fundamental reason for turnover (Lancaster & Stillman, 2010, p. 86). The pursuit to justify his existence has led man to explore meaning from different angles and at various stages of his life which, as per research, leads to several important individual outcomes, such as work engagement, job satisfaction and motivation, and to organizational outcomes, such as performance (Martela, 2010; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012; Steger et al., 2012). Furthermore, meaningful work is believed to be constitutive to well-being and a flourishing life (Rosso et al., 2010; Veltman, 2016). The field of industrial-organisational psychology suggests scholars calling for enhanced meticulous understanding of the experience of meaningfulness (Weiss & Rupp, 2011) prompting their claim that, how individuals find meaningfulness in work, “should arguably be one of the most important questions for organizational scholarship” (Podolny et al., 2005, p. 1).

### ***What we know about meaningfulness?***

In recent times, there has been a considerable growth in research on the importance of meaningful work and the features people connect with work they feel meaningful (e.g., Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Fairlie, 2011; Geldenhuys et al., 2014; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Steger et al., 2012). Several organizational characteristics and processes including leadership, recruitment, job crafting, and organizational culture can promote meaningful work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Dynamic inter-relationships between importance of positive work experiences to the individual, their sense of belonging, and their wider role and contribution designate meaningfulness (e.g. Bailey & Madden, 2016; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Pavlish & Hunt, 2012).

Meaningfulness has been defined in a number of ways, and, as authors have previously noted, a generally agreed upon definition is not in place (Martela, 2010; Rosso et al., 2010). The terms “meaning” and “meaningfulness” have often been used interchangeably, leading to scepticism about whether and how these constructs are different, and their inter-relationship. Whereas meaningfulness symbolizes the perceived level of significance of one’s work (Monnot and Beehr, 2014), meaning refers to the outcome of having made sense of work. Rosso et al. (2010, p. 94) suggests: “meaning is an individual interpreting what her work means, or the role her work plays, in the context of her life (e.g., work is a pay check, a higher calling, something to do, an oppression).” The notion of meaningfulness materializes from related but separable experiences (Heintzelman & King, 2014a). According to Pratt and Ashforth (2003), when scholars mention “meaning of work,” they usually refer to either the type of meaning employees make of their work (“meaning”) or the amount of significance they assign to it (“meaningfulness”).

Precisely, meaningful work indicates the subjective experience of existential significance resulting from the fit between the individual and work - “Subjective experience of existential significance” referring to the process of individually perceiving work as contributing to, or making sense of, one’s existential reason in the world and “Resulting from the fit” referring to the fulfilment of certain dimensions that are inherent in every human being either through or in work (Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra, & Beersma, 2017).

According to Frankl (1946), the meaning of life is found in every moment of living; interestingly, life never ceases to have meaning, either in suffering or death. Perceiving work meaningfulness is correlated with meaning in life (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Steger et al., 2012). Those who find their work meaningful also tend to find their life meaningful. In the past decade, the definitions of meaningful work in three multidimensional scales developed for

its measurement (Fairlie, 2010; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Steger et al., 2012) are in synergy to the components of general meaning in life — purpose, coherence, and significance.

### ***Meaningfulness: What we don't know?***

Though meaningful work has been receiving increasing focus from researchers and practitioners (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009), there seems to be a lack of agreement and clarity as to the nature of the construct and how the various scopes of meaning exactly differ in their subjective experience, which could otherwise facilitate better and effective scholarly collaboration. As research on meaningful work is approaching a stage of paradigm development, rather than building on distinct theories and definitions, integrating existing theories of meaningful work to establish a monosemous unifying definition would prove beneficial in making advances in this domain and avoid ambiguity, which can hence be applied in different theories and empirical studies. Despite multiple sources and pathways to achieve meaningfulness being discussed, we believe there lays a void as to what exactly are the antecedents and moderators that contribute to meaningfulness. Exploring this could be the crux of any further scholarly work on meaningfulness. We realize this to be one of the most basic research questions lying unanswered in the context of meaningfulness, which so far has witnessed fragmented contributions. This paper is an attempt to theorize meaningfulness by discussing necessary and sufficient conditions for meaningfulness. As we proceed, we discuss about the variables that could potentially act as antecedents and moderate the relationship with meaningfulness. With a better clarity on meaningfulness, we discuss about the loci of meaningfulness and conclude with implications and future research that our proposed model would lead to, paving the way for more focused and concrete investigation.

