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SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER'S THESIS

**FINDING MEANING AT WORK: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A WAY
OF ACHIEVING HIGHER MEANINGFULNESS**

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AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

The undersigned Blaž Abe, a student at the University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business (hereafter: SEB LU), author of this written final work of studies with the title Finding meaning at work: Entrepreneurship as a way of achieving higher meaningfulness prepared under the supervision of izr. prof. dr. Matej Černe.

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INTRODUCTION

Why do you wake up in the morning, start working and then repeat that your whole life? One could quickly come up with some answers to a presumably obvious question. However, in the last several decades, how we work, where we work, and when we work have altered substantially (Borman, Ilgen & Klimoski, 2003). Work has always been essential for our survival, but our perceptions of it have changed throughout history. Before the Industrial Revolution, farmers, craftsmen, and merchants all had heavy responsibilities and the autonomy to face new challenges every day (Schwartz, 2015). Occupations define people, which is the reason why the surnames of many still refer to the work they have done, e.g., Smith – a person who works with metal (Standing, 2010). Today, we are past industrialization, faced with new work challenges in a globalized and dehumanized world of increasingly technological culture. “We live in a world where there is more and more information and less and less meaning,” claimed Baudrillard (1994, p. 79). The ways to cope with the work domain of our lives have been widely discussed in different disciplines, religions, and schools of thought. Based on the legacy of neurologist, psychiatrist, and philosopher Viktor Frankl, finding your why in the complexity of this world and the variety of roles assigned to an individual in an organizational context is the way to meaningful work. Researching meaning is intriguing, as it is relative and unique to every individual and his or her life or work setting (Von Devivere, 2018).

It is human nature to try to make meaning around the given information and context (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). We spend most of our lives working, which makes the meaning of work a crucial part of assessing the meaning in our lives (Ward & King, 2017). Furthermore, people do not understand work just as a financial need but want their work to mean something more (Šverko & Vizek-Vidović, 1995). The emergence of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihaly, 2014) and its further developments (Cameron & Dutton, 2003; Luthans, 2002; Wong, 2014) have increased the research on the meaning of the work as a factor contributing to the happiness and well-being of an individual. There is substantial proof that the discussion about the meaning of work is necessary, as it has appeared to influence some crucial outcomes in the field of organizational behavior (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010), namely job satisfaction (Kamdrón, 2005), work motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway & McKee, 2007), engagement (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004), and a variety of psychological and physical health benefits (Ward & King, 2017).

Generally, the meaning of work is defined as employees’ understanding of what they do and what significance they attribute to it (Wrzesniewski, Dutton & Debebe, 2003). However, the research on the topic of the meaning of work is not unified and is divided into a diverse array of studies. There are various interpretations of the meaning of work; thus, it is difficult to piece fragmented research together and explain it as a single phenomenon (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). At this point, it is noteworthy to point out the difference between meaning and meaningfulness. Meaning is always present, and we can not make sense

without it. Meaningfulness, therefore, refers to the significance and positive valence we attribute to work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003), thereby having more growth and purpose orientation (eudaimonic) rather than pleasure orientation (hedonic) focus (Steger, 2012). Similar to Wong (2014), Ward and King (2017) believe that the focus on the eudaimonic part has put the research on the meaning of work in an unfavorable position with a hint of esoteric and less important understanding for our everyday life experiences.

The meaning is relational (MacKenzie & Baumeister, 2014). In the case of work, that is the relationship between employer and employee. There are certain expectations on the side of the individual and on the side of the organization that needs to be fulfilled in accordance with the psychological contract (Schein, 1978). Organizations need to cope with the changing external environment to ensure competitive advantage (Burke, 2017), with the promotion of meaningful work being one of them. Organizational culture, leadership, recruitment, and job crafting have been recognized as features and processes to help sustain employee well-being (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). If employers and leaders are unable to provide a thriving environment, meaninglessness as the opposite of meaningfulness, can emerge (Bailey & Madden, 2016).

To the best of my knowledge, all the existing literature refers to the employee when it comes to assessing the meaning of work. Nonetheless, there are individuals, who self-organize their work, entrepreneurs being the prime example. If we go back into history, prior to the industrial revolution and modernization, the way people worked was more similar to entrepreneurs than to today's employees. As mentioned before, people were able to choose their work, overcome problems, and develop new skills (Schwartz, 2015) - all that is inherent in the nature of the entrepreneur. Namely, autonomy is a crucial ingredient for employee well-being and engagement at work (Gagne & Bhave, 2011). The lack of it limits changes to the work organization due to hierarchical structures (Harley, 1999).

The complexity of the modern world and the changing workplace make the demand for more meaningful work stronger than ever. Thus, this thesis aims to strengthen knowledge about the understanding of the principles of the meaning of work and related concepts to achieve higher levels of meaningfulness at work. Most particularly, I am interested in the way the meaning of work is perceived by entrepreneurs, whose work setting differs from the ones employees have. Differences between entrepreneurs' and employees' understanding can be useful for identifying factors and underlying mechanisms to create an environment that enhances meaningful work.

The goals of the thesis are:

- To bring more clarity to the understanding of the meaning of work
- To provide an overview of the underlying concepts behind the meaning of work for entrepreneurs and employees

- To compare and analyze the perception of the meaning of work of entrepreneurs and employees
- To test whether the greater potential of achieving meaningfulness can be achieved with entrepreneurship
- To determine the most important factors that fuel meaningfulness at work

The research questions of the thesis are:

Research question 1: Which factors contribute to the meaningfulness of work?

Research question 2: How is the meaning of work perceived by entrepreneurs?

Research question 3: What are the differences between the way entrepreneurs and employees perceive the meaning of work?

Research question 4: Do entrepreneurs or founders of organizations have a higher chance of achieving higher meaningfulness based on their unique freedom in the work context?

The theoretical part of the thesis is divided into three parts. In the first section, I defined meaning, the meaning of work, meaningfulness, and other key terms. Moreover, I list possible sources of the meaning of work and other related phenomena. In the second part, I look at happiness and meaning. I am interested in the underlying factors that establish their relationship and how they influence each other. On top of that, differences between positive and existential psychology are discussed. In the last part, I examined the potential for achieving meaningfulness at work. Namely, what drives meaninglessness as its opposite, and how can we achieve meaningful work via work redesign. Lastly, I present a model where two paths to achieve well-being are paved for employees and one for entrepreneurs.

The empirical part of the thesis consists of the methodology part, where I describe how the qualitative research was conducted. I perform 10 in-depth interviews for each of the two research samples, the first one consisting of entrepreneurs and the second one consisting of employees. The second part of the empirical research is the analysis of the collected data, using pattern-seeking and thematic analysis. In the end, I interpret the findings and answer the research questions in relation to the theory. Additionally, I list limitations and suggestions for future research before summing up the conclusion.

1 MEANING AND THE MEANING OF WORK

1.1 Defining meaning

People have always been asking themselves about meaning. The quest for meaning is what differentiates us from other beings. Meaning is a universal concept found in various disciplines and cultural settings, with each of them offering different definitions. The question of meaning is something essential we can find and talk about everywhere. It could be seen as an entity gluing together mental representations of things, events, and relationships around us, stretching from simple objects and ordinary everyday life events to the question of the meaning of life (MacKenzie & Baumeister, 2014).

Finding meaning is one of the central questions of humanity, regarded as one of the tools for imposing stability in life. People have the drive to develop a sense and make meaning out of the situation they are put into (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). One of the prime examples of this is the autobiographical work of Austrian psychiatrist, philosopher, and author Viktor Frankl (1985) on finding meaning in some of the toughest conditions possible. His work and idea of meaning is the primary motivation in life is widely believed to be the beginning of psychological research that put meaning at the center.

In one of the early contributions of meaning scholarship, Baumeister and Vohs (2002) identify the connection as “the essence of meaning.” Meaning is what unites entities of various kinds and can be formed with cognitive processing of meaning, therefore acknowledged only by the human mind. Meaning forms nonphysical reality that can help us manage our constantly changing physical reality, giving our lives a stable conception.

Meanwhile, it is easy to agree about the existence of some kind of meaning, but finding the right definition has proven to be troublesome, as many authors have already suggested (Brief & Nord, 1990; MOW, 1987; Super & Šverko, 1995). Research on meaning has been thriving in the last years, yet the authors are warning about oversimplification of a complex topic, which leads to the lack of a coherent identity in the field (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Heintzeman & King, 2014).

In the quest for meaning, some people prefer the existential perspective, which focuses more on the darker side of life, which includes suffering, loneliness, or death, as advocated by Yalom (1980). Contrary, positive psychology presents itself as the science of a good life and more pleasant experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Wong (2018) believes that the dual systems model of pleasant and unpleasant experiences works like yin and yang, combining the best of both worlds.

1.2 Meaning of work

People derive meaning from various sources, one of them being the workplace. Maslow (1971) argued that if the workplace is not perceived as meaningful and purposeful, people

will not use all their professional capacity at work. Work is an integral part and is becoming even more intertwined with our personal life, which explains the flourishing of the research on the meaning of work (Rapaport & Bailyn, 1998).

Meaning of work can be defined as a subjective kind of sense that people make of their work, although there are various definitions depending on the setting due to its connectedness across many disciplines. Meaning can be formulated based on an individual's perceptions (internally), socially (externally), or a combination of both (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). In the field of organizational behavior, the psychological perspective is prevailing, therefore focusing on an individual's subjective experiences, interactions, and interpretations (Baumeister, 1991; Brief & Nord, 1990; MOW, 1987; Wrzesniewski, 2003).

According to the psychological perspective, there are various sources upon which one can find meaning. Some researchers have identified it in work values (Brief & Nord, 1990; Nord, Brief, Atieh & Doherty, 1990), attitudes about work (Nord, Brief, Atieh & Dorossherty, 1990; Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999), work orientation (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003) or relative importance of work compared with other domains of life (Dubin, 1956) known as work centrality (MOW, 1987).

On the contrary, the sociological perspective assumes that people attribute or interpret meaning based on their social and cultural environment (Geertz, 1973). As mentioned earlier, the psychological perspective, encompassing factors directed towards the self, has been explored to a way greater extent than sociological. The research focused primarily on individual perspectives, and ignorance of community-based perspective could be hiding unexplored elements and reasons behind understanding the meaning of work (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

One of the main sociological perspectives on this topic is situated in the widely known work of Marx (1964), whose ideas have heavily influenced the interpretation of work relations in the last century. One of his main ideas was that capitalistic society prompts social alienation, which expresses in four types: of the worker from their product, from the act of production, and from other workers. Humans understanding of work in modern society has also been the subject of Weber's (1904) research, which analyzed the emerging bureaucratic model of organization and its emphasis on rationalization. Such an organization could achieve better efficiency and effectiveness; however, he pointed out the dangers of employees losing the sense of being part of the organization's mission.

1.3 Differentiating terms related to meaningful work

Throughout the history and development of human culture, meaning has been a source of religious, scientific, and in that sense, especially philosophical discussions. A broad spectrum of the topic and multifaceted interest in the human quest for meaning induce

various definitions and understandings. To avoid potential confusion and muddling regarding the terms in the sphere of meaning, it is necessary to elaborate on this topic.

As Wrzesniewski (2003) pointed out, the definition is often left to a reader's interpretation, who can perceive meaning as being part of the self, affected by external factors or in the social context. In the meaning of work research, authors often don't differentiate between the use terms "meaning of life" (Baumeister, 1991) and "meaning in life" (Steger, 2012). Similarly, the use of terms "meaning of work" (Ros, Schwartz & Surkiss, 1999), "meaning in work" (Wrzesniewski, 2003), and "meaning at work" (Holbeche & Springett, 2009) is used to describe the same phenomenon.

Writing a scientific article about meaning while not being completely certain if others will understand its true meaning is at least an alarm call, if not the irony. It is widely agreed that the concept of meaning in the work context has an important role; however, empirical certainty about its representation is still lacking (Kar & Elangovan, 2019). If there is anything to be said with certainty, research in various fields has shown that the meaning of work is a multi-level construct (Bailey & Madden, 2016).

Work can be deemed as positive, negative, or neutral, as is the case with every other assignment of meaning (Brief & Nord, 1990; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Positive meaning is referred to as being good for an individual in some way and demonstrates connectedness, belonging, broader purpose, and search for a positive change (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). In organizational behavior scholarship, meaning is predominantly associated with being positive (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

Another noteworthy distinction should be made between the terms "meaning" and "meaningfulness." Authors often do not differentiate between those two, which fuels confusion about the understanding and relation of the concepts. Stating that work has a meaning does not necessarily mean that work is meaningful. Positive meaning is often falsely attributed to the meaning, which is probably mistaken for meaningfulness. (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Pratt and Ashforth (2003) define meaningfulness as the amount of significance something holds for an individual. Furthermore, they have developed a model distinguishing between meaningfulness at work and meaningfulness at work linking the term meaningfulness to the concept of identity. The study of Kar and Elangovan (2019) offers some clarity by providing empirical research on the constructs "meaning in work" and "meaning at work," which have already been discussed by Pratt and Ashforth (2003) and Wrzesniewski (2003). The source for a psychological state of meaning in work is the self; meanwhile, the state of meaning at work is derived externally from the organizational community. Meaning in work relates to the question "what am I doing" when "where do I belong" refers to the meaning at work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). As has been stated before (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010), "meaning in work" and "meaning at work" are interconnected but divergent concepts, of which relative importance differs. Furthermore,

empirical evidence suggests a broader scope of understanding of the concept of “meaning at work.”

1.4 Alternative definition: job, career, or calling

Research by Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz (1997) has offered an alternative perspective on the meaning of work, which elaborates on how people tend to construct their relationship to work, not personal characteristics or job design. Their work has shown that people fit into three categories regarding their perception and connection to work: job, career, or calling. This categorization has already been suggested by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) and Schwartz (1987). Furthermore, their study has shown that people in a wide range of professions saw their work explicitly in that kind of way. Moreover, differences in respondents' views could not be attributed to demographic or occupational discrepancies.

People with job orientation see their work only as a means that allows them to pursue other activities outside their job, where they find joy and express their interests. They are interested in material benefits and do not see work as an end in itself. On the other hand, individuals with career orientation have a strong connection with their work and are deeply invested in it. Apart from financial compensation, it is important for those individuals to advance on the career ladder (Wrzesniewski, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997), which brings social prestige, increased power in one's profession, and higher self-esteem (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton 1985).

People with calling orientation see work as an end in itself. Their work and life are indivisible, thus stretching beyond monetary or social benefits. Individuals who report their job as a calling believe they have the power to change the world for the better and contribute to the greater good. The word “calling” comes from a religious context, as it was understood that one was “called” by God to do morally and socially momentous work (Weber, 1963). The religious relation may have lost its significance in the modern sense since work that people feel called is mostly seen as socially valuable (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997). Relationship with work is stronger and more gratifying in those with calling orientation, who spend more time at work but get more enjoyment and satisfaction from it (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997). Further studies have shown that people are trying to make their work significant and meaningful (Wrzesniewski, 1999; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Suggested orientations help explain how people see their work and how they optimize the design of their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001). The connection between the meaning of work and internal work motivation has already been highlighted in the Hackman and Oldham (1976) job characteristics model, which presents a motivational approach to job design. More recent research on the design of job tasks has also demonstrated that work

promoting a sense of purpose gives a higher amount of significance attributed to work (Grant, 2008).

1.5 Sources of meaning at work

What fuels meaning and meaningfulness have been a subject of various studies, which explore factors and their influence on the meaning of work. Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) presented four main sources of the meaning at work: the self, other persons, the work context, and spiritual life. Sources can provide us with an understanding of the processes behind the concept of the meaning of work. Based on that, we can analyze the processes through which they are produced, contributing to a better understanding of meaning is formed and understood.

