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Understanding Decent Work and Meaningful Work

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Abstract

Emerging from distinct perspectives, decent work and meaningful work are fundamental aspects of contemporary work with profound implications for individuals, organizations, and society. Decent work reflects basic workplace conditions to which all employees are entitled, whereas meaningful work is aspirational, reflecting significance at work. Following a conceptual and empirical review of scholarship on decent work and meaningful work, we draw from psychology of working theory to connect the two constructs. We argue that need satisfaction serves as the primary connector, and societal context, organizational conditions, and individual practices (in order of effectiveness) promote access to each type of work. We suggest future research directions broadening the available scholarship and methods used, promoting a focus on the complex intersection of macrolevel and psychological factors as well as interdisciplinary approaches in determining the quality of work, and engaging in intervention research to improve the way in which people live and work together.

UNDERSTANDING DECENT WORK AND MEANINGFUL WORK

Working represents a core aspect of human life, optimally providing a means of sustainability, social connections and contribution, self-determination, and a source of meaning. Developing the knowledge base to understand and facilitate the process by which people navigate the often challenging context of work is a fundamental objective of organizational and vocational psychology as well as broader studies of career and work. Two specific dimensions of work—decent work and meaningful work—have emerged in recent years as particularly important aspects of organizational functioning and psychological/work-based well-being (Blustein et al. 2016, Dik et al. 2013, Duffy et al. 2016, Lysova et al. 2019). Decent work is a construct that defines the baseline attributes of work, reflecting the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) four strategic objectives: "the promotion of rights at work; employment; social protection; and social dialogue" (ILO 1999, p. 6). Meaningful work refers to "work experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals" (Rosso et al. 2010, p. 95).

Although some research connects the two constructs in theoretical work (e.g., Duffy et al. 2016, Lysova et al. 2019) and empirical work (Allan et al. 2020a), surprisingly little effort has been devoted to integrating the knowledge accumulated in both bodies of research. This gap limits the possibility to understand how decent work and meaningful work are related to each other (Seubert et al. 2021, Yeoman et al. 2019a), which is essential in advancing knowledge on how work is experienced by individuals. We believe that examining these two specific work-based experiences in the same article has the advantage of encouraging a more expansive vision of the impact of working on the lives of people and the welfare of organizations to improving society and advancing national economies.

Furthermore, as the global work context adapts to the massive changes evoked by the COVID-19 pandemic, significant questions are being raised about the nature of work and its multifaceted role in people's lives. Disruptions have challenged core assumptions about work, including its capacity to support needs for survival, sustenance, meaning, and safety (e.g., Cubrich & Tengesdal 2021, Kniffin et al. 2021). Although the pandemic has shed light on these issues, the labor market has long been plagued with inequity, differential access to meaningful work, vulnerability to harassment and marginalization, overwork, tedium, challenges to dignity, and other sources of distress (e.g., Allan et al. 2021; Blustein 2006, 2019; Christie et al. 2021; Cortina & Areguin 2021; McWhirter & McWha-Hermann 2021). These ongoing challenges in work are another reason why reviewing two core elements of working—decent work and meaningful work—in tandem is needed if we are to understand how to improve the quality of work in the postpandemic world.

Our approach in reviewing decent work and meaningful work is shaped by the unique linkage between these concepts, which have emerged from very different traditions in the social sciences and public policy. Taken together, we believe that a review of decent work and meaningful work can provide broad insights into the nature of work and the complex intersection of macrolevel and psychological factors in determining the quality of work. In this article, we review mainly research-based and some conceptual scholarship about decent work and meaningful work[1] as well as the relations between these two important constructs. As a means of providing connective conceptual linkages between the psychologically informed view of decent work and meaningful work, we rely on psychology of working theory (PWT; Duffy et al. 2016) and its core proposition that decent work is an antecedent to meaningful work.

[1]We have elected to circumscribe the review to paid marketplace work in order to provide a more focused scope for this article.

This review adopts an explicitly multicultural lens, encompassing the vast diversity that exists across the globe in how people engage in work and how they manage its challenges and resources. In addition, the collaboration of vocational and organizational psychologists in this review provides an inclusive perspective from these two specialties in psychology. As such, we hope to inspire research that breaks down insular boundaries between concepts and perspectives, thereby serving as a foundation for new scholarship and praxis that will make a difference for people and organizations at work. The goals of this article are (*a*) to provide a focused review of decent work and meaningful work; (*b*) to explore the ways in which these constructs connect to each other and broader social and organizational policy; and (*c*) to develop a research agenda that will enrich scholarship, practice, and public policy on decent work and meaningful work and the nature of work more broadly. First, we present PWT (Duffy et al. 2016) as a conceptual bridge between decent work and meaningful work. Next, we provide separate brief reviews of both decent work and meaningful work, each framed around a conceptual overview, a selected review of empirical research, and concluding observations. We then explore the relationships between decent work and meaningful work, followed by an integrative analysis of the two constructs, which culminates in a call for research, practice, and public policy initiatives.

PSYCHOLOGY OF WORKING THEORY: CONCEPTUAL BRIDGE BETWEEN DECENT WORK AND MEANINGFUL WORK

As research on decent work and meaningful work has been rarely integrated and the two research fields remain rather separate, we used PWT (Duffy et al. 2016) as a lens to link the constructs, given that it explicitly argues that decent work is an antecedent of meaningful work. The logic of this theory is also what guides our focused review of the literature on the two constructs separately, with decent work serving as a threshold that needs to be met in order to experience meaningful work for most people. On the basis of insights from this review, we further provide an integrative view of the two constructs.

PWT emerged from the psychology of working framework (PWF; Blustein 2006), which expanded the vision and conceptual foundation of vocational psychology by identifying prominent individual, community-based, and macrolevel factors that shape people's lives at work. PWF pushed vocational scholars to extend career theory and research to the lives of individuals with little to no choice in their career decision-making, often due to systemic forces serving to both increase experiences of oppression and limit access to opportunity (Blustein 2006, 2008). PWF also advocated for psychologists at large to affirm the central position of work in most people's lives, especially as it relates to meeting needs for survival (capacity to sustain one's existence), social connection (capacity for work to provide relational support and social contribution), and self-determination (capacity for work to facilitate autonomous and motivating experiences) (Blustein 2008).

PWT is an outgrowth of this conceptual work, representing a theory that could be more readily used in empirical research and in turn applied to psychological, vocational, and systemic interventions. PWT positions decent work attainment as a predictor of fulfillment in work and life, including an increased sense of meaningfulness in the workplace. PWT built on the ILO's (2008) systemic-focused Decent Work Agenda to define decent work at the individual level, using a five-part definition whereby work consists of "(a) physically and interpersonally safe working conditions (e.g., absent of physical, mental, or emotional abuse), (b) hours that allow for free time and adequate rest, (c) organizational values that complement family and social values, (d) adequate compensation, and (e) access to adequate health care" (Duffy et al. 2016, p. 130). This initial conceptualization used a US frame where access to health care most often comes through employment. From a PWT perspective, experiencing decent work is not about meaningfulness or

satisfaction, but rather about meeting a threshold consisting of basic workplace components that should be expected for all working adults.

Decades of research across psychology, sociology, and labor economics has demonstrated that individuals with less access to material wealth and those whose identities are societally marginalized (on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) face substantial work-related barriers and burdens across the life span (Chetty et al. 2020, Duffy et al. 2016). This includes, but is not limited to, reduced access to high-quality education throughout one's childhood and adolescence, reduced social capital when entering the workforce, and continuous experiences of discrimination around hiring and treatment within the workplace (Chetty et al. 2020, Destin 2019, Destin & Svoboda 2018, Triana et al. 2015). In PWT, economic constraints and marginalization are viewed as lifetime constructs that directly limit an individual's access to decent work by, in part, limiting an individual's sense of choice in their career decision-making. Here, work volition—the feeling that one has choice in their career decision-making—functions as a psychological construct, which is designed to assess an individual's feelings in the present versus across the life span.