## **Nomological Network of Meaningfulness Mechanisms**

### ***Meaningfulness as a distinct subjective experience***

We start our theorization by first proposing how the subjective experience of meaningfulness is different from that of other variables viz. happiness, well-being or satisfaction, though each one shares a substantial overlapping relationship with the other. Experiencing happiness and perceiving one's life as meaningful are essential characteristics of naïve notions of a desirable life (e.g., King & Napa, 1998). Meaning is one of the variables considered to provide a conducive condition for happiness to bloom (Lent, 2004; Ryff & Singer, 1998). According to Baumeister and Vohs (2002), "meaning is a pre-requisite for happiness". Happiness, generally defined as subjective well-being, corresponds to an experiential state containing a globally positive affective tone. Satisfaction with life denotes the cognitive aspect of subjective well-being (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). Human functioning demands perceiving one's life as meaningful. Past studies (e.g., Weinstein & Cleanthous, 1996; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992) show the ones who experienced their life as meaningful were less depressed and felt greater satisfaction with their lives, increased self-esteem, optimism, and more positive affect.

Having more meaning has been positively related to work enjoyment (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000), life satisfaction (e.g., Chamberlain & Zika, 1988b), and happiness (Debats et al., 1993), among other measures of healthy psychological functioning. As meaningful work is central to well-being and a flourishing life, or experiencing happiness (Rosso et al., 2010; Veltman, 2016), we infer well-being, happiness and satisfaction are the outcomes of meaningfulness and not factors that constitute meaningfulness.

Baumesiter et al. (2013) points out that happiness is rather linked with the present stimulus environment, while meaningfulness is a more complex interpretive term envisaging

circumstances that individuals associate as an amalgamation of the past, present and future. Happiness illuminates a self-centric perspective, whereas meaningfulness is a consequence of the reflection of self and may relate to own welfare or that of others. According to Vallacher and Wegner (1985, 1987), enhanced levels of meaning were consistently marked by longer time frames. Happiness is not the ultimate goal that people seek, in fact, a meaningful yet unhappy life is more commendable than a meaningless one (Baumesiter et al., 2013).

Broadly, meaningfulness refers to the subjective experience of existential significance resulting from the individual-work fit (Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra, & Beersma, 2017). Meaningfulness of work denotes the employee's subjective experience of work as being significant and also guaranteeing him a sense of purpose (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). As the amount of perceived or felt significance of something is relative, a single work experience may be regarded as extremely meaningful by one person and less meaningful by another (Rosso et al., 2010). In fact, "meaningful work" is work experienced as particularly significant that brings positivity to individuals (Rosso et al., 2010) and also contributes to their personal growth (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012). Lee (2015) quotes meaningful work as: "Meaningful work is the discovery of existential meaning from work experience, work itself and work purpose/goals" (p. 2263). The very concept of existential meaning is based on the subjective, psychic reality (Leontiev, 2005). In short, meaningfulness originates from meaning which is nothing but the ability to connect things better, further elucidated by Steger (2012, p. 65) as follows: "Meaning is the web of connections, understandings, and interpretations that help us comprehend our experience and formulate plans directing our energies to the achievement of our desired future. Meaning provides us with the sense that our lives matter, that they make sense, and that they are more than the sum of our seconds, days, and years." All these connections are formed when a subject

discovers the voyage to realization of various needs, objects and phenomena in his life, due to their incorporation into the structures of meaningful experience (Leontiev, 2005). Meaning in life is typically an aspect of eudaimonia (e.g., Huta & Waterman, 2014) which stretches well beyond personal feelings of happiness involving personal growth and virtuous pursuits (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998a, 1998b). In the words of F.E. Vasiliuk (1984, p. 129), meaning is “a borderline formation, a point of convergence of consciousness and being, the ideal and the real, life values and existent possibilities for their realization”. Evident from the aforementioned literature is the observation that subjective positive experience forms the base of meaningfulness which gets activated when the ideal self stands parallel to the real self, or, when the internal impressions and intentions get manifested. We begin with the first proposition as below:

**Proposition 1:** *Meaningfulness is the subjective positive experience triggered from the interconnection between the inner worlds of conceptions with the outer worlds of expressions.*

#### ***Authenticity at the core of meaningfulness***

The experience of meaning consists of (at least) three components: purpose, significance, and coherence (Heintzelman & King, 2013; King et al., 2006; Martela & Steger, 2016). While purpose forms the motivational component stressing on having goals, a sense of direction, or a mission in life (Reker, 1992), significance reflects the affective component concerned with feelings of satisfaction, fulfilment, and happiness accompanying goal attainment. The cognitive component, coherence denotes a sense of comprehensibility and ‘making sense of one’s experiences in life’ (Reker & Wong, 1988, p. 220). Scholarly enquiry into meaning reveals coherence as its anchor which ‘directs both the selection of goals and engenders feelings of worthiness’ (Reker & Wong, 2012, p. 434). Meaning in life is closely related to people making

sense of the world, rendering it comprehensible and coherent. A sense of coherence entails perceiving one's world as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987). Life becomes coherent when one is able to recognize its understandable patterns to make the wholeness comprehensible. Meaning as coherence is observed to be about 'the feeling that one's experiences or life itself makes sense' (Heintzelman & King, 2014b, p. 154) which comes from the notion of subjective rationality of experience (James, 1950). The Meaning Maintenance Model (MMM; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006), based on coherence, talks about meaning as: 'the expected relationships or associations that human beings construct and impose on their world' (Heine et al., 2006, p. 90). Heintzelman and King (2014b) explicitly focus on coherence, arguing for its distinction from other dimensions of meaning. This leads us to state coherence being the focal point for the subjective experience of meaningfulness. We hence differentiate subjective feelings of meaningfulness from other positive feelings as the ones sourcing from this sense of coherence.

Extending further, a sense of coherence or alignment between one's behaviour and perceptions of the "true" self is what defines authenticity (Markus, 1977; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). Authenticity, or, a core underlying self-motive, helps individuals maintain a sense of meaning and order in their lives (Gecas, 1991). Self-concordance, identity affirmation and personal engagement in work make up the three authenticity mechanisms that promote a manifestation of the "true" self (Rosso et.al, 2010). The experience of self-concordance or the extent to which people believe they are behaving in consistency with their interests and values (Sheldon & Elliott, 1998) is believed to promote feelings of deep and authentic connection to oneself (Bono & Judge, 2003). The second authenticity mechanism, identity affirmation, refers to the verification, affirmation, or activation

of valued personal identities through work. Personal engagement in work is where meaningfulness is derived from feeling personally immersed and alive in the experience of working (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Kahn, 1990). These feelings of authenticity lead to greater meaningfulness as they indicate the enactment or development of the self-concept (Britt, Adler & Bartone, 2001; Kahn, 1990; Shamir, 1991; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005).

Meaningful living is directly linked with authentic living (Kenyon, 2000). Experience of involvement, understood as the feeling of authenticity and owning one's actions, is a central aspect of meaning (Leontiev, 2006). Work experiences promoting the authentic self shape meaningfulness since they enable individuals to maintain consistency with attitudes, beliefs, values, and identities at work (Shamir, 1991). As behaviour is a response to external stimuli and situations, the congruence between one's behaviour and perceptions of "true" self symbolize authenticity which represents the match between the internal mental models and the external reality to experience meaningfulness. All of us possess internal mental models, worldviews, beliefs, values, preferences, likings and expectations with which we work in an external environment consisting of certain characteristics, contexts, structural elements and interpretations. The moment there is a fit between these two aspects, or, when the internal elements align with the external ones, we confront with authenticity. The feeling of authenticity as a central source of meaning instead of a facet of meaning is supported strongly by Weinstein et al. (2012). Since a manifestation of the "true" self can only enable a person to experience what meaningfulness really is, authenticity is absolutely fundamental to experiencing meaningfulness. This empowers us to postulate our first proposition as follows:

**Proposition 2: *Authenticity derived from person-environment fit is a necessary condition for experiencing meaningfulness.***

***The role of self-efficacy and goals***

We now shed light on self-efficacy being conceptually related to meaningfulness. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that he has the power and ability to produce an intended effect or make a difference (Bandura, 1977; Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Self-efficacy acts as a powerful motivator of human action toward particular outcomes (Bandura, 1986, 1989). Notably, experiencing self-efficacy in or as a consequence of work contributes to meaningfulness because it enables individuals to feel that they are capable and competent to effect change or exercise control in their environment (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991). Rosso et al. (2010) suggests three ways in which self-efficacy is employed as a mechanism of meaningfulness and when individuals are provided a sense of self-efficacy at work, it enhances meaningfulness. The first of the lot relates to feelings of personal control or autonomy in the work domain (Rosso et al., 2010). People have an obligation to conceive 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 they are agentic actors instead of being powerless (Gecas, 1991; Seligman, 1975; White, 1959; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). An individual is likely to experience meaningfulness based on a sense of having a degree of control over his fate (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Experiencing competence resulting from successfully overcoming challenges in one's work constitutes the second self-efficacy mechanism (Rosso et al., 2010). For instance, when an individual learns, grows and effectively responds to challenges,

she is likely to feel more personally competent and efficacious in her work (Masten & Reed, 2002; Spreitzer et al., 2005) which provides a sense of meaning for individuals in their work (Gecas, 1991). The third self-efficacy mechanism discusses about perceived impact suggesting that when individuals feel they are making a difference or having a positive impact on their organizations, work groups, co-workers, or other entities beyond the self, they see themselves as being more capable of effecting positive change, and thus are more likely to experience increased levels of meaningfulness in their work (Grant, 2008). This perceived impact on others or the environment contributes to meaningfulness (Cardador, 2009; Grant, 2007; Grant et al., 2007; Rosso et al., 2010).

Self-efficacy powers people to persist in attempts in achieving their goals (Bandura, 1982; Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005). Following goals that one finds personally worthwhile boosts well-being (e.g., Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), including meaning in life (e.g., Emmons, 2003; King et al., 2006). Goals illustrate desired objectives and events individuals believe will lend purpose to their lives and hence provide a valuable source of meaning (e.g., Emmons, 2003). Besides, they provide motivation and order to people's lives, guiding them towards actions that are impregnated with personal significance and values (e.g., Emmons, 2003). This leads us to arrive at the fact that people are more likely to follow goals and objectives that they feel capable of achieving. Research shows people put more thrust on goals that offer meaningful outcomes rather than more individualistic pursuits (e.g., Lang & Carstensen, 2002; McAdams, 2006; Ng & Feldman, 2010). Goals, not reflecting deeper values are unlikely to promote well-being and may instead lead people to exhaust energy and lose motivation (Sheldon, 2002). Activities with trivial personal interests belittle one's energy from more meaningful goal pursuits (e.g., Sheldon, 2002). People are best able to accomplish meaningfulness when they attain goals that happen to be

personally valuable within a career and organization providing support and harmony with these personal goals (Ward and King, 2017).