1.5.1 Towards the self

It is tempting to think about a job or career change when we struggle at work. Although that might be a reasonable decision, the other way to look at it is through the lens of our own understanding of the situation. The self has been identified as an important factor determining our beliefs, attitude, and actions (Maslow, 2013).

Although it might sound weird, the concept of the self is often mentioned in research related to the meaning of work (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Rosenberg (1979) defined self-concept as “the totality of an employee’s thoughts and feelings that have reference to himself as an object” (p. 7). Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe (2003) suggested the two aspects of self-meaning. The first is when an employee recognizes the content of his or her job. The second is when an employee obtains the self-understanding about the assessment of the self in the work setting. Thus, a positive or a negative value can be attributed to the self at work. Additionally, in their literature review on the meaning of work, Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) divided the self as a source of values, motivation(s), and beliefs about work.

Nord, Brief, Atieh, and Doherty (1990, p. 21) defined work values as “the end states people desire and feel they ought to be able to realize through working’. The existing research confirms that values play an important role in forming one’s meaning of work (Brief & Nord, 1990). Work values alter based on the individual and are the reflection of the social norms, interpersonal relationships, and work experience. Furthermore, individuals might self-select professions that align with their values. Throughout work experiences, those values can even be strengthened (Locke & Taylor, 1991). In the meaning of work research, values are mostly considered as work values; however, also in the broader sense as part of the other life domains. In this area of research, values are used loosely and are often directly interchanged with the term meaning or the meaning of work, which prevents researchers from making

conclusions and calls for a more detailed examination of the values as a source of the meaning of work (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

One of the earliest attempts to connect the meaning of work and internal work motivation has been highlighted in the Hackman and Oldham (1976) job characteristics model, which defined internal work motivation as “the degree to which individual experiences positive internal feelings when performing effectively on the job” (Oldham, 1976, p. 559). Experienced meaningfulness of work is stated as one of the critical psychological states in order to achieve the outcome of internal work motivation. When employees find their work significant, challenging, and complete, they are more likely to experience greater internal motivation, as they feel their work has certain importance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980).

Motivation can be externally or internally driven, with intrinsic motivation being the most internally driven form (Deci & Ryan, 1975). When people experience intrinsic motivation, defined as “the desire to engage in an activity because one enjoys, or is interested in, the activity” (Sheldon, Turban, Brown, Barrick, & Judge, 2003), they understand it as work activities and their self coming together, which fuels meaningfulness (Shamir, 1991).

Some believe intrinsic motivation is triggered as a result of the expected congruence between one’s self-concept and a particular environment or activity that is perceived to be joyful, interesting, or satisfactory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Pinder, 1984). Others understand it in the experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their work, which is in accordance with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). On the contrary, the cognitive view suggests that intrinsic motivation comes from the perception of one being in the locus of control for their own behaviour (Calder & Staw, 1975). This view has the most prominence in the meaning of work literature (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

It has also been suggested that when people experience intrinsic motivation, they report finding harmony between the work they do and their self-concept, which fuels their meaningfulness (Cardador, Pratt, & Dane, 2006). Even if the work is not found to be enjoyable, people will experience it as intrinsically motivating and meaningful when there is a connection with self-concept elements (Shamir, 1991). However, Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) suggest the utilization of experimental or longitudinal research methods to clarify the causality or the co-occurrence.

One of the ways self shapes the meaning of work is through beliefs about the role of work in our lives. It can be divided into three subcategories: job involvement and work centrality, work orientation, and callings (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

Lodahl and Kejnar (1965) defined job involvement as “the degree to which a person is identified psychologically with his work or the importance of work in his total self-image.” Therefore, the more people are committed to the job, the more difficult it is to disconnect one from that job, which makes work more meaningful (Brown, 1996).

The concept of job involvement has often been confused and used interchangeably with the concept of work centrality. Meanwhile, job involvement is defined as one's engagement in a job, and work centrality is a distinct construct defined as the degree of importance of that job in one's life (Paullay, Alliger & Stone-Romero, 1994). In the work of centrality research, authors are occupied with the role of work in one's life, which gives them insights to assess the meaningfulness in work (MOW, 1987).

Meanwhile, research on work involvement (Kanungo, 1982) similarly explores the meaningfulness people find in their work. It shows the negative consequences of work centrality. Finding a significant amount of meaningfulness in your work could mean a greater overwhelming when a job is lost, or a person retires (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Price, 2000).

Work orientation is a broader concept than job involvement and work centrality, offering an alternative perspective about people's beliefs about work in general rather than specific work they do at the time (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Research suggests that work orientations are the main characterization for people to draw meaning from work. Meanwhile, people can perceive different jobs, work tasks, and professions differently. Work orientation is the leading belief in how they understand and relate to the work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Orientations profoundly impact one's job choice (Wrzesniewski, 1999), which extends to shaping the meaning they make of work and influences their values (Gandal, Roccas, Sagiv & Wrzesniewski, 2005).

1.5.2 Towards others

Examining how the self and job are intertwined and connected on different levels is vital for the research on the subject of the meaning of work. Nonetheless, this is only one chunk of the research. Work requires interactions and collaborations with other people, that being a coworker, boss, subordinate, customer, or any other stakeholder. Employees are not just passively observing what happens but actively forming work meaning by analyzing the actions in the work environment (Wrzesniewski, Dutton & Debebe, 2003).

Contrary to the self, the meaning of work can be derived or influenced by an external factor (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski, Dutton & Debebe, 2003). Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) have divided the research on the effect of others into four groups, namely coworkers, leaders, groups and communities, and family.

Many interpersonal relationships are formed in the workplace, making a broad range of functions and effects, which also span the meaning of work (Wrzesniewski, Dutton & Debebe, 2003). A study on employee flourishing has revealed a linkage between the function of giving to others, which was most strongly associated with meaningful work (Colbert, Bono & Purvanova, 2016). Coworker support and work engagement relationship have proven to be influenced by the meaning of work (Ahmed, Majid, & Zin, 2016). On the other

hand, negative experiences such as bullying at the workplace influence the meaning of work and can lead to shifting it (MacIntosh, Wuest, Gray & Cronkhite, 2010). Coworkers also influence the perception of the meaning of other employees' work through the interpersonal sensemaking process (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003).

One of the most direct ways for leaders to influence the meaning of work is by framing the organization's goals, purpose, and mission (Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005). Framing underscores certain aspects meanwhile minimizing others so that one meaning prevails (Fairhurst & Starr, 1996). Studies have shown the effect of transformational leadership on the meaning of work. However, it is unclear how exactly leaders influence the understanding of work for their employees (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013). Bono and Judge (2003) argue that employees find their work meaningful when they find congruence with personally held values and high-order values of leaders.

Being employed most probably means working in an organization and being a part of a group of people with certain goals and tasks at work, which can scratch from a team, or division, to a large corporate environment within a company. Research has shown that being part of the group and influenced by its inner dynamics can potentially impact the perceived meaningfulness at work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Closer the dynamics of people in an organization, the higher the likelihood of understanding the work meaningful (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

In families, the group's interpersonal dynamics are even more evident, which influences the meaning of work. Family can impact one's view of meaning by imposing time, energy, and financial expectations (Brief & Nord, 1990). If financial demands are increased, the work meaning is more likely to be perceived as economic (Brief & Atieh, 1987). On the contrary, a family can also offer support, recovery, and relaxation from work, which can emphasize the importance of work in one's life. However, work and family both shape the meaning of the other (Brief & Nord, 1990).

1.5.3 Work context

Work context is another crucial source of work meaning, as all the work is done and influenced by a particular environment. Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) have divided it into the design of job tasks, organizational mission, financial circumstances, non-work domains, and the national culture in which the work is being done.

As pointed out earlier, one of the first attempts to link meaningfulness with work and job design was Hackman and Oldham model (1976, 1980). Herzberg (1966) advocated that work should be enriched and not simplified. Studies have shown that experiencing higher levels of skill variety, task identity, and task significance are connected to experiencing meaningfulness of work (Fried & Ferris, 1987; Hackman & Lawler, 1971). Meanwhile, Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics model has served as a base for job tasks, and the

meaningfulness of work relations (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). More recent studies are pointing out the importance of social context (Grant, 2007; Grant & Parker, 2009). Research on the design of job tasks has also demonstrated that work promoting a sense of purpose gives a higher amount of significance attributed to work (Grant, 2008).

1.6 Multidimensional models of meaningful work

Initial research on the meaning of work was focused on the single sources that influence individuals' perceptions of their work (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). It was unidimensional, stressing workers' viewpoints that work is important, rewarding, or valuable (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling, and Tay (2018) believe that instead of referring to work as meaningful, we should examine it as the process of meaningful experiences.

Some researchers have already made steps in that direction (Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling, & Tay, 2018). The holistic development framework developed by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) presents four sources (being, doing, self, and other) from which meaning can be derived. The sense of meaningful work can emerge only if there is the right balance between the tension of four sources. Similarly, Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) present a model with four major pathways to meaningful work that, apart from self and other, includes agency and communion as two "fundamental modalities of human existence" first defined by Bakan (1966, pp. 14-15). Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling, and Tay (2018) argue that since meaningful experiences are individual, one-dimensional models are conceptually at a higher level than multidimensional models since they do not specify the particular experiences that are meaningful. Unidimensional models, however, are thus better aligned with meaningful work, defined as the global assessment that one's work achieves significant, valuable, or worthwhile goals that are consistent with one's existential values (Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling, & Tay, 2018).

2 FROM HAPPINESS TO MEANING

2.1 Happiness at work

In practice, the question of meaning is often forgotten and rarely arises directly in the work context. On the other side of the spectrum of meaning, we can find happiness (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker & Garbinsky, 2013), which has been found as a highly valued goal for most people in most societies (Diener, 2000). Happiness is one of the basic human emotions, encapsulating positive attitudes, well-being, and pleasant moods (Fisher, 2010). However, defining and exploring happiness has been one of the longstanding themes in Western thought, offering various explanations. Generally, happiness is observed through the hedonic approach, which defines it as well being and pain avoidance. Meanwhile, the eudaimonic

approach focuses on meaning and self-realization (Ryan & Deci, 2001). One of the most cited researchers in the field, Ruut Veenhoven, argues that happiness is universal (2010), no immutable trait (2005) and not relative in the extent it depends on need-gratification (1991).

At the beginning of the millennium, positive psychology (Seligman & Csiksentmihaly, 2014) has put happiness at the center of psychological research, contrary to the prior research, which was mostly associated with negative outcomes and experiences (Fisher, 2010). The rise of positive psychology has inspired organizational behaviour researchers to dive into the topic of happiness at work. Two schools of thought have emerged: positive organizational scholarship (Cameron & Dutton, 2003) and positive organizational behaviour (Luthans, 2002).

Positive organizational behavior (POB) was presented to bring developing positive psychology closer to the field of organizational behavior. Meanwhile, positive psychology was focused on clinical applications at first; it was believed that applying it to the work setting is important (Luthans & Avolio, 2009). The interest of POB is in “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002, p. 59).

At the same time, a movement of researchers starting positive organizational scholarship (POS) emerged. It has been defined as “the study of that which is positive, flourishing, and life-giving in organizations” (Cameron, Bright & Caza, 2004, p. 2). Both POB and POS are concerned with the workplace and fostering outcomes in the work context (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). However, the primary focus of POB is on an individual's psychological state and strengths (Luthans, 2002). Meanwhile, POS emphasizes the positive aspects of the organizational context, which help workers to thrive (Cameron, 2005). POS concentrates more on the organizational level, while POB is primarily focused on micro-and meso- levels exploring the positive individual states (Luthans & Youssef, 2007; Luthans & Avolio, 2009). The role of each and its contribution to the research is debatable (Luthans & Avolio, 2009). Meyers, van Woerkom, and Bakker (2013) claim that positive psychology interventions contribute to the well-being and performance of employees.

Happiness is not a term that has been widely used in academic research about employees' perception of experiences in organizations. Nonetheless, several happiness-related concepts have emerged in the workplace scholarship. The most well-known construct in this area is job satisfaction (Fisher, 2010). Locke (1976, p. 1300) described job satisfaction largely as affect: “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from an appraisal of one's job or job experiences.” Hoppock (1935) defined job satisfaction as any combination of psychological, physiological, and environmental circumstances that cause a person truthfully to say I am satisfied with my job. Although many factors have been shown to influence job satisfaction according to this definition, something internal has to do with how the person feels (Aziri, 2011). Vroom (1964) defined job satisfaction as positive feedback

from the individuals towards their jobs, therefore focusing on the role of the employee in the organization.

The second most commonly measured construct about happiness is probably organizational commitment (Fisher, 2010). If there is congruence with one’s personal and organization’s goals and values, one can easily attach and find happiness at work. Contrary, one could stay committed to a certain organization just because there are no other employment options (Fisher, 2010).

One of the important constructs in positive psychology is flow, defined as the “holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” Csikszentmihalyi (1975, p. 36). Flow has been explained as the experience of working at full capacity, with intense engagement and effortless action, where personal skills match required challenges (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

There are many other constructs associated with happiness at work. Fisher (2010) ordered them on transient, person, and unit levels. The constructs from the table have in common that they all refer to pleasant judgments or experiences at work. The base for the transient level comes from Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which focuses attention on real-time affective work events and the short-lived moods and emotions people experience from it. Most of the research is focused on the personal level. The unit-level looks at the happiness of teams, organizations, and other collectives. Aggregated individual member reports of the collective are unit-level measures (Fisher, 2010).

Table 1: Happiness-related constructs in the workplace

Transient Level	Person Level	Unit Level
State job satisfaction	Job satisfaction	Morale/collective job satisfaction
Momentary affect	Dispositional affect	Group affective tone
Flow state	Affective organizational commitment	Group mood
Momentary mood at work	Job involvement	Unit-level engagement
State engagement	Typical mood at work	Group task satisfaction
Task enjoyment	Engagement	
Emotion at work	Thriving	
State intrinsic motivation	Vigor	
	Flourishing	
	Affective well-being at work	

Source: Fisher (2010).

2.2 Work motivation

“If one wishes to create a highly valid theory, which is also constructed with the purpose of enhanced usefulness in practice in mind, it would be best to look to motivation theories ... for an appropriate model” (Miner, 2003, p. 29). However, as Herzberg (2008) noted, psychological theories are incredibly complex, and not much can be said with assurance, despite the decades of research.

Motivation plays an important role in organizational behavior and humanistic research in general. According to Pinder (1998), work motivation constitutes forces emerging from one’s internal and external being, setting up work-related behavior as well as its form, direction, intensity, and duration. Organizations are an example of where external factors collide with an individual’s different internal preferences. It is in the interest of organizations to understand how to ensure the best performance and well-being of their employees.

One of the first theories in the field of motivation of work was Taylor’s (1914) *The Principles of Scientific Management*. His work is regarded as having a rationalistic view of man as motivated by economics alone (Fry, 1975). He opened the field of organizational behavior research, in which many theories followed in the 20th century.

Theories of motivation can be divided into process and content theories. Process theories describe the “specific needs or values most conducive to job satisfaction” (Locke, 1976). Theorists behind them focus on how to initiate, direct, and sustain certain behavior (Dinibutun, 2012). Major process theories are expectancy, equity, goal, and attribution theories. Content theories try to specify the particular needs that must be attained for an individual to be satisfied with his or her job (Locke, 1976). Emphasis is on the identification of individuals’ needs and the objectives they seek (Dinibutun, 2012). Contributions of Maslow, Herzberg, Alderfer, and McClelland are classified as content theories.