PWT also theorizes outcomes of decent work and suggests that the primary function of decent work is to satisfy basic needs. Building from the self-determination literature (Ryan & Deci 2000), PWT hypothesizes that decent work attainment across time allows individuals to meet needs for survival, social contribution, and self-determination components of autonomy, competency, and relatedness. It is through meeting these needs where fulfillment in work and life occurs. Akin to the past scholarship on structural factors in relation to work outcomes (Blustein & Duffy 2020), research demonstrating that work is a primary vessel to meet needs and thereby boost well-being is voluminous (Deci et al. 2017). Thus, this back half of the PWT model is where the proposed linkages exist between decent work and meaningful work—a step-by-step process where decent work leads to need satisfaction, which leads to an increased sense of meaningfulness felt in one's work (**Figure 1**).

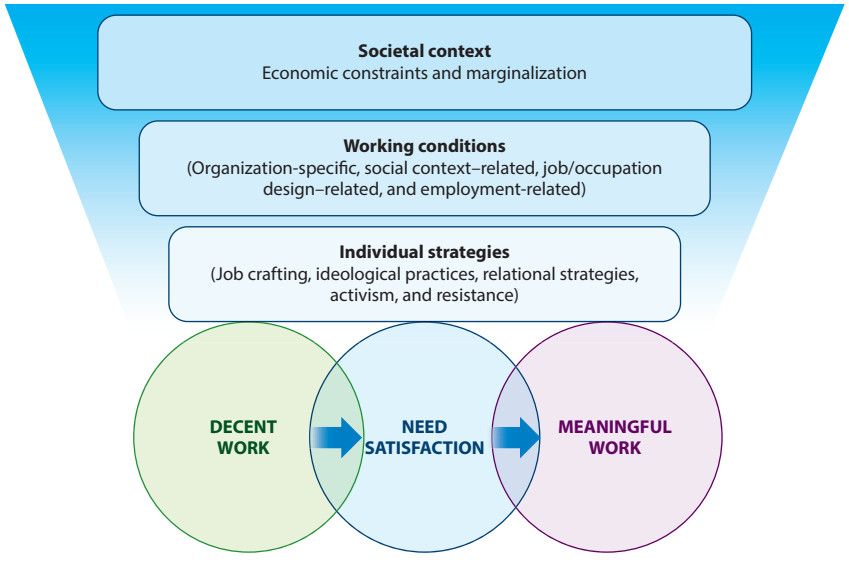

Figure 1

Integrative conceptual framework for connecting decent work and meaningful work.

UNDERSTANDING DECENT WORK: A CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW

In contrast to many other concepts in the work and organizational behavior literature, decent work began as a public policy initiative that was developed and disseminated by the ILO (1999, 2008). The ILO is a multinational organization affiliated with the United Nations that "bring(s) together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States to set labor standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men" (ILO 2022). Although decent work emerged as an aspirational standard from the ILO toward the end of the twentieth century, its etiology has roots in economic, political, and philosophical traditions that have sought to define decency and to apply this notion to various social and economic contexts, including work (Christie et al. 2021, Di Fabio & Blustein 2016).

Conceptual and Definitional Foundations of Decent Work

In 1999, the ILO established four interdependent principles framing its Decent Work Agenda, which defines the broad parameters of decent work (ILO 2008). These principles include (*a*) access to decent and productive work that ensures equity, security, and dignity; (*b*) human rights within the workplace that are both legislated and part of consensually agreed upon norms and values; (*c*) social dialogue that includes workers, employers, labor unions, and governments; and (*d*) social protections, including safe working conditions, adequate time for rest, and other supports for workers and their families. The clear structural parameters of decent work reflect the attributes of work that optimally should be evident for all working people across the globe. (Alas, the rather modest aspirations reflected in the Decent Work Agenda, for the most part, have not been fulfilled in many nations and communities around the world; ILO 2021.)

The history of the decent work concept and the ILO's Decent Work Agenda include many of the points of tension that have existed in this movement and that continue to underscore how decent work is understood and implemented. The Decent Work Agenda grew out of the massive changes in the labor market during the latter part of the twentieth century caused by globalization and the shift of the supply chain to encompass the Global South (Brill 2021). As Brill (2021, p. 14) observed, "increasing global competition resulted in the 'hollowing out' of working conditions in both the North and South, undermining trade unions and combining to make even formal sector jobs increasingly precarious." In light of these struggles due to the deterioration of working conditions, the ILO faced competing demands. Labor unions and other activists lobbied for more assertive policies that would center the needs of workers and their families. In contrast, many national governments and employers countered with the position that markets and labor policies should not be overly regulated, ostensibly to create and sustain new jobs. The result was a compromise—the Decent Work Agenda—which sought to create a clear baseline for workers across the globe but shifted the focus away from dignified work, which is viewed as encompassing a more radical agenda in promoting workers' rights (Brill 2021).

Within the past two decades, an emerging body of research and critical reflection has been devoted to the meaning and impact of the Decent Work Agenda (e.g., Christie et al. 2021, Di Fabio & Blustein 2016). The ILO, coupled with scholars and activists across the globe, sought to define decent work, explore its philosophical and psychological meaning, and identify the macrolevel indicators of decent work. In PWT, Duffy et al. (2016) defined decent work from the perspective of people's experiences of their own work lives across the aforementioned five dimensions of workplace experiences. This definition complements the broader-based perspective advanced by the ILO, which defines decent work via macrolevel conditions. Given the focus of this article on psychological aspects of decent work, we rely primarily on PWT's five-part definition of decent work.

Empirical Research on Decent Work

In this section, we provide a review of the macrolevel perspectives on decent work, followed by a summary of recent psychological research on decent work. This review demonstrates how decent work has been studied at both the structural and the individual level, offering unique insights based on the differing perspectives.

Macrolevel research. Given the policy- and economics-based tradition in which decent work was defined, ILO (2014) efforts have focused on establishing macrolevel statistical indicators of decent work that optimally can be adapted to a given region or nation. The full array of indicators includes the following: "employment opportunities; adequate earnings and productive work; decent working time; combining work, family, and personal life; work that should be abolished [e.g., child labor]; stability and security of work; equal opportunity and treatment in employment; safe work environment; social security; and social dialogue, employers' and workers' representation" (ILO 2014, p. 12). In their review of decent work research, Pereira et al. (2019) analyzed 38 articles published between 2003 and 2017 that included both macrolevel and psychological perspectives. They found that the range of decent work indicators used varied by the region of a given study, the study's focus on individual- or country-level data, and employment sector. An overall conclusion from their paper was a call for researchers to contextualize analyses of ILO indicators and to move beyond a deficit approach when assessing decent work attainment.

Prior to the pandemic, decent work goals were inconsistently attained, with the majority of working people experiencing noted deficits in their working conditions (ILO 2021). A major characteristic of working globally continues to be informal employment, which represents the majority of the jobs in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. Informal employment refers to work that is not regulated; often short-term and precarious; and with minimal, if any, social and legal protections (ILO 2021). During the pandemic, access to decent working conditions became even more challenging, with disruptions in nearly every aspect of life leading to growth in unemployment, poverty, and inequality (ILO 2021). The pandemic has underscored the delicate balance of social conditions, economic trends, political factors, and other macrolevel events that shape conditions of work. The impact of deficits of decent work is consistently adverse, encompassing individual mental and physical health, people's capacity to meet fundamental survival needs, and community/social disruptions (e.g., Christie et al. 2021). Baranik et al. (2022) conducted a study of desired and obtained work values (a key factor in decent work criteria) in 37 countries and found that the Human Development Index (a macrolevel index of support for human development) was a significant determinant in access to decent work. These findings underscore the powerful role that economic constraints play in determining how people fare in their striving for decent work.