Thus, having goals and a sense of self-efficacy can strengthen the relationship between authenticity and meaningfulness. The ability to produce desired results, or self-efficacy, along with a sense of directedness can lead to pronounced levels of meaningfulness. Hence, we arrive at our third proposition discussing about authenticity, self-efficacy, goals and meaningfulness as follows:

**Proposition 3: *Self-efficacy and goals moderate the relationship between authenticity and meaningfulness.***

#### ***Role of belongingness in meaningfulness***

Apart from authenticity, we concentrate on the feeling of belongingness, 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 through social connections plays a significant role in the realization of meaningfulness. Social exclusion profoundly affects a person’s sense of his or her existence being meaningful (Williams, 2007a, 2007b). Social belongingness in general can encourage meaning (Lambert et al., 2013). When people experience a positive sense of shared common identity, fate, or humanity with others, they feel meaningful (Homans, 1958; White, 1959). The social identification mechanism of belongingness suggests that because individuals are driven to be a part of desirable social groups, membership in workplace groups produces a sense of shared identities, beliefs, or attributes that are perceived as meaningful to employees since they feel as if they belong to something special (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Rosso et al., 2010). Mere being a member in a social group or social

category may carry a certain set of (often constructive) meanings (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Secondly, the affective experience of interpersonal connectedness indicates 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 et al., 2010). A sense of meaningfulness is highly related to individuals accepting themselves within the society and hence this sense of meaningfulness is likely to decline when people start feeling unaccepted in their social circles.

As we propose the relationship between authenticity and meaningfulness above, we realize the dimension of belongingness can in fact influence this relation. Given that authenticity is a necessary criterion for meaningfulness, unless an individual identifies himself as ‘belonging’ to his social sphere, the magnitude of this relation may not be profound. Particularly, the manifestation of the “true” self may not be influenced if an individual doesn’t feel connected within his social circle. The more the belongingness, the higher the experience of meaningfulness. Thus, we posit belongingness to be a moderator for the association between authenticity and meaningfulness.

**Proposition 4: *Belongingness acts as a moderator in the relationship between authenticity and meaningfulness.***

#### ***Impact of self-esteem on meaningfulness***

Another individualistic attribute linked to meaningfulness is self-esteem, or, an individual’s judgement of his or her own self-worth (Baumeister, 1998). Self-esteem can be described as both a durable trait of individuals and a malleable state possibly shaped by personal or collective

experiences and achievements (Crocker & Park, 2004; Leary & Downs, 1995). Feelings of achievement resulting from work experiences help to fulfil individuals' motivations for believing that they are valuable and worthy (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Gecas, 1991; Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). Though self-esteem and self-efficacy can be triggered by accomplishments, the way in which self-efficacy promotes meaningfulness typically operates through a sense of control over one's environment and fate, while self-esteem is ingrained in an individual as being worthwhile – two very distinct pathways to meaningfulness (Rosso et al., 2010). Studies on self-esteem mechanism have been in terms of how personal or group achievements provide a sense of value and self-worth for individuals, and the resulting meaningfulness (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Since self-esteem is amenable to diverse situations and experiences, possessing high self-esteem can enable a person to realise his aspirations of meaningfulness through authenticity. Similarly, lower self-esteem can weaken the relationship between authenticity and meaningfulness. Thus, we put forward our fourth proposition as follows:

**Proposition 5: *Strong self-esteem would strengthen the relationship between authenticity and meaningfulness.***

#### ***Effect of sense-making on meaningfulness***

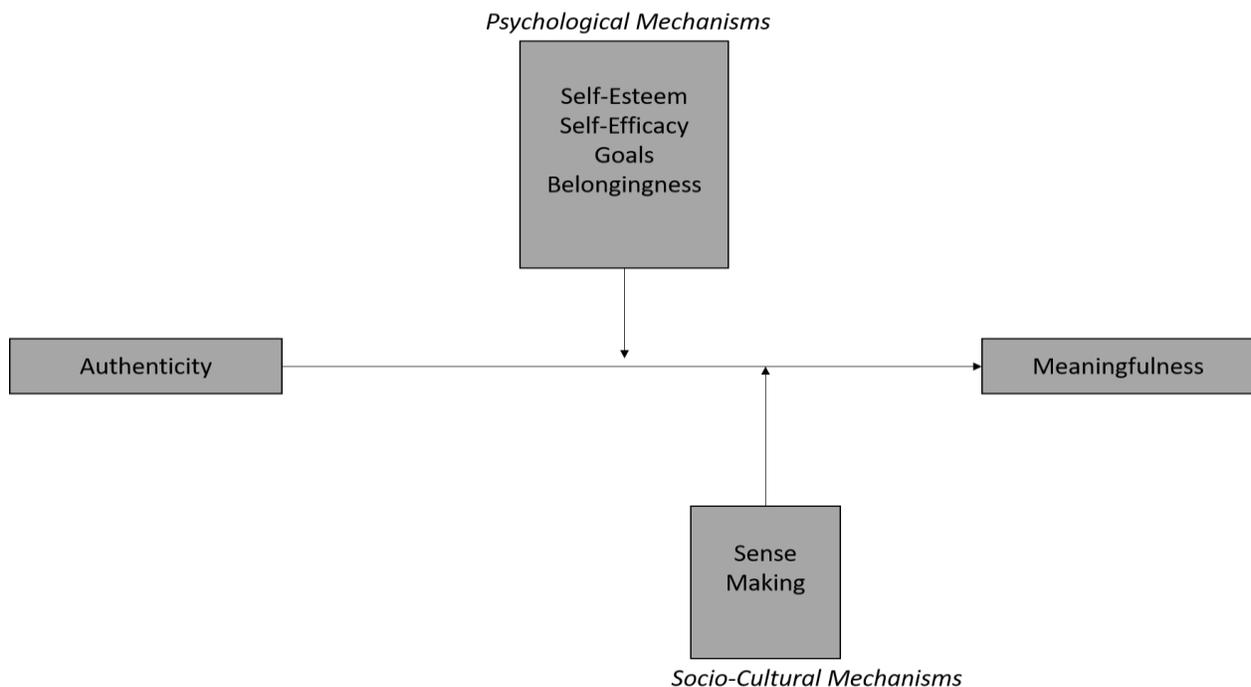
Lepisto & Pratt (2017) argue for two “paths” to the same “destination” of meaningfulness – realization and justification. Till this point, we discussed how various work enrichment strategies produce meaningfulness through the fulfilment of various needs, desires, and motivations as discussed in the path of realization. However, the justification perspective suggests that the entire interpretation is subjective to final sense-making that one does through social, cultural and

interpersonal cues. While all the above variables refer to the psychological mechanisms of the self and offer self-based explanations, we maintain that the approach of sense-making can act as the cynosure from a socio-cultural environment perspective, which is in fact a foundation of “meaning-making” research (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Sonenshein, 2006; Weick, 1995). Weick (1995) discusses meaning as an inherent social construction defined by the context or environment in which an individual is nested. The mechanism of cultural and interpersonal sense-making (Rosso et al., 2010) incorporates socio-cultural forces that shape the meaning people create of different aspects of their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). The manner in which work takes on meaning is characterized by which meanings are considered to be legitimate or prominent from a cultural lens (Rosso et al., 2010). The interpersonal sense-making viewpoint builds on social information processing theory to recommend 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). This sense-making mechanism bestows a useful social perspective on the actual fabrication of meaning. Having discussed on variables pertaining to the self viz. self-esteem, self-efficacy, goals and belongingness, to influence the connection between authenticity and meaningfulness, we are of the view that sense-making, or the socio-cultural perspective can also amplify this relationship to a considerable extent. For example, a particular job may have the appropriate aspects of authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, goals and belongingness making the job meaningful from the realization perspective; but, there may also lie a situation where a comparative job might be evaluated as having better incentives, opportunities, etc. leading to an overall narrative that the job is not worthy enough and hence justification perspective weakening the intrinsic meaningfulness. Though self-psychological variables are important, it’s paramount to consider the influence of socio-cultural aspect of

sense-making in the relation between authenticity and meaningfulness. We hence formulate our final proposition as follows:

**Proposition 6:** *Sense-making plays an influential role in the relationship between authenticity and meaningfulness.*

The above propositions enable us to put forth a model depicting antecedent – moderator – outcome relationship, which we believe will contribute to the existing scholarly work on meaningfulness and provide a sense of better conceptual clarity. Authenticity appears as the necessary but insufficient condition for meaningfulness, inviting the role of other variables like sense-making, self-efficacy, self-esteem, goal setting and belongingness to account for this relationship. Consequently, our model takes the following shape demarcated below (Fig. 1).