One of the major employee motivation theories is Maslow’s theory of motives and needs (1943). There are five needs, namely physiological, safety, social, ego, and self-actualization, related to each other and ordered in a hierarchy. Vroom (1964) introduced expectancy theory, which states that an employee will behave in a way to maximize his performance and rewards. Adams’ (1963) equity and justice theory argue that employees will be motivated if they will perceive fair treatment at work. Skinner’s (1965) reinforcement theory suggests that managers should encourage good behavior that leads to positive outcomes. Deci (1971) explained the impact of external influence on intrinsic motivation and rewards. Setting the right goals can lead to increased motivation and productivity, as has been shown by Latham and Locke (1991). Herzberg’s two-factor theory (1959) argues that motivators and hygiene factors have a crucial impact on employee motivation. McGregor’s (1960) X and Y theory assumes employees are either motivated or unmotivated, meaning management must steer workers in the right direction.

Self-determination theory understands people as beings whose natural behavior can be understood by being promoted or deterred by the social context and differentiates between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. The theory has evolved through the research of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The effect of extrinsic motivators on intrinsic motivation is explained by cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). To ease the application of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in work settings, self-determination theory was introduced upon it. In contrast with most other work theories, where the total amount of motivation is observed, the focal point is on the relative strength of autonomous and controlled motivation. Differentiation of types of motivation is noteworthy as autonomous motivation promotes performance and well-being meanwhile, whereas controlled motivation can draw away from those goals, especially if the task includes creativity, cognitive flexibility, or deep processing of information (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

In his book *Drive*, Daniel Pink (2011) pointed out how organizations have fallen behind the research in recent years in understanding the motivation at work. The current motivational approach in the workplace often relays on “the carrot and stick approach,” which has proven to be flawed. Extrinsic rewards work only to a certain extent; meanwhile, people possess a will to go beyond their abilities and find a purpose. The key three drives of motivation are described to be autonomy (the desire to direct our own lives), mastery (the urge to improve our skills), and purpose (find and pursue something greater).

Identity-based motivation hasn't been the focus of work research, yet it offers an alternative understanding that could be applied to work motivation. Studies of identity-based motivation, which assumes that identities are dynamically constructed in context, in school settings, have shown that behavior is important and meaningful when actions and identity feel congruent. Contrary, incongruence leads to the understanding of the behavior as pointless (Oyserman & Destin, 2010).

2.3 Responsibility and motivation

Responsibility is a key concept in our moral, social, and political thinking; however, it is often not properly understood, as it spans various areas of human life (Spivak, 1994). In his essay, Spivak (1994) describes responsibility as all action undertaken in response to a call; however, “responsibility annuls the call to which it seeks to respond by necessarily changing it to the calculations of answerability.”

Throughout the view of Frankl, responsibility can refer to (a) a meaning for whose fulfillment we are responsible and to (b) a being or a cause for whom we are responsible. Therefore, we can be responsible for societal values, other people, ourselves, or the ultimate meaning (Fabry, 1980). In the workplace, we are faced with several opportunities for freedom and responsibility at every moment (Von Devivere, 2018).

In one of the early attempts to find the root of motivation in the workplace, Herzberg (1959) identified two factors that determine it. Motivating factors boost employee job satisfaction and help them work harder. On the other hand, a lack of hygiene factors will make them work less and decrease job satisfaction. Meanwhile, motivating factors arise from intrinsic conditions. Hygiene factors are not found in the job itself but in its surroundings. Responsibility is found to be an important motivating factor, being understood as getting satisfaction from having the freedom to make choices at work without supervision (Alshmemri & Maude, 2017).

Another major motivational theory with responsibility at the center was presented by McGregor (1960). In his book *The Human Side of Enterprise*, he identified authoritarian (theory X) and participative (theory Y), which refer to two different management styles that impact workforce motivation. Theory X describes people as work avoidant and inherently disliking work. Therefore, people should be micromanaged, directed, and threatened to reach the company's objectives. Furthermore, people avoid responsibility and crave security. Contrary, theory Y gives a positive view of the employee, who sees work as a source of satisfaction. People don't just accept but also seek responsibility. Avoidance of responsibility is not a human characteristic but part of prior experience.

Having responsibility, an individual needs to understand why, how, and for whom he works. As demonstrated earlier, people find various meanings in their work that can extend over the mere economic dependence. And that is where the meaning comes from for Frankl (1985), as meaning is not to be found by asking ourselves about it but by "taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual" (p. 85).

2.4 Meaning as the primary source of motivation

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist, and author. Based on his experience of Holocaust survival, he wrote the book *Man's search for Meaning* (1985), which was listed as "one of the ten most influential books in the U.S" by the Library of Congress in 1991 (Fein, 1991). He founded logotherapy, a concept that, contrary to arguments of psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Adolf Adler, presents meaning as the primary motivational force in an individual's life. He viewed meaning as "not something constructed" by people but as something that is constantly existing in every situation and "has to be found." That is what gives meaning objectively; meanwhile, its uniqueness in every individual makes it subjective. Frankl disagreed with determinism through biological or psychological mechanisms, although his ideas are not fully coherent and lean towards finalism (Reitinger, 2015).

Back in the 20th century, Frankl was already concerned about the meaning of work in industrial or postmodern societies. As stated in the translation of his article written in German from 1984, he attributed meaningless found in people, declining mental health, and

apathy in changing society's structure with unemployment, early retirement, and the security of the welfare system, ultimately people lacking meaning (Frankl, 1992).

Wong (2014) created a model of five hypotheses for the meaning-seeking model based on logotherapy:

- The Self-Transcendence Hypothesis (the will to meaning is the primary motivation for self-transcendence),
- The Ultimate Meaning Hypothesis (belief in the intrinsic meaning over alternative beliefs),
- The Meaning Mindset Hypothesis (meaning mindset offers more benefits than success mindset),
- The Freedom of Will Hypothesis (belief in higher freedom and responsibility results in higher autonomy and authenticity),
- The Value Hypothesis of Discovering Meaning (meaning is found by self-transcendence activities rather than by pursuing self-interest).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is one of the fundamental theories of motivation and probably the most widely known. According to the theory introduced to a wide range of students, self-actualization is the highest need, prior to which basic needs must be met. It is less frequently mentioned that Maslow revised his concept of self-actualization as the peak experience.

In his letter exchange with Frankl, both pioneers in higher human nature psychology, Maslow (1966) amended his model and put self-transcendence as a motivational step beyond self-actualization. As presented in the revised model, having the highest form of human development on a transpersonal level makes a significant difference compared to fulfilled ego or self, as advocated with self-actualization. This is important for understanding the views on the meaning of life (Koltko-Riviera, 2006). Contrary to Maslow, Frankl believed that people could find self-actualization only via the spiritual need for self-transcendence. Accordingly, self-actualization is a result of finding a call to serve the greater good. Thus, a switch from self-focus to meaning focus is needed (Wong, 2014).

2.5 Self-actualization vs self-transcendence

The term self-actualization was first used by Goldstein (1939), who described it as the motive to realize one's full potential and one's desire to become actualized in his potential. It caught more attention with the popularization of Maslow's Theory of motivation (1943), where self-actualization is on the top of his five-level hierarchy of needs. Self-actualized people have an important role in organizations, significantly relating to job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment (Gopinath, 2020). The prominence of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the idea of striving for higher-order needs had a sizable part in the development of organizational leadership. However, that often leads to over-emphasis on personal success at all costs, resulting in a self-serving and narcissistic

leadership style. On the other hand identifying with a cause greater than themselves, meaning having a common purpose, a global perspective, and shared responsibility for the organization, is a characteristic of self-transcendent leaders (Venter, 2012).

Contrary to self-actualization, Frankl (1966) saw self-transcendence as an essential human characteristic directed to something other than the self. Therefore, being open to the world and not functioning as a closed system makes our lives meaningful. Similarly, possibly influenced by Frankl's ideas, Maslow later suggested that the fully developed person is not characterized by his ego and selfishness but by one's transcendence of other people's views (Venter, 2012). He defined the term as an individual's capability to form uniting consciousness with other people (Maslow, 1968). Those who can transcend understand the world and their purpose in relation to other people on a level that stretches over geographical or cultural boundaries. This allows one to constitute a deeper purpose or meaning of life, which is not self-focused and better aligned with the whole world (Venter, 2012). Same as Frankl, Maslow (1973) supposed autonomy and independence from the external environment as the main trait of self-actualized people.

2.6 Meaning in positive and existential psychology

In positive psychology meaning is one of the core concepts (Seligman, 2002; Peterson; 2006). However, in positive psychology research, Frankl's understanding of the role of the meaning in one's life and its impact on well-being is often reduced to the use of his quotes as inspiration in the introductory texts. Meanwhile, there are mentions of his ideas (e.g. Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010) they do not try to understand exactly what logotherapy is and how it could benefit their research (Wong, 2014). This shows the divide between humanistic-existential and positive psychology, which has been marked by continued tensions and ambivalence. Because of the philosophical divide Waterman (2013) called for separate research in those fields. On the other hand, Wong (2014) suggests future research to bridge these two parallel fields for the benefit of everyone.

Positive psychology and logotherapy are both concerned with living a meaningful life, yet there is a vast discrepancy in language, worldview, and values (Wong, 2014). Meanwhile, positive psychology often tries to represent itself as the science of a good life, neglecting the negative experiences. Frankl embraced the negative side of human existence as well. Furthermore, logotherapy primarily addresses the meaning of suffering. Frankl (1985) famously noted that if there is meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering.

Researchers in the area of positive psychology struggle to grasp that the pursuit of happiness is in contradiction with self-transcendence. A limited view of meaning in positive psychology models impedes adequate understanding of the broader perception meaning has in our lives. As Wong (2014) furtherly argues, the understanding of meaning in well-being research needs to be clarified, as misunderstandings in theoretical and empirical research

due to a lack of coherent identity are present in most of the research on the positive psychology of meaning.

Positive psychology favors and heavily relies on the cognitive-behavioral perspective. On the other hand, logotherapy is based on a spiritual-existential perspective. In logotherapy, philosophy and religion play an important role as well. The problem is that rationality can not properly explain the irrationality in human behavior, expressed in individuals who sacrificially devoted their lives to brave pursuits. Those differences can only be understood through conceptual analysis and empirical research. Logotherapy should embrace methodological difficulties; meanwhile, positive psychology should focus on more challenging constructs that might be harder to quantify and measure, but offer a lot of rewards in understanding the meaning (Wong, 2014).

The most important difference is in the path of achieving the peak experience or other meaningful outcome. In logotherapy, self-transcendence is the essence of being fully human and an end in itself. In positive psychology, self-transcendence is only an instrument for meaningfulness and well-being and does not present a terminal value. According to Frankl, people can experience meaning in life only when we shift focus from our self-interest to something greater and beyond our self-concept (Wong, 2014).

2.7 Happiness-meaning relationship

Psychologists distinguish between hedonic well-being (Kahneman, Diener & Schwarz, 1999) and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman et al., 2010). The hedonic approach is characterized in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance; meanwhile eudaimonic approach focuses on meaning and self-realization, with a portrayal of well-being as the degree to which a person is fully functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being is deeply rooted in philosophy but might not work well in science. Studies have shown an overlap in those two concepts and may represent psychological mechanisms that work together (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener & King, 2008). Similarly, some researchers believe that happiness and meaning are essentially indistinguishable (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener & King, 2008; King & Hicks, 2012). Others acknowledge considerable overlap and believe there is a possible trade-off between meaning and happiness (e.g. Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker & Garbinsky, 2013; McGregor & Little, 1998). However, a more recent study has shown that there may be a trade-off between happiness and meaning-making as well as a reversal in their patterns of long-term outcomes (Abe, 2016).

“Humans may resemble many other creatures in their striving for happiness, but the quest for meaning is a key part of what makes us human, and uniquely so” (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker & Garbinsky, 2013, p. 516). Throughout evolution, it was important for organisms to feel pleasure in connection with having their needs satisfied. That is the argument for happiness starting earlier and being more natural. Contrary, the meaning could be more

cultural. The ability to process meaning in solitary pursuits of animals is limited. To experience meaning, we need a language, a set of interactions inside of a cultural system, which fosters our well-being (Forgas & Baumeister, 2018).

Positive psychology has awakened the research on well-being and peak experience, as it was proposed by the first positive psychologists like Maslow and Frankl nearly half a century ago. Meaning has once again become an important research topic in happiness scholarship. As already stated in this thesis, understanding the concept of meaning can differ significantly. One of the founders of positive psychology, Seligman (2002), acknowledged that his thinking on the goal of psychology has changed since then, but still only to the extent of seeing human flourishing and his PERMA model (positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, accomplishments) (Seligman, 2012) as the final goal (Wong, 2014). Later Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker and Garbinsky (2013) presented a series of studies on how happy and meaningful life differ and suggested more caution in positive psychology research, which has caused some controversy. Being happy and regarding life as meaningful have proven to be positively correlated. Meanwhile, there definitely is an overlap, and the study has shown differences between the two highly desired components of well-being.

Being able to satisfy basic needs and wants is a factor that makes people happier. However, that was largely irrelevant to meaning. The same goes for items of finding life easy, difficult or struggling. Similarly, having enough money has been shown to increase happiness without having an impact on meaning. Lack of money reduced happiness but barely influenced meaningfulness. Despite money being a product of culture, it works as a medium to help get people what they want, which brings it closer to happiness than more culturally characterized meaning. When observing emotions and feelings, positive were linked to high happiness and negative with low happiness, with no effect on meaningfulness. However, boredom was associated with low scores on happiness and meaning (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker & Garbinsky, 2013).

People who are happier tend to spend more time in the present and less in the past or future. Thinking about the present had no impact on perceiving life to be more meaningful. In contrast, people who spend more time thinking about the past and future reported more meaningfulness and less happiness. Imagining the future also resulted in more meaningfulness but less happiness. There was a difference in the time span of happiness, which was observed to be way shorter than meaningfulness. Therefore, meaningfulness was assessed to be longer-lasting and more permanent (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker & Garbinsky, 2013). As it has been shown before, that is probably more a subject of perception than reality (Baumeister, 2018), as happiness seems to be a rather stable concept (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker & Garbinsky, 2013; Costa, McCrae & Zonderman, 1987).

Social interactions and feelings of belongingness play an important role in feelings of happiness and meaningfulness. Relationships with friends and family have been observed to make people feel more meaningfulness (Debats, 1999). Studies by Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker

and Garbinsky (2013) showed positive correlations with increase and negative correlations with the lack of social interactions (Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick & Wissnig, 2011). Social interactions are important for both happiness and meaningfulness, but they differ in direction and focus. People who reported being a giver showed more meaningfulness; meanwhile, being a taker was negatively correlated with meaningfulness. The opposite was with happiness, where being a giver was associated with less happiness and being a taker with more happiness. In short, doing things for others brings more meaningfulness. Concurrently doing things for oneself increases happiness. However, there certainly is a connection between the two concepts. Doing things for others will also increase happiness, but primarily by increasing meaningfulness. This relation will not work if the meaning is taken out. Contrary, doing things for others increases meaning, even when controlled for happiness. Happiness alone was not linked to helping others in need. Helper's life was more meaningful when helping others and has shown to increase happiness thereby (Baumeister, 2018).

Another important concept in the meaning-happiness relation is the so-called parenthood paradox. Most people want to have kids and be happy, but those goals are conflicting (Twenge, Campbell & Foster, 2003). Therefore Baumeister (1991) suggested that people should aim for meaning, not just happiness. Keeping that in mind, losses on the side of happiness are substituted by gains in meaning. Focusing on others rather than the self leads to more meaningfulness while having an insignificant or negative link to happiness (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker & Garbinsky, 2013)

Involvement in the affairs and events that go further than one's individual life impacts meaning and happiness. Living a meaningful life has been connected with having more negative events in life. As one would expect, that means lower levels of happiness. However, the perception of the events plays an important role here since unhappy people probably remember more negative events than happy people (Baumeister, 2018). That resembles the words of a Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky who noted that man only likes to count his troubles, but he does not calculate his happiness.