In addition to informal work, another challenging context for work is the growing role of digital platform work (e.g., Uber driver) and precarious work (Allan et al. 2021, Kalleberg 2018, Purcell & Garcia 2021). Precarious work, which refers to employment that lacks many of the core attributes of decent work, including stability, security, adequate pay, benefits, and social and legal protections, has become a significant part of the global labor market (Allan et al. 2021, Kalleberg 2018). Although precarious work has been part of the labor landscape for many decades, its growth across diverse regions of the globe and sectors of the labor market is disconcerting and further erodes the aspiration of the Decent Work Agenda (ILO 2021). Research on the consequences of precarious work has consistently identified adverse outcomes for individuals including challenges in mental health, work-related behaviors and attitudes, and the capacity to plan for the future (Allan et al. 2021, Kalleberg 2018). At the broader social level, precarious work is associated with political instability, growing fractionalization of social bonds, and the rise of populism and fear of others (for reviews, see Kalleberg & Vallas 2018, Lorey 2015, and Standing 2011).

Psychological research. The bulk of studies in the Pereira et al. (2019) review article explored the presence or absence of decent work for individuals or specific cultures, with only four studies measuring decent work quantitatively and assessing how it relates to other constructs. However, within the past 5 years, research on decent work has burgeoned, especially around attempts to link decent work with other predictors and outcomes, often using PWT as a frame for the construct and associated analyses. A portion of this scholarship has centered on examining the decent work construct's applicability and conceptualization cross-culturally, while another portion has focused on understanding predictors and outcomes of decent work. Considering decent work research that has used a psychologically informed framework, we identified more than 50 studies that have used both qualitative and quantitative methods with samples of working adults representing more than 25 different countries.

At the construct level, conceptualizations and measures of decent work have been developed and adapted to be culturally appropriate, in many cases based on narrative feedback from participants who were asked to define what decent work means to them. Although these studies revealed substantial cross-cultural overlap—especially around subcomponents related to safety, adequate compensation, and free time/rest—several key differences emerged (Duffy et al. 2020a). First, among the studies that used the Duffy et al. (2018) Decent Work Scale, most countries outside of the United States had fully or partially government-sponsored health care, making that component of decent work either irrelevant or of diminished importance. Second, some proportion of participant groups from wealthier countries viewed meaning as a necessary component for work to be considered decent, versus a component that would be an outcome of decent work (Di Fabio & Kenny 2019, Masdonati et al. 2019, Vignoli et al. 2020). These studies offer a unique glimpse at how some, likely more privileged, participants may cognitively tie these two constructs together.

The remainder of decent work scholarship drawing from a psychological perspective has examined its predictors and outcomes. Results have been largely consistent in demonstrating that individuals who experience higher levels of economic constraints and marginalization across their lifetimes are also less likely to view their current work as decent; these links are explained in part by a diminished sense of volition in one's career decision-making and by the lack of opportunities for decent work (Blustein & Duffy 2020). Longitudinal research verifying these connections is limited, but one recent study did demonstrate the stability of these effects over a 6-month period (Duffy et al. 2020b). Other, more pertinent research has explored outcomes to decent work, namely need satisfaction and aspects of work and life fulfillment. Decent work attainment has consistently and strongly correlated with survival, social contribution, and self-determination need satisfaction (Blustein & Duffy 2020, Duffy et al. 2020a, Kim et al. 2021). A series of studies also have demonstrated the mediating effect of need satisfaction. For example, survival need satisfaction has been found to mediate the link between decent work and physical health outcomes, whereas social contribution and self-determination need satisfaction are stronger mediators in the link between decent work and well-being outcomes (Duffy et al. 2019, 2021). Overall, findings across this group of studies generally support key theoretical propositions that structural factors significantly predict decent work attainment, and attaining decent work links with a greater sense of need satisfaction and, in turn, higher well-being.

Finally, recent work by organizational scholars has complemented PWT-informed research by studying decent work with a slightly different conceptualization. In contrast to the Duffy et al. (2018) five-component construct model, Ferraro et al. (2018a,b; 2021) conceptualized decent work and developed an associated instrument using the following seven components: fundamental principles and values at work, adequate working time and workload, fulfilling and productive work, meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship, social protection, opportunities, and health and safety. Several empirical studies using this instrument have found that, in a large

sample of working adults, those more likely to attain decent work are more engaged at work (vigor, dedication, and absorption), feel more voice in the workplace, and have higher intrinsic work motivation (Ferraro et al. 2018a, 2021; Sheng & Zhou 2021). Although the conceptualization of decent work in these studies is more complex, the relation of decent work to work-related outcomes is analogous to PWT-informed research.

Concluding Observations About Decent Work

As reflected in the literature reviewed, the quality of one's work is a powerful factor in determining individual well-being and the welfare of communities. Decent work provides an important index of work conditions; however, the circumscribed scope of decent work, as articulated by the ILO, manifests the tension that has existed in the original construction of this concept and agenda (compare with Pereira et al. 2019). One particular theme of the initial debates about the political and economic assumptions underlying decent work continues to evoke concerns. In Brill's (2021) summary of critiques of decent work, she observed that the focus on determining a foundation or baseline for work avoided the more problematic aspects of work related to growing precarity and acceptance of some of the harsher conditions of neoliberal economies (see also Blustein et al. 2019, Spooner & Waterman 2015, Standing 2011). Much of this acceptance could be attributed to the desire of organizations to survive in competitive markets while providing a return on investment to their shareholders. That is often achieved through reducing learning and development opportunities, pressing employees to work longer hours without extra pay, or disregarding work security guidelines.

The macrolevel perspective that launched decent work as a concept and agenda has been thoughtfully expanded and critiqued by activists and scholars in other fields that have sought to infuse a more explicitly individual perspective and a justice-oriented value system (Christie et al. 2021, Di Fabio & Blustein 2016, Pereira et al. 2019). We build on these critiques by infusing theory and a focus on meaningful work as a means of further enriching knowledge about the nature and impact of decent work.

UNDERSTANDING MEANINGFUL WORK: A CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Meaningful work is a concept that currently attracts considerable scholarly attention. A burgeoning body of research on the topic has been discussed in several reviews and a special issue editorial (Bailey et al. 2017, 2019a,b; Laaser & Bolton 2021; Lepisto & Pratt 2017; Lysova et al. 2019; Michaelson et al. 2014; Rosso et al. 2010). Meaningful work also has been extensively studied within a range of research fields, including organizational behavior, vocational and organizational psychology, humanities, communication studies, and ethics. The disciplinary diversity of views on meaningful work explains why its conceptualization remains a point of discussion, with research revealing 36 existing definitions of the concept (Martela & Pessi 2018).[2] This diversity requires making choices when it comes to the review of the scholarly state of the art on the topic. Here, we proceed with focusing on the concept of meaningful work as discussed by organizational behavior and vocational and organizational psychology scholars as it aligns most with our view on decent work.

[2]Given space limitations, we do not include here an extensive discussion of the differences in the existing conceptualizations of meaningful work. However, **Supplemental Table 1** provides example definitions.