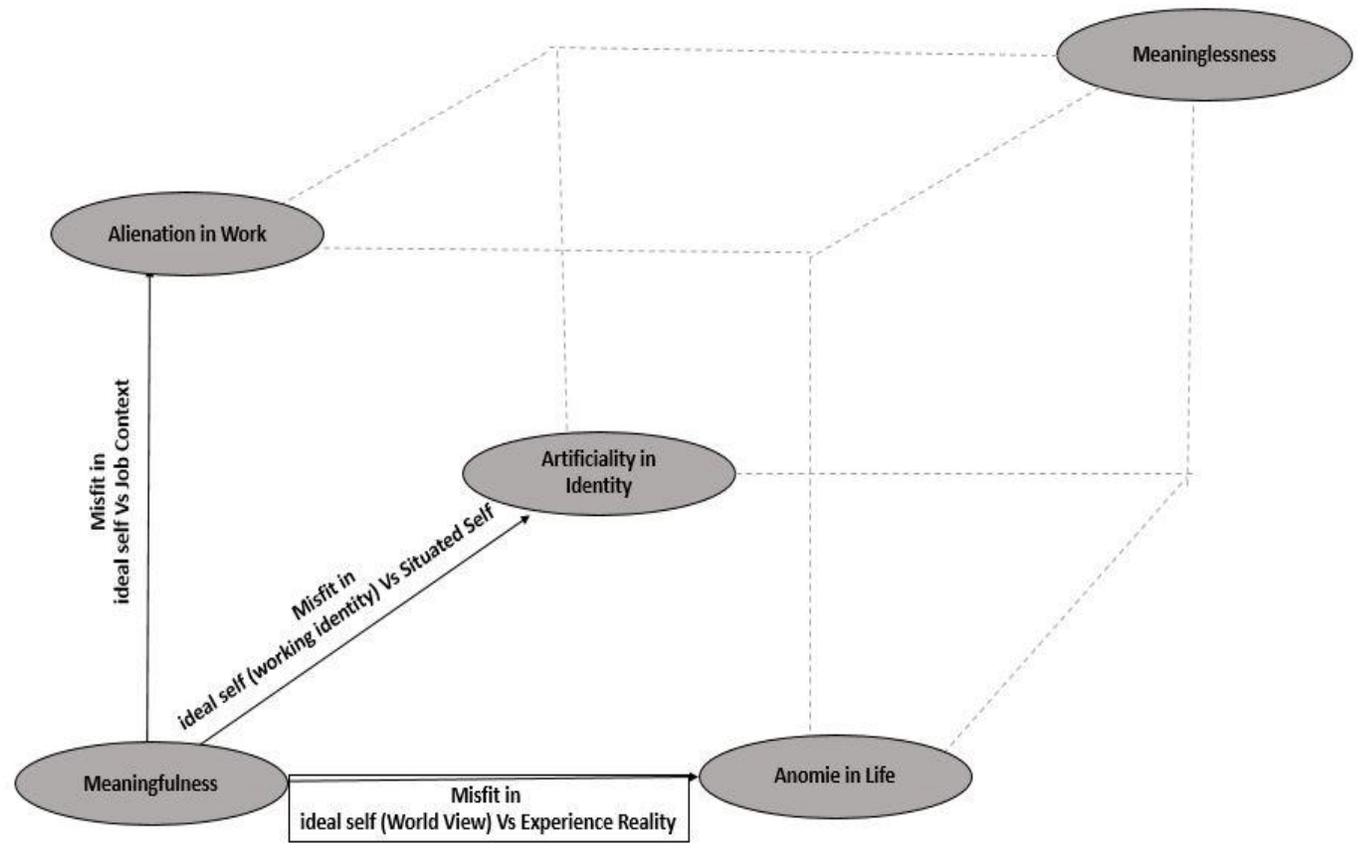


**Figure 1:** *Nomological Network of Meaningfulness Mechanisms*

## **Discussion on Loci of Meaningfulness and Implications**

In our theory of meaningfulness, we first differentiate other positive subjective experiences from the subjective experience of meaningfulness. We argue that since coherence plays the central role to trigger subjective positive experience of meaningfulness (Martela & Steger, 2016), the authenticity of finding fit between the inner world of self-expectations and the various dimensions of external world where this self gets expressed becomes a necessary condition for labeling the emerging positive experience as subjective experience of meaningfulness. A relevant question may be asked as to what is the boundary condition for our theory of meaningfulness? What are the loci of meaningfulness that our theory is referring to? Are we discussing it in the context of meaning in life, or, meaning of work, or, situational meaning? Rather we propose that we can't differentiate the subjective experience of meaningfulness that we might derive from these different loci of meaning. We suggest meaningfulness is the cumulative subjective experience that one derives from the fit one finds between the ideal self and the situational self, work context and his experienced life. Any one of this if missing would impact the intensity of meaningfulness experienced by an individual as depicted in the figure below (Fig. 2).

The first locus of meaningfulness lies around the fit between the ideal self and the experienced world. Meaning in life literature (Park, 2010) suggests that when an individual's worldview (consisting of global belief, global values and other assumptions about reality) and the experienced world are aligned, one experiences meaningfulness. Any deviation between them leads to violation of meaning (Park et al., 2012) and hence everyone attempts to maintain this sense of meaning (Heine et al., 2006). Higher the alignment between the world views of an individual and the situational meaning, the more authentic one feels, the more sense of coherence and hence an increased level of meaningfulness.



**Figure 2: Loci of Meaningfulness**

We argue that when this fit is not achieved, one starts experiencing meaninglessness through the central problem of anomie (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). The second locus lies around the fit between the ideal self and the job context. Meaning of work literature (Rosso et al., 2010) suggests any deviation between individual preferences and work characteristics leads to violation of meaning and hence everyone attempts