Accordingly, living a meaningful life means experiencing more negative events. That goes well in hand with being involved in things over oneself. When we go beyond ourselves, we lose some control over events and are thus more likely to face difficulties when things do not turn out to be as planned. Worry, stress, and anxiety have all been linked to experiencing higher levels of meaning while having a negative effect on happiness. By all means, one should not strive for bad experiences but for meaningful involvement in society in order to achieve meaningfulness. Self-expression and issues of personal identity have also been shown to have an influence on meaning. Those who care about how they define, understand, express and fulfill the self-report higher meaning in life. Meanwhile, this importance was irrelevant to happiness or even showed some negative trends (Baumeister, 2018).

3 POTENTIAL FOR ACHIEVING MEANINGFULNESS

3.1 Finding meaning and purpose in the corporate world

In Western and industrialized societies, work and money are accorded an ever-increasing status and importance. All areas of life are overshadowed by economic standards, constraints, and reflections related to success, achievement, money, and economic status. In the 21st century, just as in the last decades, we observe that work and the workplace have increasingly become the most important part of people's lives in general (Von Devivere, 2018). Lost in the challenges of an efficiency-based globalized world, increasingly exhausted by the dynamics of change and expectations of work performance, most people revolve around themselves and search for distractions instead of meaning (Wallace, 1996).

Discussions about finding meaning at work in companies are often associated with the terms such as reinventing organization, finding company purpose, or employee engagement. They try to overcome the dominant paradigm of utility maximization and recognize other concepts related to the company that impacts economic and organizational behavior. Quinn and Thakor (2013) describe individuals and organizations concerned about pursuing something beyond wealth and something bigger than oneself as a higher purpose.

Finding a purpose or changing the purpose of a company is a trendy term to describe the overhaul of the company. However, many executives are skeptical about implementing higher purposes in their organizations. Such decisions usually come in times of crisis, when management seeks to boost productivity or motivation (Quinn & Thakor, 2013). There are various models in leadership literature on how to shift to a purpose-driven organization. Those frameworks include advice such as (Quinn & Thakor, 2013) “envision an inspired workforce, “recognize the need for authenticity”, “stimulate individual learning” or (see Malnight, Buche & Dhanaraj, 2019) “redefine the playing field”, “reshape the value proposition”, “assess how purpose can guide strategy.” Undoubtedly there are many positive outcomes of a company pursuing a higher purpose. Meanwhile, Quinn and Thakor (2013) claim that a higher purpose is not about economic exchanges and that it reflects something more aspirational, it is not clear how those outcomes are expressed, if not in economic metrics.

In the report of consulting firm McKinsey, leaders put a strong sense of meaning as the most important factor for them and their coworkers, also stating it is the hardest to obtain. They defined meaning as “a feeling that what’s happening really matters, that what’s being done has not been done before or that it will make a difference to others”. Their decade-long research has narrowed down the conditions for achieving peak performance in three sets. A low intellectual quotient (IQ) can harm the energy employees bring and lead to conflicts. The second is emotional quotient (EQ, which creates an emotionally safe environment; meanwhile, lack of it can result in ego management and depletion. They describe the third

category as the meaning quotient (MQ) of work, defined as “describes the peak-performance experience as involving high stakes; excitement; a challenge; and something that the individual feels will make a difference hasn’t been done before”. Accordingly, a lack of MQ means employees see work as only a bit more than a paycheck. They claim missing meaning causes companies tremendous opportunity costs (Cranston & Keller, 2013).

In their attempt to explore how people find work meaningful and the impact of leadership on it, Bailey and Madden (2016) found out that meaningfulness seems to be profoundly personal and individual, which was against their expectations of meaningfulness coming from work-related attitudes. Furthermore, employees often associate their work with important and emotional events from their personal life and family. Unlike their expectations, the research showed that meaningfulness was not influenced by managers and their style of leadership. There was no difference between transformational and transactional leaders regarding influence on meaningfulness. Moreover, leadership was not mentioned in the description of meaningful work at all; meanwhile, inadequate management was the root cause of ruining meaningfulness. Their research show that meaningfulness is a delicate concept and a result of how employees are treated.

They identified five features of meaningful work, starting with already frequently mentioned self-transcendence when people talked about how their work impacted others. Secondly, their research has confirmed statements from Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker and Garbinsky (2013) that meaningfulness is not to be mistaken with positive meaning but challenging and often unpleasant. Thirdly, meaningfulness is not something that is experienced constantly yet episodic. Awareness of meaningfulness reached its peak when strong experiences were generated, which is not sustainable in the long term, arising rarely. On the fourth point, they argue that meaningfulness was seldom expressed at the moment, rather when people reflected on their work and connected with their attainments and general life. Lastly, meaningful work has to be understood in the personal context, where the context of their work does not matter as much as their personal experiences. In all, meaningful work is complex and presents much more than concepts in meaningful work research encompass.

3.2 What drives meaninglessness

While meaningfulness at work is a widely researched topic, there is only a little research on its opposite – meaninglessness. Bailey and Madden (2019) found that meaninglessness results from powerlessness, disconnection, devaluation, and self-doubt. Research has shown that human beings defend meaning to sustain psychological equanimity (Van Tongeren & Green, 2010).

Factors that seem to drive meaningfulness seem to be fairly different from those that foster meaninglessness (Bailey & Madden, 2016). Meanwhile, the influence of managers and leaders has very little to do with experienced meaningfulness; treatment by those influences meaninglessness at work significantly). The most frequent source of meaninglessness at

work was a disconnection from the values of their employer or workgroup, despite congruence in values not being identified as an important meaningfulness factor. People do not seem to see the point in their jobs when their work lacks recognition; thus, employers take employees for granted. Meaninglessness at work arises when people feel the task they got is pointless, which proves that people have a strong sense of what their job should involve and how they are spending their time at work. Another factor is unfairness and injustice, followed by not being heard or feeling one's opinion or experience does not count. Lack of supportive relationships and disconnection from them have also been linked with meaninglessness. People can feel marginalized or ostracised by their managers or are simply not able to find people with whom they would share the success. Lastly, exposing people to unnecessary physical or emotional harm damages one's sense of meaningfulness (Bailey & Madden, 2016).

3.3 Work redesign

Work design has an important role in health and economic outcomes for individuals, teams, and organizations (Parker, Morgeson & Johns, 2017). The rapid changes in organizations have a significant impact on people and their work, which is why work design should play a central role in applied psychology. Parker, Morgeson and Johns (2017) identified the most influential work design scientific papers and classified them into five clusters of work design research: (a) sociotechnical systems and autonomous workgroups, (b) job characteristics model, (c) job demands-control model, (d) job demands-resources model, and (e) role theory.

Fundamentally, job design can be defined as modifying tasks to benefit workers and employers (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The main point is on employees' daily tasks and activities for their organization (Oldham & Fried, 2016). Morgeson and Humprey (2008) define job design as “the study, creation, and modification of the composition, content, structure, and environment within which jobs and roles are enacted.”

Today job design is a broad field in organizational behavior and applied psychology (Grant, Fried & Juillerat, 2011) that offers many benefits, including motivation and prosocial difference (Grant, 2007). However, job design is often described as a top-down process, where superiors act on changing the individual's job, tasks, or roles (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Therefore individualization is limited, with job tasks set to optimum for the average worker. Meanwhile, the problem of the top-down approach is in its inability to adjust to the individual, and the problem of the bottom-up is the scope of job modifications workers need to accomplish. The third option arises in idiosyncratic deals (i-deals), where workers negotiate i-deals tasks with their employer (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer & Weigl, 2010).

The job Characteristics model (1976) is still the most popular model and topic of research in job design (Grant, Fried & Juillerat, 2011). It consists of five core task characteristics

concerned with how tasks are associated with a particular job. The five characteristics are autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity, and feedback. Hackman and Oldham's (1976) model is the dominant model, while broader research in integrating different theoretical models on work design is limited and hidebound. In the creation of the Work Design Questionnaire, Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) broadened the focus by simultaneously including knowledge, social and contextual characteristics apart from the commonly used task characteristics.

3.3.1. Job crafting

On the bottom-up level, job crafting offers job redesign on the individual level, so one can adjust and develop its job so it can fit best to his choice and competence (Tims & Bakker, 2010). If experienced meaningfulness at work is significantly individual and personal (Bailey & Madden, 2016), job crafting can therefore have a more profound effect. Furthermore, by actively redesigning jobs to their needs and preferences (Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski, 2008), the responsibility, also associated with meaningfulness, rises (Tims & Bakker, 2010).

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001, p. 179) defined job crafting as “ the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work.” Reshaping the way individuals proactively transform their work boundaries can be divided into three techniques: task, cognitive and relational crafting. Task crafting refers to changing the set of responsibilities determined by a job description, changing the work process, the timing of their tasks, and the attention they attribute to tasks. Cognitive crafting implies changing the way employees perceive their job to find more meaning in them. And finally, relational crafting involves altering the interactions people have with coworkers and other people at work when executing their jobs (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013).

Job crafting can be used to strengthen the meaningfulness of employees' experiences and contribute to an engaged and satisfied workforce (Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Some ways of using job crafting in the workplace are (Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski, 2013):

- Changing tasks
 - Adding tasks
 - Emphasizing tasks
 - Redesigning tasks
- Changing relationships
 - Building relationships
 - Reframing relationships
 - Adapting relationships
- Changing perceptions
 - Expanding perceptions

- Focusing perceptions
- Linking perceptions
- Crafting a better person-job fit: Using motives, strengths, and passions
 - Motives
 - Strengths
 - Passions
- Establishing a job crafting mindset: Focusing on opportunities for small wins.

3.3.2 Work design and authority

Work design can be attained in different ways, making it a heterogeneous process. It raises the question, “design in whose view?” (Weick, 2001). All job design approaches are subdued in relation to the authority, which determines job contents (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer & Weigl, 2010). Cooperation between the organization’s members drives approval of the decisions others make: “Authority is exercised over an individual whenever that individual, relaxing his own critical faculties, permits the communicated decision of another person to guide his own choice” (Simon, 1997, p. 200). Thus, all interdependent workers, from managers to associated workers, have to approve and find appropriate decisions and actions others take to attain their own work (Barnard, 1968). The zone of acceptance marks actions accepted as part of the job and is prone to bounded rationality and incomplete information (Simon, 1997). People believe that their definition of acceptable and appropriate is how others perceive it (Ross, Green & House, 1977). If there is no disapproval, worker interprets their actions as adequate. Opposition to the contrary means reaching the zone of acceptance. Therefore, work redesign paths are moderated by legitimacy and acceptance of changes in job composition (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer & Weigl, 2010).

3.4 Different pathways for achieving meaningfulness

The meaning of work in the corporate context is often misunderstood as just another toolkit for pushing their employees to peak performance under the pretense of creating a better work environment (Von Devivere, 2018). Management consultants and researchers are pointing out the importance of finding meaning and purpose and coining strategies for finding and implementing it. Those concepts often include finding potential alignment with the organization and telling employees the impact of their work on broader society.

As already stated, employees value meaningful work (Bailey & Madden, 2016; Cranston & Keller, 2013). A slight majority of them are willing to accept salary decreases to get more meaningful experience from work (Kelly Services, 2010). It should be apparent that monetary incentives and other transactional benefits are not enough to retain the talent and ensure well-being in the organization (Steger, 2016). Organizational culture, leadership, recruitment, and job crafting have been recognized as features and processes to help sustain employee well-being (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). According to theoretical and empirical

evidence, Steger (2016) built SPIRE (strengths, personalization, integration, resonance, expansion) and CARMA (clarity, authenticity, respect, mattering, autonomy) models, which incorporate the most important personal-level predictors and correlate to meaningful work.

Figure 2: SPIRE and CARMA models

SPIRE		CARMA	
Finding pathways to more meaningful work		Fostering meaningful work for your employees and followers	
S	Strengths	C	Clarity
	Know your unique strengths and talents, and use them in executing your work, even if that means going above and beyond your basic job duties		Organizations need a vision and mission to be clearly shared across all levels, if a company lacks purpose, its workers might follow suit
P	Personalization	A	Authenticity
	Bring more of yourself to work, align work with your values, take responsibility and adopt an ownership mentality for your work and your organization		Organizations must follow their own mission, leaders must behave ethically and honestly; phony purpose and exploitation kill meaning
I	Integration	R	Respect
	Integrate the motivation of and execution of your job with other elements of your life, work in ways that bring meaning to the rest of your life		Building positive, effective relationships in an organization begins with leadership modeling respect and creating chances for beneficial interactions
R	Resonance	M	Mattering
	Learn your organization's core values and mission, find ways in which it resonates with your personal mission and meaning through your everyday work		Leadership must convey to each worker exactly how their contribution is vital to the success and health of the organization and its mission
E	Expansion	A	Autonomy
	Seek ways in which your work can be grown to benefit some greater good, expand your concerns to embrace broader interests beyond your self		Allow followers increased self-expression by providing opportunities for self-direction, trial and error, innovation, and idea interchange

Source: Steger (2016).

According to Von Devivere's book (2018) on the meaning of work through Frankl's view, such attempts are destined to fail: Meaning must "be found with individual responsibility and freedom," as the will of meaning can not be created by someone externally. Therefore, the only successful strategy would be to let employees find their own stories. At this point, Von Devivere reminds us of Kahneman's (2011) work, which exposes the fallacies and systematic errors of our minds and suggests that we should withdraw ourselves from our impending concern for ourselves. According to Frankl's view, the path to meaningful work is achieved by autonomy and freedom of human will.

Thus, job design, understood as a top-down process, significantly reduces one's freedom to choose its own path. It is essential for leaders to create an environment where people have the ability to discover themselves and thrive (Bailey & Madden, 2016). In that way, job crafting seems like a great tool to enhance meaningfulness at work. Nevertheless, employees are still part of the organization and need to act in accordance with the company structure and its goals, which might not be fully aligned with one's meaning in a broader context.

Tims and Bakker (2010) simply conditioned the subordinate status when defining job crafting: “employees are hired by the organization first, and then the employees start to change the job” (p. 1). Steger, Dik & Duffy (2012) suggested three levels of meaningful work. In the center, there is the perception of one’s work that feels meaningful or has a purpose. In the second circle is work that can find congruence with an employee's personal life and, therefore, one level higher in terms of transcendence. The third or the outer circle is even more transcendent, meaning it offers the opportunity to benefit the community or even higher levels of society, ultimately the whole planet. Getting hired means that one’s ability to be able to find uniformity in the three levels of meaning might be troublesome, as a substantial part of autonomy is subdued by the organization and its own ambitions.

Figure 3: Three levels of meaningful work



Source: Steger, Dik and Duffy (2012).

3.4.1 Entrepreneur's path to meaningful work

When it comes to autonomy and freedom in the work context, some people are put in a better position. People with a calling orientation have a higher chance of attaining meaningfulness at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Self-determination theory places autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential psychological needs to achieve full human potential and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Shir, Nikolaev, and Wincent (2019) argue that task

engagement in entrepreneurial work offers rare support for one's basic psychological needs, allowing individuals to organize their work in accordance with self-motivation, which leads to higher levels of agency, competence, and relatedness. Therefore getting a salary is converted into a meaningful pursuit, increasing the probability of finding the congruence of one's intrinsic psychological needs and entrepreneurship (see Markman & Baron, 2003).