Supplemental Material >

Conceptual and Definitional Foundations of Meaningful Work

Although there is generally little consensus on what meaningful work means, many scholars tend to agree that meaningfulness captures how individuals evaluate the significance and value of their work (Pratt & Ashforth 2003, Rosso et al. 2010). Here, we adopt Rosso et al.'s (2010) definition of meaningful work as individuals experiencing their work as being both significant and positive in valence. Although meaningful work is described as a positive phenomenon, it does not mean that meaningful work is always accompanied by positive emotions and pleasure (Lepisto & Pratt 2017). Meaningful work can also arise in moments and situations of tensions or conflicts that are associated with mixed, uncomfortable, and even painful feelings (Bailey & Madden 2016, Mitra & Buzzanell 2017) and may be accompanied by personal and family-related sacrifices (e.g., Bunderson & Thompson 2009). For example, Lysova (2019) shares the story of a detective who decides to leave the hospital just before a lifesaving cancer treatment to pursue a new clue in a missing person's case that for him mattered more than anything else, deliberately sacrificing his health and neglecting his wife and daughter. By viewing meaningful work as a subjective experience, we bring it in line with the psychological perspective on decent work.

We also acknowledge that scholars differ in how they view dimensionality and the nature of meaningful work. With regard to its dimensionality, by being first integrated into the job characteristics model (JCM; Hackman & Oldham 1976) as an outcome of job design, meaningful work has been traditionally conceptualized and measured as a unidimensional construct (May et al. 2004). Yet, there is a solid body of research that challenges this view, arguing for a multidimensional conceptualization and measurement of meaningful work (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012, Steger et al. 2012). For example, Lips-Wiersma & Wright's (2012) multidimensional construct of meaningful work incorporates the four key dimensions—unity with others, developing the inner self, serving others, and expressing full potential—and aims to capture tensions that exist between them. With regard to its nature, due to being grounded in the JCM, meaningful work is traditionally assumed to represent a positive stable job attitude. This view, however, has recently been challenged by research showing that meaningful work has an episodic and fluctuating nature (e.g., Bailey & Madden 2017, Mitra & Buzzanell 2017).

Empirical Research on Meaningful Work

In this section, we provide a selected review of the antecedents and outcomes of meaningful work, building on and extending the key findings of the earlier published reviews. While the review of the antecedents of meaningful work is structured around different types of working conditions, the review of outcomes of meaningful work focuses on discussing the bright and dark sides of meaningful work.

Antecedents of meaningful work. Given our focus on the context in which individuals work, we review findings concerning how the context within an organization and conditions of working influence meaningful work. We categorize these contextual antecedents of meaningful work into organization-specific, social context–related, job/occupation design–related, and employment-related working conditions. This structure emphasizes the multiple contexts that frame meaningful work using a perspective that is similar to decent work, which also is embedded in macrolevel, social, organizational, and job-related factors.

Organization-specific working conditions include organizational policies, practices, and climates that influence meaningful work. Several studies argue, and a few of them empirically demonstrate, that corporate social responsibility (CSR) positively influences meaningful work (e.g., Aguinis & Glavas 2019). Also, human resource practices, and particularly those aimed at

personal growth and development, enable greater meaningful work (e.g., Fletcher 2019). Meaningful work is fostered in organizations where there is a social-moral climate (Schnell et al. 2013), but it is challenged in organizations with high workplace incivility (Peng et al. 2020). Interestingly, organizational contexts characterized by the utilization of datafication systems (i.e., digital means of tracking worker activities) do not always hinder the experience of meaningful work: Such systems can also foster meaningful work by providing employees the means for self-reflection and development when designed in a way that allows customization and minimizes conflict between the aims of the systems and individuals' values (Stein et al. 2019).

Social context–related working conditions include relational aspects of the work context that influence meaningful work. Individuals make sense of their work and can experience meaningfulness through interpreting interpersonal cues they received from other people at work as they provide important information about their worth at work (Wrzesniewski et al. 2003). Also, an individual's social network at work provides resources, which influence the likelihood of achieving various meaning-related goals of the individuals and, thus, can allow them to experience meaningful work (Roberson 2019). Meaningful work is fostered in social contexts that provide opportunities for individuals to engage in positive work relationships (e.g., Colbert et al. 2016), have rewarding coworker connections (e.g., Fouché et al. 2017), and experience a sense of belonging (e.g., Pratt & Ashforth 2003). Leaders also matter for the experiences of meaningful work as they communicate organizational mission and purpose, serving as "architects of meaning" (Carton 2018). Leaders who manifest servant (Cai et al. 2018), ethical (Demirtas et al. 2017), or responsible (Lips-Wiersma et al. 2020) behaviors enable greater experiences of meaningful work, whereas leaders who mistreat and/or abuse their employees (Rafferty & Restubog 2011) and disconnect them from important social relationships (Bailey & Madden 2016) seriously challenge the possibility for individuals to experience meaningful work.

Job/occupation design–related working conditions include research and theory focusing on how the design features of one's job and the experiences of working in diverse occupations influence meaningful work. Jobs that allow higher levels of autonomy, task significance, skill variety, task identity, and feedback from the job (e.g., Humphrey et al. 2007) and provide challenging work demands (e.g., Kim & Beehr 2020) enable greater experiences of meaningful work. Furthermore, jobs that have a relational architecture (i.e., "the structural properties of work that shape employees' opportunities to connect and interact with other people") allow employees to connect with and impact beneficiaries of their work and, therefore, to experience greater meaningfulness in their work (Grant 2007, p. 396; Grant et al. 2007). In contrast, working in jobs that create a sense of alienation, powerlessness, disconnection, or devaluation (Bailey & Madden 2019, Lepisto & Pratt 2017) challenges the possibility for workers to experience meaningful work. Similarly, several studies point to the harmful influence of doing repetitive tasks or unnecessary tasks (e.g., Isaksen 2000, Mäkikangas et al. 2021).

Similar to examining how job design influences meaningful work, researchers have been exploring how specificities of occupational context or one's position in an organization impact experiences of meaningful work [e.g., Mitra & Buzzanell (2017), who study practitioners in the area of environmental sustainability, and Frémeaux & Pavageau (2022), who study leaders]. A modest portion of this research has explicitly studied meaningful work in the context of low-status work (for a review, see Laaser & Bolton 2021) and specifically so-called dirty work—work that is physically, socially, or morally tainted (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999, 2013)—such as the work of refuse collectors, stonemasons (Bailey & Madden 2017), and animal shelter workers (Schabram & Maitlis 2017). These studies find that in all these occupational contexts, individuals can experience their work as meaningful or meaningless.

Employment-related working conditions include nature (gig work, self-employment, etc.) and conditions of employment that influence meaningful work. The experience of work as meaningful is limited in working conditions characterized by job insecurity (e.g., Arnoux-Nicolas et al. 2016) and fostered in the conditions of fair compensation and workload distribution (Lips-Wiersma et al. 2020). Several studies focused explicitly on how experiences of meaningful work are challenged by working in the context of digital gig or platform work (e.g., Kost et al. 2018). Underemployment was also found to be a barrier to experiencing meaningful work (Allan et al. 2020b, Kim & Allan 2020). One complex example concerns employment as entrepreneurs, which could enable individuals pursuing meaningful work (Lysova & Khapova 2019) while also creating conditions of underpayment, unhealthy work pursuits, and demands for self-sacrifices (Dempsey & Sanders 2010).