to maintain P-J fit through job shifting or job-crafting. Higher the alignment, higher the sense of coherence and thus higher meaningfulness. We insist that when this fit is not achieved one starts experiencing meaninglessness through the central problem of alienation (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). The third locus of meaningfulness lies around the fit between the ideal self and the situational self. Multiple theories of self (for details, please refer Markus and Kunda, 1986) assert that when the working self-concept is in harmony with various ideal self-

concepts, one experiences a sense of coherence. We argue that continuous faking up or pretending something else and turning up to a masked identity leads to experiencing meaninglessness through the central problem of artificiality.

We suggest that this theory of meaningfulness can connect and integrate different sources of meaning through the central mechanism of authenticity that triggers a sense of coherence enacting as the necessary condition for subjective positive experience of meaningfulness differentiating it from other similar positive subjective experiences. Loci-mechanisms have been the standard framework used by various theoretical strands to integrate the literature when faced with theoretical pluralism (Hernandez et al., 2011). We believe our initial propositions being tested under separate loci distinctly could be a prospective step in this direction of academic research. For example, self-efficacy as moderator could be tested - as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in achieving self-developmental goals when tested under the locus of 'ideal self-situated self', as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in achieving job-targets when tested under the locus of "ideal self-job context" and as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in achieving societal goals when tested under the locus of "ideal self-experienced world". Or another example is belongingness as moderator that could be tested as self-acceptance under the locus of 'ideal self-situated self', as job inclusion/ job embeddedness under the locus of ideal self-job context" and as cultural assimilation under the locus of "ideal self-experienced world". Together, an integrated framework of loci and mechanisms of meaning through the lens of meaningfulness could aid us in connecting different theoretical strands in the meaning literature. We expect our tiny efforts to contribute promisingly to the even gigantic work that lies ahead of us in making research in meaningfulness more meaningful.

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