In the sense of meaning at work, the most freedom is left to an entrepreneur or founder of an organization, as he has all the freedom to organize and design his work to fit his free will and personal views. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) also stress the importance of enough opportunities to experience one or all four pathways in their model through work for work as a whole to be regarded as meaningful. Definitions of who is an entrepreneur vary but could be simply defined as a person behind the creation of organizations (Gartner, 1988). Hebert and Link (1989) define an entrepreneur as "someone who specializes in taking responsibility for and making judgemental decisions that affect the location, the form, and the use of goods, resources, or institutions".

Entrepreneurial activities influence one's well-being by contributing a meaningful and one-of-a-kind work-related context and circumstances, apart from ensuring the value of freedom (Shir, Nikolaev & Wincent, 2019) and being innately self-organized (Shir, 2015) and goal-oriented quest (Frese, 2009). Not being employed for someone is not the only result of entrepreneurship. People who pursue entrepreneurship have the freedom to engage themselves in prospects that are self-chosen as meaningful instead of being the product of external pressure and influence (deCharms, 1981).

Entrepreneurs have an opportunity to avoid bureaucratic corporate structures, and, unlike employees in companies, they have the unique opportunity to use their skills and talents to contribute to society. Personal freedom to take actions and make decisions using one's skills and talents provides an environment for creativity and is key to joy at work (Rindova, Barry & Ketchen, 2009). Moreover, entrepreneurs have the opportunity to create a work environment that allows them to listen to their inner voice and fully actualize their full potential (King-Kauanui, Thomas & Waters, 2005). When personal values harmonize with organizational values (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), mission, and vision (DeValk, 1996), a sense of wholeness can emerge.

3.4.2 Employees' path to meaningful work

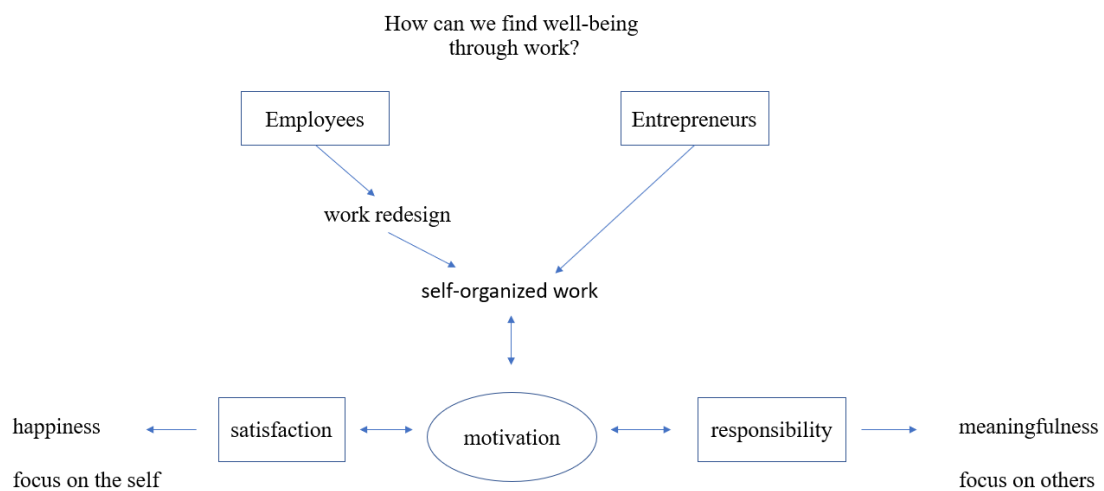
Not everyone becomes an entrepreneur, which means that possibilities for self-organized work are limited but not necessarily absent. When job tasks are assigned from someone else, coming from the orders of possibly distant higher levels of management, and therefore not self-chosen, one can still find opportunities to self-organize and strive for meaningful, engaging behavior (Shir, Nikolaev & Wincent, 2019). Job crafting allows individuals to become entrepreneurs in their workplace by changing the tasks, perceptions, and job relations in the broader organization.

Those people have an option to craft their work to fit their needs and change the working relationship in a more meaningful way. However, being in the subordinate position, our freedom and autonomy will always be repressed, which will impact the significance we assign to work.

“Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is unique, as is his specific opportunity to implement it,” another famous quote of Frankl’s (1985, p. 113). Findings from Shir, Nikolaev and Wincent (2019) support that idea, emphasizing how important driving for a meaningful personal goal in one’s professional career is.

Creating new business and organization as an end in oneself or as a means to a higher end is the result of entrepreneurs’ utmost dedication of their lives to an important purpose. Entrepreneurship is not an easy pathway, filled with stress (Harris, Saltstone, & Fraboni, 1999), grief due to failure (Jenkins, Wiklund, & Brundin, 2014), self-doubt (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), earning lower incomes, and working longer, but means experiencing significantly higher levels of job and life satisfaction (Benz & Frey, 2008).

Figure 4: The conceptualization of finding well-being for employees and entrepreneurs



Adapted from McGregor (1960); Laloux (2014); Tims & Bakker (2010); Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker & Garbinsky (2013); Shir, Nikolaev & Wincent (2019), Wong (2014); Abe (2016); McGregor & Little (1998); Venter (2012); Bailey & Madden (2019).

In the last century, it has become more and more clear how important the well-being of people employed in organizations is. It is in the interest of organizations to understand how to ensure the best performance and well-being of their employees (Pinder, 1998). Happiness

is one of the most valued goals in most cultures (Diener, 2000). Everyone wants to be happy, which often puts happiness as the ultimate goal. Some companies have even introduced the position of Chief Happiness Officer.

However, the scope of finding happiness rarely goes beyond the notion of trying to motivate employees. It is true that people need to be motivated to be happy, yet that is not where it all ends. As argued in some motivational theories, the basis for motivation is responsibility. If we want to be responsible, we need to understand why and for whom we work and be free to decide how we are going to do it (Laloux, 2014). Essentially, knowing your why means you have found the meaning of the actions that follow.

Positive psychology includes meaning as part of its interest in research but still sees human flourishing as the final goal (Wong, 2014), largely ignoring the unpleasant experiences such as suffering on the other side of the spectrum (Wong, 2018). Happiness and meaning are not just two opposite concepts but often overlap and may represent psychological mechanisms that work together (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener & King, 2008). Furthermore, some researchers believe that happiness and meaning are essentially indistinguishable (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener & King, 2008; King & Hicks, 2012).

Most existential philosophers, with famous names like Kierkegaard (2013), Camus (1976), and Frankl (1959), have advocated the idea that meaning, happiness, or success is a human state to be found in life, not by actively seeking it. Keeping that in mind, following the frameworks and pathways to happiness at work might not yield the wanted results. In the last years, the focus has switched to meaning and fostering meaningfulness at work. Meanwhile, it is encouraging to look on the other side of the spectrum, and it is still important to see the whole picture. As Bailey and Madden (2019) pointed out, research on meaningful work is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Therefore, instead of focusing on either happiness or meaningfulness, one should strive for well-being, which is in all the combination of both.

“Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our happiness,” an unknown author's quote, often falsely attributed to Frankl as it resonates with his ideas. Nevertheless, it captures an individual's unique ability to act freely in any situation. This goes well with the idea of job design and our opportunity to modify the job tasks we do to enhance well-being.

Yet, job design for employees is always subdued in relation to authority (Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer & Weigl, 2010), which unables individuals from finding full congruence with work and identity. On the other hand, entrepreneurs have full freedom and autonomy to self-organize their work in a self-chosen way, which guarantees higher meaningfulness. Intriguingly, entrepreneurs tend to encounter more negative experiences

(Harris, Saltstone, & Fraboni, 1999; Jenkins, Wiklund, & Brundin, 2014; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006) but can yield higher satisfaction in life (Benz & Frey, 2008).

4 METHODOLOGY

Research on the meaning of work has been flourishing in the past years. Various studies that take a wide variety of perspectives on meaning have been presented in the past years to help us understand factors influencing work and life satisfaction. Past research has shown some important discoveries about employees' perceptions; however, not much has been done on the entrepreneurs, whose unique work circumstances presumably form distinctive interpretations. Furthermore, the entrepreneurs' understanding is later compared with the employees' understanding. Thus this research work tries to fill the missing gap and represents an important contribution to the field of meaning of work research and enhancing meaningfulness at work.

There are a plethora of questionnaires often used to measure the significance of meaning at work. Nonetheless, in-depth interviews were deemed to be the most suitable method to capture people's perceptions to the greatest extent (Kvale, 2003; Berg, 2007).

4.1 Research framework

The purpose of this thesis is to help enhance the understanding of the principles of meaning and related concepts to achieve higher levels of meaningfulness at work. The results of this research can help organizations and each individual better understand the underlying concepts driving meaning, especially in relation to others. The research also offers an opportunity to use the findings of entrepreneur as someone working with full autonomy and employee as someone with subordinate status and then apply them to combine the best of both worlds in various work settings.

The goals of the thesis are:

- To bring more clarity to the understanding of the meaning of work
- To provide an overview of the underlying concepts behind the meaning of work for entrepreneurs and employees
- To compare and analyze the perception of the meaning of work of entrepreneurs and employees
- To test whether the greater potential of achieving meaningfulness can be achieved with entrepreneurship
- To determine the most important factors that fuel meaningfulness at work

Qualitative research will be used to help us answer the following research questions based on the analysis of interviews with successful entrepreneurs or founders of organizations.

Research question 1: Which factors contribute to the meaningfulness of work?

Research question 2: How is the meaning of work perceived by entrepreneurs?

Research question 3: What are the differences between the way entrepreneurs and employees perceive the meaning of work?

Research question 4: Do entrepreneurs or founders of organizations have a higher chance of achieving higher meaningfulness based on their unique freedom in the work context?

4.2 Data collection method

Measuring the meaning of work has proved to be a challenge due to a number of factors that constitute it and influence one's understanding of it. Researchers are gradually including different approaches and measurement scales to capture the most appropriate perception of meaning. The most common approach to data collection in the field of meaning of work is a questionnaire, such as Work as meaning inventory (Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012). For this research, in-depth interviews were conducted, as it seemed to be a more appropriate method. The goal was to gain an understanding of the way entrepreneurs perceive the meaning of work and what fuels it. Interviews are more effective when it comes to bringing out narrative data, thus enabling a researcher to obtain and analyze people's beliefs to a greater extent (Kvale, 2003). Furthermore, it enables participants to "speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings" (Berg, 2007, p. 96). The latter was crucial in the process of data collection and couldn't be observed if relying on the conventional questionnaire method. Interviews were semi-structured, which is a combination of structured and unstructured interviews. The questions were prepared in advance (See Appendices); however, additional sub-questions were asked, and explanations were given when necessary. Adhering to the structure of questions would limit the interviewees from fully expressing their thoughts. Also, the order of the questions varied among the interviewees to not interrupt their narrative.

Interviews were conducted in person or via online video calls from June 2021 to April 2022. They lasted between 30-90 minutes, depending on the interviewee's willingness to engage in the interview. The author of this thesis was actively participating in the interviews with sub-questions. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed into the Slovene language, which was also the interview language. Interviewees were granted anonymity and had no impediments to publishing their answers.

4.3 Data analysis method

After data has been gathered through the semi-structured in-depth interviews, it has been analyzed using content analysis, thematic analysis, and pattern-seeking techniques.

Researchers use content analysis to analyse text data (Cavanagh, 1997) while conducting qualitative research. Since the existing research literature on the topic is limited, conventional content analysis has been used to interpret data from the in-depth interviews. Since data analysis in qualitative research is directed towards qualities rather than quantities, pattern-seeking in qualitative research takes over the focus on the p-value in quantitative research (Suter, 2011). With a pattern-seeking tool, we observe to demonstrate why a certain pattern arises (Lategan, Lues & Friedrich-Nel, 2011). Thematic analysis is a technique used to analyze classifications and present how themes relate to the data (Boyatzis, 1998). When using interpretations, thematic analysis is regarded to be the most appropriate (Marks & Yardley, 2004).

4.4 Sample description

The convenience sampling method was used for the in-depth interviews in both research samples. This type of nonprobability sampling is used when entities in that target population meet specific criteria, in this case, the ease of accessibility (Dornyei, 2007). Entrepreneurs are generally on a tight schedule and are therefore hard to reach, especially for an in-depth interview.

The only criteria in the first research sample were the age of the entrepreneur, with the goal to ensure a more diverse age of the participants. If the sample was selected randomly, fewer young entrepreneurs would probably be. However, the research author has access to the network of the entrepreneurs, so it would be hard to say that some vital members of the population were excluded if we consider the entrepreneurship scene in Slovenia. High variability of the sample was ensured using 10 representatives from various industries were included. However, 20% of the participants in the research sample were females, which is less than the national average in the population of 30% (GEM, 2018). Despite best efforts, it was very difficult to find female entrepreneurs who were willing to participate in the study.

In the second research sample, gender and age were the criteria as well. Compared to the general population, there could be a more diverse range of industries and positions. In the general population, there are fewer people with higher education.

Table 1: Research sample 1

	Gender	Age group	Position	Company's industry	Annual revenue in 2020
Interviewee 1	M	45-50	CEO	technology	“around 40 million €”
Interviewee 2	M	40-45	board member	finance	1,9 million €

table continues

continued

Interviewee 3	M	35-40	CEO	education	“a few million €”
Interviewee 4	M	25-30	CTO	crypto	“half a million”
Interviewee 5	F	30-35	CEO	social	N/A
Interviewee 6	M	35-40	consultant/ investor	real estate/ start-ups	N/A
Interviewee 7	M	55-60	Partner	management coaching	0,14 million €
Interviewee 8	M	20-25	CEO	technology	0,3 million €
Interviewee 9	M	35-40	CEO	law	0,15 million €
Interviewee 10	F	25-30	CEO	marketing	“around 1 million €”

Source: Own work.

Table 2: Research sample 2

	Gender	Age group	Position	Years of work experience
Interviewee A	M	40-50	Head of the projects in construction, SME	22
Interviewee B	F	25-30	Technical steward in a pharmaceutical company	4
Interviewee C	F	60-65	Sanitary inspector, public sector	39
Interviewee D	M	55-60	Commercialist in a SME	35
Interviewee E	F	50-55	Medical doctor in a public healthcare institution	21
Interviewee F	M	35-40	Specialist for market relations in an energetics company	10
Interviewee G	F	40-45	Data and artificial intelligence lead in a multinational company	16

table continues

continued

Interviewee H	M	65-70	System operator in an energetics company	41
Interviewee I	F	50-55	Marketing manager in a public institution	26
Interviewee J	M	25-30	Researcher in drug development, multinational company	3

Source: Own work.

5 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE 1

5.1 Participant observations in the research sample 1

While conducting interviews, I paid attention to the content of their answers and their mood and the way they answered their questions. I divided observations into three categories:

- How were they answering the questions;

In the beginning, a lot of them had trouble coming up with their answers. They provided their answers rapidly but in a short manner. There was not much depth to the answers, which were often heavily generalized. They would say, “*well, of course, that is logical,*” indicating the general validity, or even comment, “*why this kind of question*”. However, throughout the interview, their answers would become more substantial. They would keep coming back to initial questions after their thoughts had accumulated and crystalized during the interview. In that way, they would also become more descriptive and enthusiastic about the topic. A minority of participants did not develop such characteristics and have provided neutral but precise descriptions.

- How strongly did they engage with the question;

Interviewee 5 said, “*those are some really tough questions*”, when asking for some more time to think. The topic of this research is linked to psychological and philosophical questions. To provide a meaningful answer, they had to think deeply about their work, their life in general, and the relationships they form with others. Some have already shown to have thought about this subject a lot and were therefore highly opinionated and more open to sharing their thoughts. Others gradually started to come up with more in-depth answers.