Outcomes of meaningful work. Meaningful work is found to have benefits for both individuals and organizations.[3] With regard to employees, experiencing meaningful work is positively related to such work-related attitudinal outcomes as organizational commitment (e.g., Steger et al. 2012); work and personal engagement (e.g., May et al. 2004); job satisfaction (e.g., Steger et al. 2012); and flourishing, that is, psychological well-being reflecting feelings of competence, having positive relationships, and having purpose in life (Kim & Beehr 2020). Higher levels of meaningful work are also associated with lower intentions to quit (e.g., Arnoux-Nicolas et al. 2016) and lower absenteeism (Soane et al. 2013). These findings are supported by a recent meta-analysis on outcomes of meaningful work, showing that meaningful work has moderate to large correlations with many of the abovementioned work-related attitudes (Allan et al. 2019). For organizations, the benefits of meaningful work take the form of increased in-role (e.g., Fürstenberg et al. 2021) and extrarole (e.g., Allan et al. 2019) behaviors (e.g., organizational citizenship behavior), employee creativity (e.g., Cohen-Meitar et al. 2009), and innovation (e.g., Cai et al. 2018). Although much of the research on the outcomes of meaningful work studied its benefits, there is limited but growing research acknowledging the dark side of meaningful work manifested in negative effects on one's well-being (e.g., Allan et al. 2020a), work–family conflicts (e.g., Oelberger 2019), and other personal sacrifices (e.g., Bunderson & Thompson 2009). These adverse effects can be explained by higher levels of work devotion of individuals experiencing their work as deeply meaningful (Oelberger 2019).

Concluding Observations on Meaningful Work

As this selected review shows, meaningful work is likely to continue to be an important and valuable characteristic of work. What stands out is that, despite there being some general agreement on what is meaningful work, uncertainty on its exact conceptualization remains a challenge. Another observation concerns the context in which the reviewed empirical studies are conducted. First, the majority of these studies are conducted in the United States, followed by several studies in Western Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, and then by only a few studies from the other parts of the world. This draws attention to the necessity to have more diverse culture-representative research on the antecedents and outcomes of meaningful work. Addressing this shortcoming is not only promising for understanding diverse experiences of meaningful work; it also triggers a much-needed focus on how societal-level factors (and culture specifically) shape these experiences

[3] For a more detailed overview of the outcomes of meaningful work, see Bailey et al.'s (2019b) literature review and Allan et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis.

(Lysova et al. 2019). Second, although we have reviewed several papers that study meaningful work in the context of work and occupations that are precarious, low status, and/or dirty, this research remains limited, as is the research focusing on marginalized, minoritized, or invisible workers. Similarly, comparatively less empirical research has examined which factors at the level of organizations enable or inhibit opportunities for employees to experience meaningful work. Lastly, although much of the research on meaningful work has focused on the antecedents of meaningful work, research studying diverse subjective and objective outcomes of meaningful work remains limited, particularly scholarship that explores the dark side or double-edged sword nature of meaningful work. One potentially fruitful path in responding to these notable limitations is to integrate decent work and meaningful work, which we discuss next.

Decent Work and Meaningful Work: An Integrative Review

In this section, we aim to provide an integrative review of decent work and meaningful work, with particular attention to the conceptualization of these constructs and empirical research that has examined the relationship between them. We build on a limited but growing research base connecting the two constructs and offer a thorough vision of how the two constructs are connected, with a particular focus on how system-level factors may influence this integration.

Conceptualization and Empirical Research

Conceptual contributions that have been informed by PWT have explored the interface between decent work and meaningful work, assuming that the two constructs are conceptually different (Duffy et al. 2016, Lysova et al. 2019). Specifically, decent work reflects basic workplace conditions to which all employees are entitled, whereas meaningful work is seen as a more aspirational work condition oriented toward experiencing a sense of significance. Many structural, organizational, and individual factors can influence the promotion of meaningful work, and experiencing decent work should be considered a primary antecedent condition for work meaningfulness.

Some scholars note that decent work and meaningful work are likely to be conceptually different, yet do not elaborate on the difference (Yeoman et al. 2019a). However, there are also scholars who view meaningful work as a core part of their conceptualization of decent work (Seubert et al. 2021). Other scholars argue that job security and sufficient wages, which are inherent in the decent work conceptualization, are "core aspects of meaningful work" (May et al. 2014, p. 654) and that these "basic moral conditions" must be met by organizations and institutions to enable opportunities for workers to pursue meaningful work (Michaelson et al. 2014, p. 84). Grounded in PWT logic and growing empirical research discussed below, we favor the distinct construct argument, where decent work is seen to provide basic requirements for creating opportunities to experience meaningfulness in one's work.

A limited but growing amount of empirical work has primarily or secondarily examined the relationship between decent work and meaningful work in relatively wealthy countries. For example, eight of the studies that investigated decent work cross-culturally examined how well each of the five components of decent work predicted meaningful work [Buyukgoze-Kavas & Autin 2019 (Turkey), Di Fabio & Kenny 2019 (Italy), Dodd et al. 2019 (United Kingdom), Duffy et al. 2018 (United States), Ferreira et al. 2019 (Portugal), Nam & Kim 2019 (South Korea), Ribeiro et al. 2019 (Brazil), Vignoli et al. 2020 (France)]. Across all studies, at least two components were significant predictors, with values complementary to the organization being the most common individual predictor, followed by safety and access to health care.

Other studies that examined the relation between the two constructs found that decent work is moderately/strongly correlated with meaningful work (effects ranging from 0.40 to 0.53; Isik et al.

2019, Kashyap & Arora 2020). Allan et al.'s (2020a) study showed that these constructs also relate longitudinally: Decent work positively predicted meaningful work, and positive changes in decent work (e.g., work becoming more decent) predicted positive changes in meaningful work (work becoming more meaningful). They also found that community belonging partially explained why decent work related to meaningful work and that helping others partially explained why changes in decent work predicted changes in meaningful work. This study offers a theory-consistent explanation that decent work may promote feelings of meaningfulness because it offers a space to connect with others and contribute to society. In sum, the reviewed empirical studies show that decent work and meaningful work are related yet not overlapping constructs and that they relate to each other indirectly as well as longitudinally.

A Conceptual Framework Integrating Decent Work and Meaningful Work

Relying on the insights from the focused reviews on decent work and meaningful work as well as on their integrative review, we propose a conceptual framework that aims to further integrate the two constructs (see **Figure 1**) and to offer instructive ideas for future research, policy advocacy, and organizational practice. This framework builds on the basic premise of PWT that decent work is an antecedent of meaningful work, yet it provides opportunities for more complex connections between the two constructs. As **Figure 1** reflects, decent work connects to meaningful work through need satisfaction (i.e., survival, social contribution, and self-determination). In addition, societal context, working conditions, and individual strategies not only influence decent work and meaningful work separately but also have implications for the whole process of decent work contributing to meaningful work.

With regard to the latter, **Figure 1** puts forward that the most substantive responsibility for enabling decent work and meaningful work lies in the hands of society, where societal interventions aimed at reducing economic constraints and marginalization are needed. As an example, systemic interventions and policies that provide full employment in decent jobs would be a powerful and effective societal intervention. Moreover, legal protections against abuse, bullying, racism, sexism, and other forms of denigrating workers would be another exemplar of interventions that can take place at the societal level. Organizations also have the responsibility for creating working conditions in which employees perceive their work as decent work and experience meaningfulness in it. This responsibility is not only in the interest of the worker but also in the interest of the organization. Creating working conditions that foster decent work and meaningful work reflects the social responsibility of the organization, engaging in which could showcase its caring approach, enhance its reputation, and provide a return on investment through increases in employee productivity, satisfaction, and retention. As our review shows, these working conditions can be (*a*) organization-specific, (*b*) social context–related, (*c*) job/occupation design–related, and (*d*) employment-related. Relevant interventions for these working conditions include (*a*) strategic organizational practices, (*b*) leader–follower and collegial relationships, (*c*) structure and occupational nature of the job performed, and (*d*) the quality of one's employment.

Finally, individuals can engage in agentic actions to create some opportunities for experiencing meaningfulness, although they may find work not to be completely decent. However, their ability to take responsibility for experiencing one's work as decent work and then meaningful is limited by circumstances (being a single parent, having a disability, asylum status, etc.). Therefore, the model depicted in **Figure 1** aims to capture the relative extent to which societal context, working conditions, and individual strategies have the power to make a significant difference in the experiences of decency and meaningfulness in work, ranging from high (societal context) to low (individual strategies). In the following section, we utilize the cases of three fictional people described in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Vignettes of lived experiences of decent work and meaningful work

Vignette 1: Deepak	Deepak is a 35-year-old data scientist living in Mumbai, India, who is currently working in a software development company; he is happily married and has a 6-year-old daughter. He chose software engineering as a career to honor his parents, who wanted him to pursue a stable and high-paying occupation in India's growing computer industry. Deepak works very long hours and often has to be available at unusual times to meet virtually with colleagues. Although he does not find much meaning in what he does at work (such as writing programming code), he values many of the outcomes, including the pay, the job security, the relationships he has forged, and his parents' pride in his success. These rewards, however, do not compensate for Deepak's deep sense of dread on Sunday evenings as he approaches another exhausting workweek. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced him to work from home, leaving him feeling lonely and isolated.
Vignette 2: Kisha	Kisha is a 55-year-old Black woman living in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia (USA). Throughout most of her early work life, Kisha struggled to gain a foothold in the labor market, given the considerable obstacles of intergenerational poverty, a lack of social and human capital, and the ongoing racism adversely impacting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in the United States. Kisha has three children, two of whom are in college and one who is in high school. She has been divorced for 15 years, which initially challenged her capacity to survive financially. Twelve years ago, Kisha attended a local state university to study nursing, which is a field that she has been interested in since her youth. She had envisioned a life in a medically oriented helping profession because of her desire to care for people and her hopes for a job that offers security, stability, a living wage, and health benefits. She graduated 7 years ago with a bachelor's degree in nursing and is now an emergency department nurse in the local community hospital. Kisha's job had offered her considerable meaning, given her calling for helping others and for the practice of nursing in crises. However, she has found her job to be far less rewarding since the COVID-19 pandemic began, which has resulted in escalating stress and growing staff shortages. She has been asked to work 12-hour shifts and is also experiencing psychological grief and trauma from working with so many critically ill patients suffering from COVID-19. Kisha does not feel supported by her supervisors and views the administration of the hospital as caring only about its income and reputation as opposed to its patients and staff. She is considering leaving nursing because of the increasingly harsh work conditions.
Vignette 3: Siobhan	Siobhan is a 42-year-old woman who works at a call center in a suburb outside of Dublin, Ireland. Siobhan is married to Sophie and has four children, who are the center of her life. She elected to engage in market work when her wife became disabled in her nursing assistant job, and has since struggled to find work that pays a sufficient wage to support their family. Siobhan felt that she did not have marketable skills when she began looking for work 6 years ago, and settled for a job at the call center, which is close to their home. Both Siobhan's and Sophie's parents prefer that Siobhan not work outside the home because of her extensive parenting responsibilities. Although Siobhan values being able to contribute to her family, she finds the work at the call center degrading, especially when dealing with rude customers and supervisors. The work conditions at the call center are also a source of distress for Siobhan; the employees are closely monitored and they often receive direct (and, at times, abusive) criticisms from supervisors and customers. Moreover, the job is not highly secure, and workers are often fired with little forewarning or clear rationale. In addition, the call center does not provide benefits for the staff and offers only the minimal benefits for workers that are required by the Irish government. Prior to her marriage to Sophie, Siobhan was attending art school and had some interest in graphic design; however, she did not complete the program because of her parental responsibilities. At this point, Siobhan does not feel confident in her design or art skills; in fact, her overall view of work is that it is a necessity that she wishes would just disappear.

The table summarizes their lived experiences of decent work and meaningful work, showing that work matters and has a deep and pervasive impact on their lives. We also discuss the implications for policy and practice for each of the three aforementioned factors, which are summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2 Implications for practice

Factors that put things in action	Implications
Societal context	Implementing structural changes that lower the proportion of individuals experiencing economic constraints and marginalization with actions ranging from providing equal access to high-quality education and resources to protecting all spheres of workers' lives
	Developing laws, regulations, and policies that minimize the risk of discrimination or mistreatment and foster inclusion within the workplace
Working conditions	Pursuing business and work interactions on ethical principles and embedding social responsibility with the strategy, routine, and operations of organizations
	Fostering positive and high-quality relationships in the workplace
	Providing opportunities for work enrichment
	Enhancing the quality of work–life balance, especially for those in precarious and insecure work contexts
Individual strategies	Exercising agency through engaging in job crafting and occupational ideological techniques and practices
	Pursuing advocacy strategies such as resistance and activism

Societal context. Society at large sets the conditions whereby a proportion of individuals have access to decent work and meaningful work. The economic conditions, history, laws, and employment opportunities within a particular society represent the foundational pieces of our framework that make available decent work and meaningful work. These larger structural forces determine the proportion of individuals who are experiencing economic constraints and marginalization that limit access to decent work. As such, we contend that the primary avenue to opening up access to decent work and meaningful work is to make substantive structural changes. This starts with providing equal access to high-quality education and other resources (such as access to health care, stable housing) that enable individuals to acquire the human capital and social capital that is needed for securing their employment. Economic constraints can also be addressed by establishing living wages for workers (Carr et al. 2016, Smith 2015), contesting neoliberal policies (McWhirter & McWha-Hermann 2021), enhancing worker protections (Blustein et al. 2019), and restoring labor union power (Brewster & Molina 2021).

Although connected to the problem of economic constraints, reducing experiences of marginalization requires societies to advocate for and develop policies that minimize the risk of discrimination or mistreatment and foster acceptance within the workplace (on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). Broadly, these efforts could involve macro policies aimed at reducing oppression (McWhirter & McWha-Hermann 2021) or raising questions about the focus on work to the exclusion and neglect of other life roles and responsibilities (Brewster & Molina 2021). More specific policies may include, for example, establishing mandated national quotas for women's representation on boards, potentially reducing the gender inequality in pay (Maume et al. 2019), and advocating that companies publicly measure diversity and disclose the progress toward their self-set diversity goals (Klettner et al. 2016).

The previously mentioned systemic changes can be of great importance for providing opportunities to experience more decency and meaningfulness in work and quality in the lives of Deepak, Kisha, and Siobhan, described in **Table 1**. For example, creating clear and enforceable policies on living wages and workers' rights would enhance the lives of both Kisha and Siobhan. Similarly, Deepak's work and life could be improved by creating social protection policies that are aimed at caring for workers' health through fostering safe and work–life balanced working conditions.

Working conditions. The role of organizations in contributing to the decency and meaningfulness of work lies in creating working conditions that allow for the presence of such psychological

experiences. With regard to organization-specific working conditions, interventions aimed at creating an ethical or socially moral climate seem to be particularly promising. For example, organizations could set a course toward embedding CSR within their strategy, routines, and operations, which enables employees to feel their organizations are authentic in their desire to care for them and treat them fairly, contributing to the satisfaction of employees' social contribution needs and the greater experiences of meaningful work (Aguinis & Glavas 2019). However, when implementing CSR within an organization, CSR optimally should reflect what individuals find meaningful (Girschik et al. 2022, Lysova et al. 2019). With regard to social context–related working conditions, organizations may want to invest in fostering the development of positive work relationships (for some practical suggestions, see Lee et al. 2020), which can then contribute to the experiences of decent work, as these work relationships would enable satisfaction of social contribution and self-determination needs and then the greater experience of work as meaningful (Colbert et al. 2016, Roberson 2019).