On the other hand, a smaller part of the participants seemed like they were not willing to disclose their thoughts or just simply perceived the meaning of their work differently. Meanwhile, the former often related to their private lives, family, and upbringing, while the latter stayed in the business realm. Responses would describe phenomena that are more

evident and somehow shallow. Despite not going beyond the work sphere, their answers could have reached the same depth, however, to a lesser degree. At this point, a considerable difference in the given answers can be observed.

- What was their mood like.

Participants in this research were all entrepreneurs on a tight schedule. In most cases, they were not displaying high enthusiasm in the beginning. Throughout the interviews, their mood was elevated, in some cases drastically. Interviewee 6 even thanked me in the end *“I really was not feeling to do this interview, but now I feel so good after this discussion.”*

I believe this mood change is associated with their self-reflection on their work. Throughout the interview, they had to think about their impact, how they perceive their work, and how others perceive it. Becoming aware of the value they have created for others fueled their momentary satisfaction levels.

5.2 Entrepreneurs and their formation of meaning

Defining meaning is an ungrateful task. It is difficult to come up with a structured and understandable answer. Furthermore, there are various definitions and perceptions about the meaning and meaning of work. Entrepreneurs offered a broad variety of answers accumulated during the interviews.

Some started to build their answers by giving an overview of their career or process of the business establishment. Despite seemingly being redundant at first, that was often a crucial part of the answer in order to understand their thinking: *“If you want to create a meaningful life, you need to envision it in your head, before you build it and before you can act in it. I already created this film in my head when I was young. 30 years later, I am having a de ja-vu on my high-school dreams. That was my guide in life,”* explained interviewee 1. They would explain their meaning-making by telling what drives them in life. In doing that, some already offered their personal theories: *“We need to have some goal or sense in life, and work can provide us with that. I do what I have chosen myself, and I enjoy it. So that is what fuels me,”* told interviewee 7.

While explaining their vision of what entrepreneurship means to them, they did not show just self-reflective but also psychoanalytical views: *“Everyone has a unique story, everyone has an environment in which he has grown up, but in the end, we are all looking to find some sense via work. We all have some strong drives, and those are our pain points in subconsciousness. We will keep pushing until this is resolved,”* pointed out interviewee 2.

Another simple but common explanation was that solving a problem and helping people overcome difficulties is what brings the most meaning to respondents: Interviewee 6 noted: *“My purpose is to resolve problems and help people. I don’t really care what that is or on*

what level". Similarly, interviewee 4 said: *"I try to resolve difficult problems and therefore help the world. This is what gives my life meaning and drives me further"*. It seems like the most important thing is just to have an intent to create something. Many would add that it doesn't matter what that is if they are in the process: *"As long as I am doing challenging work, I am fine. That is what I need,"* said interviewee 8. They would point out how solving other people's problems is also helping them. While bearing the financial risks brings financial rewards, overcoming challenges also provides personal growth: *"With entrepreneurship, you solve other people's problems. You take the weight of the burden another person is not willing to deal with. By doing so, you overcome various problems, which enables your personal growth, apart from the financial reward of taking the risk,"* explained interviewee 6.

Two of the respondents reported positive feedback from their clients or users to be a primary source of meaning: *"Meaning comes from seeing the result of your work and actually having an impact,"* said interviewee 3. This could have been an answer for many, as it straightforwardly recognises your work. However, instead of focusing on their solutions, some interviewees put their employees in the first place: *"The most meaningful thing for me is building a platform that enabled a lot of people to develop their talent. We are like a sports team performing in a big league. There are ups, and there are downs. But we constantly keep pushing,"* described interviewee 1.

Similarly, interviewee 5 noted: *"If you give work to people, you give them dignity. You can protect them from facing economic distress, and you give them social inclusion. That is what matters to me."* Those interviewees would often provide more in-depth and profound answers. Therefore, it could also be argued that those participants were more opinionated and had thought about the topic before: *"Instead of thinking how I can change the world, I think of changing the lives of my employees. /.../ If I provide them a good life, I already make the impact"* said interviewee 10.

Two of the participants raised the possibility of their work not having a particular or desired meaning. *"Even if I am deluding myself with all of this, as long as I am enjoying it, it doesn't matter,"* said interviewee 3. The respondent acknowledged that his work might not be meaningful; however, that does not matter if his actions are aligned with his vision. Similarly, interviewee 4. claimed: *"Maybe our work has no meaning. It depends what perspective you take."* He as well saw no problem in his work being meaningless. Again, what caught my attention is the confidence in the intention to do what he believes in.

5.2.1 Actively thinking about meaning

One of the important factors when discussing meaningfulness at work is the significance people attribute to this phenomenon. Actively thinking about meaning of work arguably emphasizes its importance. Answers of the participants on this topic can be divided into two categories.

Three participants claimed they actively think about the meaning of their work. Interviewee 2 expressed how vital digging into the meaning of work on a regular basis has been for the right leadership and the future of his business. He came up with his own theory of what entrepreneurship activity means for a person and why it happens.

Similarly, interviewee 10 emphasized: *“I think about the meaning of work all the time, all the time, all the time,”* expressing her strong interest and significance in this topic. *“Every small decision is well-thought of. Why are we making this, what will it change, how will it change, and will there be any difference at all. Every decision needs to fit our vision,”* she claimed. Interviewee 10 believes those regular *“existential crisis”* are crucial to improve their business model and provide the most positive impact.

Interviewee SJ said she had thought about the meaning of work when she was an employee already. *“It’s important to think about what you leave behind in this world. I thought it’s good to have a broader impact on society beyond products and services.”* Similarly, other participants associated reflections on the meaning of work when they were employed: *“I used to think about the meaning of work, what is the point of the work I am doing when I was employed,”* said interviewee 4. But now he doesn’t think about it anymore. *“It’s better to work towards a meaningful goal than think about its meaning. I think you start asking these kinds of questions when you are not on the right path,”* interviewee 4 added.

This answer coincides with the response from interviewee 3: *“I don’t think about the meaning of work often. Maybe simply because my work is meaningful and I don’t see any problem. I do what I like, and therefore it is meaningful.”* The interviewee JF expressed a similar belief: *“I don’t think about the meaning of work often because I experience fulfillment of the work I do regularly.”*

Based on these answers, we could argue that actively thinking about meaning of work rises when one’s preferences and work reality are not aligned. Accordingly, it diminishes when congruence eases this tension.

Although most interviewees negated having actively thought about the meaning of work, their answers indicate they still consider many aspects that could be considered under the meaning of work concept. When describing their businesses and what is meaningful for them, they regularly stress how cautious they are when making decisions.

“I have my life philosophy ... it manifests in a way that I strongly question what I am doing. Does it make sense,” said interviewee 3, despite claiming differently, when asked if he actively thinks about meaning. Others would often give a broad overview of their business model, crucial decisions, or stakeholders, showing how attentive they are to make decisions that match their visions.

It seems like all of them think about the meaning of their work to some extent, understandably so. However, how they perceive and understand those thoughts or actions

differs from person to person. Some might not even be aware that they think in a way that strives for meaningful results because they are so deeply immersed in it. The feedback they receive from their clients, employees, or other stakeholders might be so strong that actively chasing meaningful actions has integrated into their thought process. Lastly, the way they understood the question or even the concept of the meaning of work can vary significantly.

5.2.2 Impact and greater good

One of the ways to improve meaningfulness is to make contributions beyond yourself (Hansen M., 2014). This is especially true for companies that follow a certain purpose to help people in need. Interviewee SJ, who runs a social enterprise, said: *“I have a feeling I am making the change in this world. It’s a tiny thing in the whole world, but most importantly, I want to be a paragon for others. I want to show people that it is possible, and I hope they will follow me on this path.”* Experiences from running a social enterprise enabled her to provide a substantial answer on the meaningfulness of her work.

Other participants were reluctant to claim so. They would generally say, *“I hope that I am making the change.”* Interviewee 1 argued that entrepreneurship is one of the best ways to create a powerful impact in the world. Meanwhile, interviewee 10 said, *“I am trying, but I know that not really,”* when asked if she is making a change in the world. Interviewee 1 raised the question of consumerism: *“I am skeptical since we are part of an unsustainable system. Sometimes there are conflicts in the company, and sometimes people have conflicts.”*

It seems like a lot of participants understood meaning as something that needs to be special, a cherry on top of the cake of their business with statements like *“We are trying, but I know we are not going to end world hunger,”* added interviewee 1. Gradually, however, throughout interviews, many of them realized that what they find meaningful is right in front of them.

“There is nothing better but to see feedback from a happy client,” said interviewee 8. A lot of them justified having an impact on society by helping to solve problems that their customers have. Yet the most common answer was centered on the lives of their employees. *“We try to be an organization where people feel good, so they can transfer those impacts on other people as well,”* interviewee 1 noted.” Or *“At least I try to impact people and provide them with a good life,”* said interviewee 10.

5.3 Entrepreneurship vs. Employment

One of the goals of this research is to understand how the meaning of work is perceived in the eyes of an entrepreneur and the employee on the other. While it was difficult for participants to come up with answers about their meaning at first, their responses gradually

improved when they were asked to compare their experience working as an employee and now as an entrepreneur. In most cases, their perception of work has drastically shifted in the role of the entrepreneur.

5.3.1 Feeling limited at work

Respondents spent a lot of time discussing the drawbacks and negative sides of being employed. They predominantly described their job positions as limiting. *“I felt trapped like I have no freedom,”* interviewee 9 confided in. *“When I was employed, I thought I was broadening my horizons, but now I see how limited I was. I don’t want to be mean, but being employed really limits a person,”* described interviewee 6.

The feeling of being limited stems from work being reduced to the tasks they are given by the superior: *“I just sat at the bank doing the given tasks and left at five,”* said interviewee 5. Additionally, they reported not being able to act on the things they found important or beneficial: *“At the job, you can’t just try something new,”* said interviewee 3, or *“In the workplace, rules are set, there is not much space for innovation. Entrepreneurship opens a whole new world,”* noted interviewee 6.

The feeling of constraint was repeatedly a reason to engage in entrepreneurial activity. *“I felt that working in an organization was holding me down if I wanted to be creative and do something more. It was just a matter of time before I went on an entrepreneurial journey,”* interviewee 9 said. *“I was not able to do the work I truly wanted, and I could feel that was not it, although it was related to my core job tasks. So I quit and started my own company,”* explained interviewee JH. Interviewee 6 added: *“If you are a Vice President of a company, there are only an x number of jobs for this position. In entrepreneurship, there are infinitely many. It limits you mentally.”*

As weird as it might sound, participants spoke about their employment stories as they were enslaved. Judging based on responses, the work environment certainly did not provide them with the right support where they could use their skills to the fullest potential. They described it as they were lacking something that couldn’t have been granted at their job position. Most of the complaints were aimed at expressing creativity, autonomy, and inability to fuel the motivation that was otherwise always present.

5.3.2 Working as a subordinate

Entrepreneur builds the company from the ground, meaning he or she holds the reins of everything. There is no boss to tell them what to do. Contrary, almost all jobs in an organization come with a superior who can delegate tasks and limit one’s actions and free will. Participants pointed out that not having “a boss” is an important benefit. *“Although the*

job was generally good, having a superior was always bothering me,” explained interviewee 4.

One of the given reasons was that their work was not appreciated: *“Meaning comes from the results of your work when you see the actual impact. When I was employed, someone would come and tell me what I did wrong and try to correct it. That didn’t feel good after putting my best effort into the work. Now the market directly tells how good my work is,”* described interviewee 3. Participants expressed their dissatisfaction with being dependent on and having someone interfering in their work: *“When you work as an employee, you always need to take into consideration his point of view. I felt like a kid in the school,”* said interviewee 4. Similarly, interviewee 9 said: *“Now I am not dependent on someone. I can choose how I will work, when, and with whom.”*

Given answers are not surprising; people generally dislike a boss or someone who manages people and meddles in your work. However, it is intriguing to see how having a superior is not met with apathy but a strong intent for action at the same time: *“When you are on your own, you need to do more to move further. Only action and more action bring meaning. When you are employed, on the other hand, you can only think and discuss whether something is meaningful or not,”* claimed interviewee 4. Having a boss is disliked because they believe in their work and want to do something beyond the frame of their superior's tasks: *“If you are employed, you follow someone else’s dreams. Now I finally follow mine,”* stated interviewee 4.

5.3.3. Being your own boss

While having the freedom and autonomy was expressed as something positive, the other side of it was mentioned as well. *“When you leave the company, you feel free. You lose the feeling of having your boss. You feel relaxed, but after some time, this taste of freedom is gone,”* explained interviewee 3.

Participants described how not having a boss can prove to be troublesome and challenging. *“The job itself is way more difficult. Before, I had someone to tell me what to do. Now I often don’t even know what problems to solve. You don’t even know the right answer since no one has done it before. It is difficult, but that is also the beauty of it,”* interviewee 3 said.

“I miss having a boss. Not because I miss someone giving me a hard time, but because it is hard. There is no one there to tell you what is wrong and what is the right direction,” said interviewee 10. Similarly, interviewee 7 noted:

If participants expressed strong confinement at the workplace, being your own boss brings another extreme. As respondents noted, managing yourself can be difficult as well: *“It’s no easy matter being your own boss. You need to know where to set the boundary. Sometimes that can be demanding if you know yourself too well.”* Nonetheless, none of the respondents

claimed he or she would prefer to move back to the subordinate position. Moreover, some said they can't imagine doing that after being in an entrepreneurial role. Lastly, overseeing everything means taking a greater responsibility, which enhances meaningfulness.

5.3.4 Unlocking the hidden potential

Participants generally reported lesser engagement, motivation, and commitment at work when employed. *"When I was employed, I was not giving my maximum. When you work for yourself, you experience work differently,"* said interviewee 5.

Since working as an employee was perceived to be limiting, entrepreneurial roles accordingly unlocked the hidden potential. *"Entrepreneurship opened a whole new world for me. It released inner energy and creativity I was never aware of,"* said interviewee 6. Similarly, interviewee 10 explained: *"I never thought I was creative. Only via entrepreneurship did I become aware of my capabilities."*

Interviewee 2 said that he believes entrepreneurship served his personal fulfillment: *"Undoubtedly, I wouldn't be able to achieve this at any other job."* In a similar manner, interviewee 7 explained: *"Being in a workplace that doesn't fulfill you won't bring maximum engagement and commitment."*

While participants expressed being limited at work, stepping onto the entrepreneurial path meant opening a new chapter. Since they were not able to fit their needs in someone else's work environment, they got the freedom to create their own that could fit their needs and vision with entrepreneurship. Naturally, that didn't bring only higher satisfaction but most probably also higher motivation. Alone and with a plethora of problems to solve, they needed to come up with new solutions that demanded new skills. A work environment that was congruent with one's needs with a combination of challenging tasks could have resulted in tapping into undiscovered capabilities and self-discovery.

5.3.5 Incurring risk by being involved in achieving a goal

Working for yourself and being your own boss also means taking more responsibility, which fuels meaningfulness: *"If you work in a smaller group, your experience is more meaningful. And if you also own it, then motivation increases with responsibility,"* interviewee 3 said. Responsibility also comes with financial investments into your business, taking care of employees and other stakeholders: *"In a company, you are not really paid for your efficiency. So, I was not even that motivated,"* said interviewee 5.

Participants also noted personal freedom in choosing individual responsibility: *"Now all the responsibility is on me. I take the responsibility for what I do and what I don't do,"* explained interviewee 4. Similarly, interviewee 9 noted: *"Before, I just did what I had to do. Now I know exactly what I do and experience a totally different responsibility."* When one works

as an entrepreneur, he or she chooses to accept more responsibility: *“You can go for an easy 9 to 5 option, or you can decide for a more difficult path that demands more responsibility. But in the end, your yield is also higher,”* described interviewee 10.