With regard to job/occupation design–related work conditions, organizations could focus on enriching jobs with autonomy and redesigning their relational structure to let employees see their impact on their beneficiaries (Grant 2007, Lepisto & Pratt 2017). This would then contribute to perceptions of decent work, as these job redesigns would enable satisfaction of both social contribution and self-determination needs, fostering meaningful work. Finally, with regard to employment-related working conditions, organizations may want to enhance the quality of work–life balance for precarious workers; for example, in the case of gig work, the platforms may allow gig workers to unionize or to take more control over their work process (Meijerink & Keegan 2019). In so doing, organizations could contribute to workers' experiences of decent work through satisfying their survival needs and self-determination needs, further contributing to meaningful work. Overall, these organizational efforts should secure safe and pleasant physical conditions to conduce decent work and meaningful work.

Returning to the stories of Deepak, Kisha, and Siobhan, the organizations they work in, like many across the globe, have the potential to facilitate or frustrate fundamental strivings for decent work and meaningful work. For example, creating policies and practices that aim to support work–family balance (for Deepak), help individuals cope with work stress (for Kisha), or build resilience in dealing with rude customers (for Siobhan) is an example of how their organizations could take more responsibility for enabling decent work and meaningful work. Also, creating working conditions that provide relational support and positive work connections to address their current sense of loneliness (Deepak), stress (Kisha), and extensive control (Siobhan) can contribute to experiencing their work as decent and meaningful. The working lives of these three workers could also be improved by providing greater job security (Siobhan), more autonomy (Deepak and Siobhan), or more resources to cope with intensified work (Kisha).

Individual strategies. Workers themselves could attempt to exercise agency in shaping their perceptions of decent work and meaningful work. To the extent that their work context allows this, employees can engage "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work," such as task crafting (i.e., altering the number, scope, or type of job tasks), relational crafting (i.e., altering the quality and/or amount of interaction with others in one's job), and/or cognitive crafting (i.e., altering how one views one's job) (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001, p. 179). Engaging in various job crafting behaviors may be used by workers to address their powerlessness (Bailey & Madden 2019) and find meaningfulness in "a hopeless [work]place" (Kost et al. 2018, p. 108). Job crafting could enable individuals to satisfy those psychological needs that are not addressed by their current work design, compensating for the lack of perceived work decency and contributing to their experience of work as meaningful.

However, infusing the decent work perspective into existing discourses about meaningful work forces a reckoning with broad systemic factors that shape the core parameters of work conditions, which may be above and beyond the reach of job design. In the case of Siobhan, her abusive supervisors coupled with the lack of stability in her job might attenuate the positive influence of a job design intervention. Similarly, Deepak's striving for greater work–life balance and Kisha's struggle to maintain the gains that she has worked so hard for might be transformed by policies that protect a balanced and sustainable life.

In the context of dirty, precarious, and low-status work, which could provide limited opportunities for autonomy needed to engage in job crafting (Laaser & Bolton 2021), individuals may engage in such occupational ideological techniques and practices as reframing (i.e., transforming the meaning ascribed to one's dirty work), recalibrating (i.e., adjusting one's perceptions and evaluations of standards of work to be less based on undesired aspects of dirty work), and refocusing (i.e., shifting attention from the tainted features of work to the nontainted features) to view their work as significant and honorable (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999, 2013). For example, Deery et al. (2019) demonstrated how workers specializing in the cleaning of abandoned apartments in high-crime areas reframed their dirty work into the work that needs "stamina and strength" and due to its dangerous nature confers honor and pride. Furthermore, much of the experiences of meaningful work in indecent contexts could be enabled through workers relating to their peers, building mutual recognition and respect with them (Bailey & Madden 2017, Laaser & Bolton 2021).

In addition to the abovementioned strategies, individuals may engage in other bottom-up but potentially controversial strategies that take the form of resistance (e.g., devaluating an employer or withdrawing one's discretionary effort for the firm; Bailey & Madden 2019) and activism aimed at addressing systemic problems that are left out from the organizational CSR agendas, thereby limiting experiences of decency and meaningfulness (Girschik et al. 2022). Engaging in these controversial strategies, however, could be less feasible due to a potential risk of losing a job that is secure and well-paid (Deepak), that is the only source of family income (Siobhan), or that cannot be given up as it is needed to be done in extreme COVID-19-created working conditions (Kisha).

Future Directions for Research

We summarize future research directions in **Table 3**, identifying themes and promising research questions that serve to explore and integrate decent work and meaningful work. These themes were selected to optimize the opportunity for future research to explore and map the space shared by decent work and meaningful work. A key objective of the research themes and questions is to stimulate research that will matter in changing the systems and institutions that function to differentially provide access for some to attain decent work and meaningful work, while others struggle in their work lives, often with great hardships.

The first research theme focuses on exploring the connection between decent work and meaningful work, which has been investigated sparingly to date. For example, research that identifies and empirically studies the factors that mediate and moderate the relationships between these two constructs would be particularly informative. Here, scholars can draw on insights provided by the review of the two separate literatures, exploring, for example, how working conditions discussed in the meaningful work literature can inform the decent–meaningful work connection and vice versa.

Another question that merits exploration is assessing whether and, if so, how it might be possible to experience meaningful work that is not decent. One of our central propositions is that meaningful work builds from decent work for most people, as decent work allows for basic need satisfaction that sets the stage for work to be experienced as meaningful. But there is likely a segment of the workforce who experience their work as meaningful but not decent. These

Table 3 Future research directions

Research areas	Potential research questions
Explore the connection between decent work and meaningful work	How do people understand decent work and meaningful work and their relations with each other? What factors shape their subjective experiences?
	What other mechanisms, aside from psychological need satisfaction, link decent work and meaningful work?
	Which human resources policies and practices shape the relationship between decent work and meaningful work?
	How do responsible practices of organizations (e.g., corporate social responsibility, sustainable human resource management) contribute to connecting decent work and meaningful work?
	How do different working conditions (e.g., job design, social context) interact to enable decent work and meaningful work?
	Does the connection between decent work and meaningful work exist at the level of teams?
	What are the most salient work conditions that foster access to decent work and meaningful work?
	What types of individuals may have meaningful but not decent work?
Explore decent and meaningful work in diverse organizational and professional contexts	How does precarious work shape access to decent and meaningful work?
	How is decent work and meaningful work experienced in similar or different ways in the context of profit and nonprofit organizations, in the context of working within an organization, or in the context of one's own company, self-employment?
	How are decent work and meaningful work experienced by white-, blue-, and pink-collar workers?
	How are decent work and meaningful work experienced in understudied (e.g., stigmatized occupations, low-status work) and new professional settings (e.g., gig work, platform-based work)?
	How do people resist or proactively attempt to impact indecent work conditions that may also deprive them of meaningful work? What factors within and outside of the context of their organization/work support them in these efforts?
Integrate macrolevel constructs with decent and meaningful work	What role do the International Labour Organization's decent work economic indicators play in facilitating decent work and meaningful work?
	How do racism and other forms of marginalization affect access to decent work and meaningful work?
	How do views of worker protections influence how people manage indecent work conditions that may also deprive them of meaningful work?
	How do worker organizations (such as labor unions or professional associations) play a role in fostering access to decent work and meaningful work?
	To what extent are people critically aware of the social and economic factors that contribute to privilege for some and oppression for others?
	How can we use societal-level data (e.g., countrywide economic indicators, geographic information system mapping, school system performance) to explain individual experiences of decent work and meaningful work?
Expand the array of research methods, disciplines, and constructs used to study decent work and meaningful work and related work conditions	How can diverse disciplines work together to understand the antecedents and outcomes of decent work and meaningful work?
	To what extent is workplace dignity related to decent work and meaningful work?
	What are the theoretical linkages among the various work contexts that shape people's work lives?
	Which outcomes of decent work and meaningful work should be studied to make the two concepts relevant for managers and organizations?

(*Continued*)

Table 3 (*Continued*)

Research areas	Potential research questions
Explore culture and intersectionality	How does culture inform our understanding of decent work and meaningful work?
	What cultural factors are most salient in understanding decent work and meaningful work?
	How do diverse social identities intersect with each other and with working contexts to shape access to decent work and meaningful work?
	How do structural barriers and systemic forces collude to intersect and shape decent work and meaningful work?
Identify interventions that enhance decent work and meaningful work	What systemic, organizational, and individual interventions are maximally effective in promoting decent work and meaningful work?
	What are the most effective strategies that can be used to shape public opinion about decent work and meaningful work?
	What interventions are most useful in fostering critical reflection and critical action that can empower people and communities to advocate for decent work and meaningful work?

would be workers who may be engaged in highly meaningful work where—for example—the conditions of that work may be unsafe, lack adequate compensation, or require extremely long and taxing hours. Common examples may be musicians, artists, and zookeepers (e.g., Bunderson & Thompson 2009). However, it will be imperative to understand what types of individuals are more likely to engage in meaningful work but not decent work and vice versa. It may be that being able to prioritize meaning over decency is afforded only to those who have the privilege of meeting their basic needs via other avenues (e.g., parental financial support, health care received from a spouse's employment). **Figure 2** provides examples of the interplay of the different levels of decent work and meaningful work on the low–high continuum.

What is more, unlike meaningful work, decent work as a concept initially relied on a priori standards, with only a handful of studies actually gathering input from working people on what they consider decent. Therefore, it is important to understand how people subjectively experience

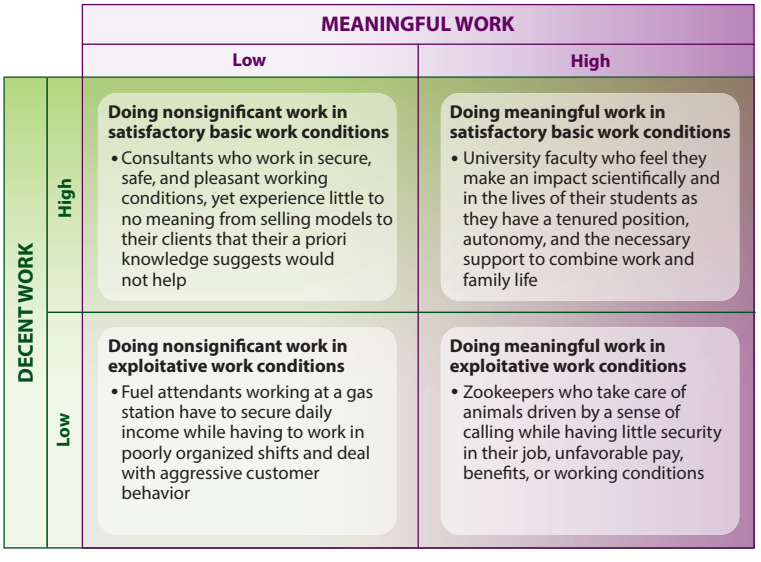

Figure 2

Examples of the interplay of different degrees of decent work and meaningful work.

decent work and meaningful work, as well as the relationship between them. Optimally, this line of inquiry can inform further theory development on decent work and meaningful work as well as institutional and policy reforms that will enhance the quality of work.

The second research theme highlights the need to understand how decent work and meaningful work are understood and experienced in diverse organizational and professional contexts. For example, the bulk of conceptualizations and understandings of meaningful work has been imbued with values from traditional management and professional fields that have not sufficiently included workers who are less visible and empowered. By bringing decent work and meaningful work together, it is important to give voice to and build on ideas from the lived experiences of diverse (and understudied) working people across the globe as they would provide a useful and yet underexplored contextualized understanding of decent work and meaningful work. Here, attention should be also paid to the behaviors and practices individuals engage in to deal with indecent working conditions that may also undermine their experience of work as meaningful. Lastly, with the rise of digital labor platform work that often falls short of decent income and work conditions (ILO 2021), research exploring how both decent work and meaningful work are experienced in and shaped by these work settings would be informative. The abovementioned research directions, in our view, have the potential to guide theory, practice, and policy development and would be particularly useful in bringing in perspectives that have been neglected in existing research.

The third research theme advocates for multilevel modeling as a tool for integrating macrolevel constructs in formulations and studies about decent work and meaningful work. PWT provides a useful exemplar of a theory that foregrounds economic constraints and marginalization, which reflect two of the most powerful macrolevel factors in the working context. Yet the vast majority of research using this framework has relied on gathering data from individuals themselves. It seems promising to blend economic, political, historical, and social factors into studies that connect individual work experiences to such factors as access to opportunity, employment/unemployment levels, political changes, and climate-based issues. Baranik et al.'s (2022) recent study provides an exemplar of thoughtful integration of macrolevel and psychologically oriented perspectives on decent work.

The fourth research theme is built around the expansion of research methods, disciplines, and constructs that are used to study decent work and meaningful work. This expansive lens would encompass new research designs (such as more time-lagged longitudinal studies, critical qualitative research) and constructs (such as workplace dignity and precarity) that can expand the purview of research to include work conditions that are related to decent work and meaningful work. For instance, qualitative research that incorporates prolonged or immersed engagement with understudied contexts and worker populations seems to be particularly promising. By expanding the scope of work conditions, more inclusive theoretical models can be developed that more realistically capture the complexity of contemporary work. In addition, we propose that integrating decent work and meaningful work can foster greater interdisciplinary research, including by economists, sociologists, and labor scholars who can add new ideas and vantage points to future research. Through interdisciplinary research, it would be possible for scholars to identify methodological tools to integrate macro- and psychological-level variables. Researchers may also wish to take a more critical perspective toward studying decent work and meaningful work (see also calls by Bailey et al. 2019a and Blustein et al. 2016) or toward their role as researchers (for an example of researchers acting as intellectual activists, see Girschik et al. 2022).

The fifth research theme focuses on culture and intersectionality, which reflect important contexts for future research. Exploring how decent work and meaningful work are embedded in cultural understandings is essential in designing the conceptualization of these constructs that are relevant to diverse communities. Intersectionality, which refers to the complex matrices that

connect structural barriers and social identities (e.g., Moradi & Grzanka 2017), is an essential concept that can drive future research. Applying intersectionality in all its possible forms (e.g., race, culture, age, geography, industry) to decent work and meaningful work would support research that examines the broad and interconnected ways that privilege and oppression are manifested in decent work and meaningful work.

The final research theme is devoted to investigations of the effectiveness of interventions designed to foster decent work and meaningful work. In a recent exemplar of a project designed to foster meaningful work, Fletcher & Schofield (2021) designed and evaluated a group intervention coupled with homework assignments that yielded promising findings in promoting work meaningfulness. Building on Fletcher & Schofield, we encourage individual, work-based, and societal interventions that can provide useful insights into how to facilitate decent work and meaningful work; in turn, the evaluation studies will provide new insights into the nature of these two constructs.

CONCLUSION

As reflected in this review, decent work and meaningful work are important pillars of the work lives of people around the globe. However, most working people currently (and in the past) do not have access to decent work or meaningful work. Given the hardships that so many face in their lives, we argue that change-oriented knowledge and practices are needed that will make a difference for people, communities, and organizations. We hope that the literature and conceptual framework this article has presented inspire readers to consider ways to focus efforts on improving work conditions, particularly for the vast majority of working people who are on the margins of decent and meaningful work.

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