When working as an employee, there is not much at stake for the worker. The situation changes completely when you need to take full responsibility for every action. Thus, the perception of work alters as well as the meaning of work. Interviewee 10 described it as *“you fight for your business as you would fight for your life.”* Additionally, participants seem to be aware of the risks and benefits that come with it: *“People understand entrepreneurship as something that is risky. But it is way less risky if you believe in yourself. You own your decisions.”*

5.3.6 Satisfaction at work

Overall job satisfaction of participants in the research sample has reportedly increased significantly after choosing entrepreneurship. That was observed in the answers of entrepreneurs while answering related questions directly and indirectly.

“Entrepreneurship brings me higher satisfaction. I can’t even imagine not doing it,” said interviewee 5. *“Satisfaction is definitely higher in every case. Agency over my time, work, location, and ownership are the key factors of my increased satisfaction,”* explained interviewee 3.

On the other hand, two respondents claimed that their satisfaction had not increased that much. Nonetheless, they reported a change in their perception of work. *“I was satisfied before as well. What entrepreneurship brought me is fulfillment. Now I can say I am at peace,”* said interviewee 2. *“The roles I had before also brought me sufficient satisfaction. Now I just got an upgrade,”* interviewee 8 noted.

A reported increase in satisfaction levels was expected. However, I believe it was highly unlikely that respondents would claim differently since it would go against the image of the entrepreneur and possibly also their ego. A deeper introspection was needed to claim that satisfaction has not increased greatly. Nevertheless, increased satisfaction was observed through other questions as well.

5.4 Entrepreneurship and personality

Entrepreneurs attributed their entrepreneurial activity to various factors, with personal characteristics being the most important. They have shown having thought about this topic a lot, raising the importance of self-reflection and self-discovery to achieve meaningfulness: *“Entrepreneurship is a phase in life, where you really need to look into yourself. After you have done that, you become more open to new solutions.” /.../ “When you open yourself, you*

also see your fears and where you need to work on. There is a constant need to question your deeds. It is really self-therapeutic,” said interviewee 6.

Generally, their answers indicate how vital it is to know yourself and act according to your beliefs: *“If you want to lead a company well, you need to know yourself in the first place and know how to lead yourself. This is a never-ending process that demands constant problem solving, thus also developing yourself,”* said interviewee 2.

The most repeated characteristic was “being a builder,” or someone who wants to creatively express himself. A notable trait was also taking the lead, stepping out of the crowd, and thus taking more risk: *“In a room of 10 people, I will feel like I need to start talking and organizing something,”* said interviewee 8. Similarly, interviewee 10 noted: *“I don’t have a problem with exposing myself and taking the initiative. People are risk-averse; if you have the courage to keep trying, you will likely succeed.”*

Generally, participants expressed a belief that there are personal characteristics that distinguish them from other people: *“If you are an entrepreneur, you simply have it. I don’t know if that is entrepreneurial, probably it’s also something artists have. You want to build and express yourself,”* explained interviewee 6. One of the participants was more reluctant to claim so: *“I am not sure if I was born to be entrepreneur, or just entrepreneurship made entrepreneur out of me. It is a chicken and egg question,”* explained interviewee 1.

However, a few participants pointed out a similar conclusion that entrepreneurs are not a kind of their own but share a similar vision with other builders and intent-driven people, such as artists or sportsmen: *“Entrepreneurship is one of the means that is widely accessible, to have an impact in the world. There are a lot of entrepreneurs in this world, probably way more than professional musicians or athletes,”* added interviewee 1. Interviewee 10 found a direct comparison from her personal life: *“While interacting with a professional alpine skier, I realized our lives share a lot of similarities. Entrepreneurship is a serious diagnosis. You need to express yourself, and you can do that via entrepreneurship or other means.”*

5.5 Meaning of work and private life

Respondents would often say that the border between work and private life has loosened. As a result of that, they would not just take their work responsibilities to occupy them in their private life but also mirror knowledge and lessons obtained from the work realm: *“Ownership logic is very helpful in personal life as well. If you think you are a victim, then you don’t feel the ability to change; the world is spinning just around you. As an entrepreneur, you get the feeling that changes do happen,”* said interviewee 3.

It could be said that enhancing their self through entrepreneurial work influenced their perception and meaning of life: *“Meaning of work and meaning of life are connected. With every year of entrepreneurial experience, I feel like I better understand my role in this world.”*

.../ It's a never-ending story; when you start digging about meaning, what can you create in this life. You are just constantly jumping to the next level," explained interviewee 5.

Participants focused on the importance of relationships: *"Entrepreneurship means relationships. You mirror those relationships in other aspects of life,"* claimed interviewee 2. They explained how success in their career helped them manage private relationships as well: *"Relationship with my wife and family improved. I have a different perspective on life now. Flexibility and ability to do whatever I want and with whoever I want greatly improved my life satisfaction,"* said interviewee 6.

5.6 Entrepreneurship as a life trajectory

Answers from the participants showed that entrepreneurs seem to have a certain vision or a career path. Most of them identified themselves as builders early in their lives: *"I always wanted to have an enterprise, this has become a part of my identity. Being employed would already go against my identity. I always had a feeling I need to build something myself,"* said interviewee 3.

However, a lot of them noted that they did not actively think about becoming an entrepreneur; that just happened naturally. *"I never had a clear idea of becoming an entrepreneur. But throughout life, I was always building something on my own,"* said interviewee 8.

Three of them expressed having some kind of a life trajectory: *"When I was young, I created a film in my head, a vision of myself in the future. I never saw myself working in a corporation, that I wouldn't establish myself,"* said interviewee 1. Two of those three said that their current work is just a part of their bigger plan that will manifest later on in their careers: *"I was always an entrepreneur, with the first steps being made in childhood. I have a clear life trajectory, which determines how the meaning of my work will change. Now my work is focused more on money, later I will focus on my passions and soul,"* claimed interviewee 10. A strong drive to achieve something even greater was present in the third participant with a clear life trajectory: *"What I do right now is just a step towards my vision. Probably it is a necessary step to achieve social and financial goals, but ultimately I aim in a completely different direction,"* said interviewee 4.

5.7 Entrepreneurs and their purpose

The concept highly associated with the meaning of work is also finding your purpose and understanding the why behind your work and actions. Throughout the interviews, entrepreneurs started to offer insight into what drives them: *"Always do your best, work with your best intention, and don't stop. You can't build a good enterprise if you are not a good person. You can't be a good person if you don't know what drives you,"* said interviewee 2.

The question of why taps into a field of existence and one's relation to the world. As the answers of entrepreneurs show, it is difficult to describe exactly the thing that drives them: *"I have a lot of drive, but I don't know what drives me. I want to create something, and I want to build something because I see it is possible. Entrepreneurship is like building blocks. You just need to put them together correctly,"* explained interviewee 10. Their intent to build is not just to build but also to show greatness: *"My personal why is the why of my company. I see my company as a piece of art. Those are my skills, and I want to create the most elegant company possible. /.../ You want to live a good and conscious life, so you are not on autopilot,"* said interviewee 3.

Their responses show some inner force pushing them to persist and follow their goals: *"You need to have some expectations, what do you want to achieve in life. You need to strive for something. Whether you want to become the best athlete or you want to achieve a certain lifestyle – whatever it is, you need to have a reason to persist,"* claimed interviewee 1.

5.8 Factors that fuel meaningfulness

Entrepreneurs were very consistent when naming the most important factors that contribute to their meaningfulness. By far, the most discussed factor was autonomy, which also prerequisites other factors. Autonomy was followed by creativity, which was also said to be a crucial factor that improves the perception of work. A repeatedly mentioned factor was also the owner of the company in relation to the financial compensation that it offers.

5.8.1 Autonomy

The ability to have the freedom to do the work you prefer to do is granted by autonomy. It also enabled entrepreneurs to build work environments that fit their personal beliefs and vision: *"As a leader, I can create values and thus the company culture. If you are just an employee, you just need to follow the values set by others. That was crucial for me,"* explained interviewee 5.

Most of the given answers were heavily related to the autonomy and the freedom it provides: *"Autonomy is very important. It's a factor that greatly influences my satisfaction at work. The reason why I decided to become an entrepreneur was autonomy at work. I can do the work I want, at the time I want, and with people I like. Although I like to get up early, going to work felt like taking freedom away from me,"* said interviewee 5.

Based on the interviews, autonomy is by far the greatest factor related to an entrepreneur's satisfaction and the reason for entrepreneurial endeavour: *"I am doing this because of autonomy. Because I have it, I can help create it for others as well. /.../ If you want to be autonomous, you need to solve the problems; otherwise, they accumulate and cause you trouble. That's why self-discipline is crucial to maintain autonomy,"* claimed interviewee 2.

On the other hand, with autonomy, a greater responsibility comes. Two of the respondents questioned the true nature of their autonomy: *“Big company comes with a big responsibility. You are responsible for the people you employ. Not to forget the investors and of course family. /.../ Autonomy is a relative thing,”* explained interviewee 1. They still need to take into account a number of different ideas, demands, and, most importantly, people: *“I am in the service of my people. I talk to the clients and bring that to the product team, where solutions are later developed for our clients. I work based on their orders to solve their problems. Is that autonomy?”* interviewee 10 wondered. Still, they have profound freedom at their company, but also that has its limitations. *“Honestly, I have so much autonomy that I would prefer to give it away. Sometimes I have more autonomy than the belief in myself,”* said interviewee 10.

5.8.2 Creativity

Entrepreneurs frequently mentioned that creating an organization means building in a new way, which requires creativity. The absence of given tasks and internal motivation to solve problems in different ways opens a space for creativity to thrive. *“Your work is creative. You don’t feel like you are a machine; you have greater control of your life. I can decide what to do on a daily basis, which brings responsibility. But it is really creative. Every phase of the company presents different challenges,”* said interviewee 1.

Throughout the interviews, participants often expressed a desire to create or build something new. While this might have been constrained when working as an employee, it now offers them a place to use their knowledge and imagination to the fullest: *“(Entrepreneurship) ... released inner energy and creativity I was never aware of,”* said interviewee 6. It was often noted that autonomy and creativity are connected, with autonomy enabling the latter: *“Autonomy enables creativity and enables me to solve problems,”* said interviewee 8

5.8.3 Financial compensation

While autonomy and creativity were clearly stressed as vital factors, participants were reluctant to emphasize the financial aspect of their entrepreneurial path. However, when asked directly, »the ownership of the company« or »the financial benefits« were pointed out with a bit of caution. It could be said that interviewees were more delicate when it came to money. They would say, *»well, I can't say I am not doing this also because of the money,«* as interviewee 10 said. Compared to previously mentioned factors, it seemed like they wanted to provide a justification for why they have decided to point out money as well. Interviewee 5 said: *»ownership of the company enhanced my motivation.«* Interviewee 1 would add that they have created a lot of value for investors, but also for the employees.

6 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE 2

6.1 Participant observations

As with entrepreneurs, I paid attention not just to the content of their answers but also to their mood and the way they answered their questions. I divided observations into three categories:

- How were they answering the questions;

In the beginning, their answers were short and often heavily generalized, saying: “*everyone knows you have to work.*” Throughout the interviews, they would start opening themselves up and coming back to the initial questions. Moreover, they would gradually become more and more immersed in the topic, which was reflected in their answers, time needed to think, and the seriousness. Their responses would be finished with a statement like: “*now you hear my honest view.*” At the end of the interview, when I asked them if they had anything else to add at the end of the interview, they usually continued the discussion and frequently offered a new insight that had not been mentioned earlier.

- How strongly did they engage with the question;

As in the first research sample, questions about the meaning of their work have proven difficult if an interviewee wanted to provide a straight answer. A prevalent first response was, “*this is a difficult question.*” Those who needed more time to answer usually provided more structured and in-depth answers. Nevertheless, some have thought about the subject a lot already and were able to answer promptly.

Interviewees who rushed to answer often started to describe the meaning of work or the right perception and not how they experience it, observed with a statement: “work is the most important value in our society.” Thus, I had to give them a lot of sub-questions, which slowed their pace and usually improved the depth of their answers.

Additionally, they did not have difficulties relating to their private life. Some entrepreneurs did not talk about their private lives and understood the meaning of work as a strictly business realm. On the other hand, employees repeatedly relied on free time as a logical counterweight to work and therefore discussed their private life to a greater extent.

Entrepreneurship was widely communicated as something that completely encompasses the lives of the interviewees in the first sample and thus greatly influences their perception of meaning. However, participants in the research sample of employees provided a wide variety of answers. They could find meaning in various aspects of their work.

- What was their mood like.

Before the interview started, I could sense a bit of nervousness in the participants. This kind of attitude was not observed while interviewing entrepreneurs. I believe that is because entrepreneurs know that they are the center of the research because of their unique position of being entrepreneurs. On the other hand, employees often felt insecure because they did not believe they had anything worthy to share.

During the interviewees their mood was increasingly improving. As with entrepreneurs, participants would thank me for the discussion saying, *“I need to think more about this.”* Interviewees were happy to share their views, thoughts, and ideas that they can probably not express freely in the workplace.

Worthy to note is also that one person, who was selected to participate and agreed to the interview, changed her mind before starting the interview. When she realized she would need to reflect on her job, which she finds deeply unsatisfying, she decided not to participate to avoid dealing with negative emotions.

6.2 Employees and their formation of meaning

In the research sample of employees, it was no easier task for participants to come up with their definitions and descriptions of how they interpret the meaning of work. Throughout the interviews, they would generally come up with new ideas and descriptions. It was intriguing to observe how different perspectives on what they find meaningful can create various definitions and understandings.

Those who wanted to give a fast and straightforward answer frequently relied on the old proverbs and sayings like: *“A day without work is a day without food.”* They would then continue to explain how they have been raised with a mentality to always work. With more thinking and some sub-questions, they would also come up with responses that have more to do with their personal understanding. Notwithstanding, it is hard to disagree that old proverbs and principles still apply today - no matter how much our work has changed throughout history.

Another straightforward but common answer was the perception of work as a need to survive. That was especially more prevalent with older interviewees, who already had their families. For them, work meant a means to provide a good life for their families in the first place. *“I still have kids that need my financial support. Providing them that is meaningful to me,”* said interviewee D.

The most accepted answer among interviewees was that the meaning of work is to provide value. In the first place, there was a need to help other people. *“My work is to help people in need; this gives my life meaning,”* explained interviewee E. Another common response

tackled the broader aspect of society. Interviewees also stressed the importance of everyone contributing to their work, so the system can work flawlessly. In that view, meaning is formed by groups of people working to achieve a common goal. *“One’s work is meaningful because it all makes sense in the end. Otherwise, everyone would work on their own,”* said interviewee H.

Therefore, the meaning of work was understood as a duty that needs to be done, so we can all enjoy the results of the common effort. Perceiving work as meaningful just by doing what you like doing was consistently reported to be significant. *“A person needs to have a feeling of significance, that it works for others. You can have everything, but if you do not feel useful, you will not find meaning,”* claimed interviewee E.

Having visible feedback, the work was also regarded to be highly meaningful. This was especially notable with participants who work directly with people or are close to their customers. More about it in the Feedback subsection. However, two participants focused on the personal sense of accomplishment more. For them, their work outcomes, but also how needed to achieve that result achieved and what kind of working atmosphere. *“It is more important to me if I have contributed, and if I am content with it, I want to have inner peace,”* interviewee G elaborated.

There was one clear outlier in the research sample. Interviewee, I said that work has a significant impact on her life, which goes beyond the explanations other participants mentioned. *“I fully immerse into work. That is why I want to do work that is meaningful, work that creates value for society and myself,”* she explained. Contrary to other participants, she was closer to saying that her work equals her life, something that was observed when interviewing entrepreneurs in the first research sample. Furthermore, interviewee, I was the only one saying religion is one of the crucial sources of meaning for her.

6.2.1 Meaninglessness at work

Throughout conducting interviews, it was observed that participants also like to describe experiences where they see little to no meaning. Recognizing what drives meaninglessness at work is equally important to what drives meaningfulness. If those aspects are identified and addressed, more can be done to prevent such feelings.

As with many other questions, participants would usually struggle to describe what fuels meaninglessness when asked directly. Gradually they would come up with answers while responding to different questions and cases. Most people derive that feeling when they face some hardships at their workplace. Feelings of insecurity and doubt are present when they feel like they are not fit for the challenge or make mistakes. *“When things go wrong, and I do not know what to do, I start questioning the meaning of my work,”* said interviewee B.

Another situation when a sense of meaninglessness rises is when you know the work does not actually matter, participants claimed. That comes with work that needs to be done because of some rules or explicit processes, although everyone knows that this extra work will not make any difference. *“I need to make some Excel spreadsheets that no one ever reads,”* said interviewee I. Participants also expressed meaninglessness when they put in a lot of effort, which shows zero effect or feedback from the superior. *“You work hard to complete the project, and then all the commendation goes to the person that did not do much,”* interviewee J complained.

The feeling of meaninglessness was highly attributed to the corporate world. Three participants pointed out how projects come from top-down. Their superiors believe that it is a great idea; meanwhile, those who need to execute them do not see any sense in it. *“Then it is up to you to handle the situation, which can be quite political. The problem is that these situations can demotivate people incredibly,”* interviewee G explained.

6.2.2 Changing of meaning over time

One of the questions was aimed particularly at the way the meaning of work has changed throughout the career of interviewees. With the increase in work experience, career growth, or general life milestones, the perception of meaning ought to change. That was especially the expectation for the participants who had more years of work experience.

When older participants reflected on their careers, there was not much depth observed in their answers. They didn't come up with any specific reasoning for how the meaning of their work has changed. Mostly they would point out the disadvantages of their work in a nostalgic way: *“It used to be very good at the beginning, but then it just turned into politics,”* said interviewee C. It was difficult for them to reflect on a long period of time without generalizing: *“There were oscillations, moments of dissatisfaction, but it got better in the end,”* said interviewee H. Understandably so, since it is easier to conclude positively about the end of the career, rather than face the potential difficulties from the past again.

Participants with around 10-25 years of work experience had more to share. Interviewees noted that you want to have a good job with a lot of things happening at the beginning of your career. Participant UP described it as *“You are ambitious; everything needs to make sense.”* The high significance attributed to work thus strongly influences the perception: *“People from your job become the people you hang out with since you spend so much time together. You start to equal job with your life,”* said interviewee G.

They noted how their job role in life has slowly diminished compared to the first years of their professional career. *“In the first years, I was overestimating the role of the work, and it was positioned beyond my personal interests. Now I see that a counterweight is needed to*

prevent burnout. You need to take care of your personal interests to be successful at work (day pod free time?),” said interviewee E.

At the beginning of their career, many prioritized their work and understood it as their sole purpose. Throughout time and the increasing complexity of their lives (such as family), their perspective has shifted, attributing less prominence to their work: *“Later you realize that compromises are necessary because you need to adapt to the processes and people around you,”* said interviewee F.

The attitude also probably changes due to gained work experience. Even if the intensity of work remained the same, interviewees perceived the work to be way less stressful and demanding: *“In the beginning, you have more doubt in yourself, but slowly the stress of new projects and challenges is gone,”* said interviewee F. Similarly, interviewee D noted: *“Things that took much of my time and mental energy are just part of the routine now.”*

Some described how the meaning of their work changed via applying strategies to cope with job demands better: *“You need to set borders. You need to see what you receive for what you get,”* said interviewee A. They would try to elaborate on how it is necessary to adapt to the job position and the company’s changing situation, therefore also influencing the meaning of their work.

Contrary to most other participants, the interviewee I described how their perception had not changed much as she has always tried to find the work that would be meaningful for her. She has changed numerous positions to find the most fulfilling work that is congruent with her beliefs. *“Often, I was jobless, just so I could find and do the work I really wanted. /.../ I had to go through a lot to find the work that is fulfilling,”* said interviewee I. Even if the meaningfulness of her work was starting to diminish, she would try to craft it or find meaning in other aspects before finally deciding to switch positions.

6.2.3 Feedback

When asked about the meaning of their work and observing participants’ responses throughout the interviews, feedback was repeatedly pointed out as something they found significant. This was often mentioned only secondary; however, I could observe how passionate interviewees were about it. Throughout the interviews, feedback became the most meaningful factor for some of the participants. On the contrary, not getting positive feedback when one has expected to receive one was regarded as a strong dissatisfaction factor.

Getting feedback from the client was regularly mentioned as a crucial factor: *“The highest satisfaction for me is when the customer approves my work,”* said interviewee A. At this

point, some expressed a desire to get more feedback: *“I wish I could be closer to a customer to hear their feedback,”* said interviewee J.

Some saw an important value of feedback as a way to show appreciation for the work they have done from the superior: *“If there was an outage (of electrical energy) and you managed to solve the situation quickly, you got a praise, and that was very powerful,”* said interviewee H. Interviewee A noted that understanding how powerful feedback is, made him devalue the salary and other financial compensations: *“Because of feedback we have better relations, more flexibility and that is far more important for me.”*

Apart from the superior recognizing their work, other employees' feedback was also stressed. Interviewees tend to understand how important relations with their coworkers are for their well-being. Participant B explained that employees need to assign bonus points to each other. Meanwhile, bonus points are distributed to determine the financial compensation, and she kept the score to remind her how valuable she is to other coworkers, completely disregarding the financial aspect.

One commonly introduced aspect was how feedback is important to determine your work identity. Gaining feedback from your results, coworkers, and superiors was understood to be crucial to get a sense of how one functions at work. *“You need to understand who you are at work. It is difficult to achieve that without feedback. You can say you have found your meaning, but maybe you are a headache for others,”* claimed interviewee F. Furthermore, feedback is crucial for one's career development. Thus positive and negative feedback is needed. Coworkers can help you recognize your strengths and weaknesses; participants argued: *“It gives you room for improvement. You won't be able to change your patterns of behavior on your own,”* said interviewee G.

6.3 Autonomy at work

This thesis focuses on autonomy as a vital factor in enhancing meaningfulness. Employees are, unlike entrepreneurs, in different positions, as they are directly dependent on their superiors. The research subject was not just their perceived autonomy but also their ability to use it when changing or recreating their work environment. Participants also described their relations at work, social inclusion, task variety, creativity, personal growth, and greater good as key variables when determining the meaning of work.

The most notable thing was the discrepancy between the perceived and actual autonomy at work. Participants would repeatedly claim: *“I think I have enough autonomy at work.”* However, the way people defined freedom at their workplace significantly differed. Participant B explained her sufficient autonomy by having the ability to *“choose the vacation anytime.”* Then she explained that *“anytime”* actually means in June and the first half of July. Moreover, that needs to be agreed upon by her boss. After saying that, she realizes that

she is more limited than she first thought. Then she would also come up with other work-related situations: *“I wish to have a bit more freedom at work, so I could freely choose how to get the work done.”*

The responses show that the way people perceive autonomy is very relative. Some would compare their autonomy to the one experienced by their partners, their previous positions, or coworkers. *“I have full autonomy now,”* said interviewee J, since he was comparing his current position to the previous one, where he had to deal with a lot of administration. However, that would not be considered sufficient autonomy for some other participants in the sample. This kind of thinking could simply be attributed to the fact that we have different personalities. Nonetheless, it seems like the autonomy defined by the work position or work environment significantly influences the way we perceive our space of freedom. The way participants would realize their limitations during the interviews shows that people are not conscious of it enough.

Interviewees would start to open themselves and talk about their difficulties and limitations when asked if and how they are able to form their work tasks and environment. Generally, they would say they are trying to change the work environment. However, they would repeatedly come up with reasons why changes are not possible. *“I am not trying to actively change the environment because I realized it is better not to do it. Relations here seemed to be more formal, and I don’t want to hinder the working process,”* said interviewee A. Despite having expressed a willingness to change something that the interviewee lacks at the workplace, he settled with the current situation and found satisfaction with the flexibility that this job offers.

Participant F said that he actively tries to improve the way work is done. He listed numerous activities and showed concern for coworkers and business performance. Although he noted in the end: *“I don’t have enough ability to shape the environment. I am trying, but people look the other way. Sometimes I am embittered because I know that I can not change things.”*

Generally, participants would say that they want to change their work environment, many claimed they have tried, but in the end, they would conclude the change is not possible. The given reason for that is the rules and the norms that prevent any changes, interviewees claimed. No matter the position or industry, they would say that nothing can be done in their case. Those with more years of work experience seemed especially designated.

It seems like participants rather focused on the aspects of work that they find satisfying or where they had a feeling to make the most influence. *“I am rather working in the field because I have freedom there. Leadership means dealing with bosses,”* said interviewee C. Similarly, interviewee I noted how she would focus on the creative part of her work, so that would keep her away from an otherwise dissatisfying work environment.

There was one case where participants expressed that their autonomy was expanding. A good relationship with the superior was generally mentioned as an important factor. However, participants noted how gaining the trust of their superiors enhanced their autonomy. “I feel autonomous because I can take decisions without his approval, which would actually be needed,” said interviewee F. Likewise, interviewee G claimed that *“because of the boss who gives clear feedback, recognizes strengths and weaknesses and provides a support system, my hands are free.”* This is another proof of how important or how limiting having a superior for one can be.

Participant I, however, was an outlier in the research sample. She said that not being able to change the work environment and not finding her work meaningful would make her quit the job and look for the new one. In her opinion, autonomy is crucial to finding meaning at work. Even though having autonomy sometimes means more work and more effort, it is worth it, in her opinion. *“If I am not satisfied at work, I will start working on quitting and finding a new job,”* interviewee I explained. Furthermore, she was the only one that presented a clear example of job crafting. Interviewee I described how she and her coworker decided not to compete for their clients in the marketing job but instead decided to cooperate and share their bonus as well, which completely turned the dynamics of the job position.

That does come with a high cost. She prefers to be self-employed rather than signing a full-time contract, meaning she does not have high social security. On the other hand, she was the only one to rate her job satisfaction on a scale from 1 to 10 with ten; meanwhile, all the others chose 8 or 9. The question is whether she can achieve high satisfaction and autonomy levels due to her character or the fact that self-employment brings more autonomy, as could be the case with entrepreneurs.

6.4 Achieving the fullest potential at work

Autonomy is also closely related to one’s ability to actualize his or her fullest potential. In the research sample of employees, it was observed how entering the entrepreneurial role unlocked their hidden potential. Interviewees in the research sample of employees described how limiting they often feel at work. Not being able to fully express oneself could hinder their potential and development. This concern was raised especially since participants described how they move into the fields of work where they feel better, however narrowing their space of possible activities.

When asked about using their strengths and fulfilling their potential, their answers were not as affirmative as in other cases. In fact, a few claimed, *“definitely not.”* The most common reason they think so is the work environment that is hindering their development. *“The organization of work does not allow enough time for developing new skills, research, other projects,”* said interviewee E. Those with less work experience said they might try new roles

to help them unlock their potential better someday. On the other hand, the older generations again resigned, saying *“I am too old now,”* despite stating there are many opportunities.

The main reason one would not pursue new challenges was the family. Participants would say they have decided on the family and more free time, despite being aware of what they are missing out on. *“I know that I could focus on my strengths and get a higher sense of fulfillment,”* said interviewee A. Besides, participant H expressed regret for not taking the opportunity for a management position that could enable him to use his potential. *“I needed to take care of my parents, my family, and then I got old, although I constantly had opportunities.”*

6.5 Free time

Leisure was one of the topics interviewees mentioned repeatedly. Free time activities, including private or family life, were often used as a counterweight to work activities. When discussing meaning, people were trying to clarify what is significant in their lives, so the conversation often included the connection between the meaning of work and the meaning of life. Free time was strongly preferred over working hours, although some participants claimed that work brings them similar satisfaction.

Interviewees often added that the right balance between work and free time is needed. Although that seems to be a widely accepted concept in our society, participants described how they needed to learn it the hard way: *“Now I see that a counterweight is needed to prevent burnout. You need to take care of your personal interests, to be successful at work,”* said interviewee E.

The more work experience people had, the more they focused on the importance of the right combination of work and free time activities to live a meaningful life. *“Whatever the ultimate satisfaction is, the job alone can not offer you that. It’s not about the money, the job, or your passion; it’s about the combination of everything,”* interviewee H explained. Moreover, some started questioning how their private life influences the way they perceive the meaning of work: *“If you are unhappy in your private life, it will influence your work and vice versa,”* said interviewee F.

Although most of the interviewees claimed that they prefer free time, their answers proved how powerful an impact work has in their private lives as well. In some cases, it was observed that participants were not conscious of the impact their work had. Interviewee B said she sometimes works in her free time, despite not having any overhead work and without getting compensated for it. In this case, it was once again proved how people tend to give socially accepted and generalized answers that seem common to everyone. However, deep dive into their behavior showed that participants act in different ways. Seemingly obvious questions about meaning usually led to a whole new discovery about oneself.

Lastly, a minority of participants said that they have a clear border between work and private life. Unlike some others who claimed similarly, they exhibited that clearly with statements like: *“When I come home, I close my notebook and I don’t think about work until I am back in the office the next day,”* said interviewee D. Instead of referencing their work when discussing their private life, they would talk about their hobbies and leisure activities: *“Playing in the orchestra and hearing the applause, in the end, gives me the highest satisfaction,”* said interviewee D.

6.6 Understanding what drives employees

After having thought and discussed various topics on the meaning of work, the last question asked was about their why. Participants were asked to describe their purpose or the driving force behind their activities. Their answers were not as sovereign. Often, they would ask what is meant by that or that they do not have anything to share.

Lack of intent was visible in their answers throughout the interviews. Compared to entrepreneurs, who often described how they have a clear vision of what they want, the answers of participants in this research sample were vague. Interviewee B described how she never thought she would work at the current workplace. *“I ended up here completely by chance.”* Likewise, interviewee C said, *“I was just happy that I got the job, and so I work there from 8 to 4.”* Furthermore, participant B said, *“I have no clear goals. I just go and do what life brings me. So far, it has been quite ok. I have no vision of where I am going.”*

Participants would say they just like to do their work without any higher goals or purpose involved. Additionally, they would recognize they do not have that special intent other people have. *“I was thinking about it, but I do not see anything. I admire people that have this calling,”* said interviewee F. Living “a normal life” was mentioned frequently, meaning spending time with their families and friends, enjoying free time activities, and having financial needs met.

Nonetheless, a few participants mentioned having some intent or objectives in their life. Those were not high-flying goals, but rather guiding principles used at work. *“I decided that I know what I like to do, so I stuck to it, no matter what,”* said interviewee D. Additionally, going from a goal to a goal was mentioned a few times. *“Right now, my goal is to get as many handicapped kids as possible to start doing sports. Then I will find a different one,”* said interviewee I.

6 DISCUSSION

This chapter contains the findings and results which were obtained from the interviews and the theory. Our aim is to answer the research questions and list the recommendations for organizations. Limitations and suggestions for further research are also discussed in this chapter.

6.1 Interpretation of the findings

In this thesis, my focus was to acknowledge how entrepreneurs perceive the meaning of work. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were also conducted with employees to compare the results and better understand how to make work more meaningful. According to my hypothesis, entrepreneurs perceive the meaning of work differently. Based on the answers and findings, we can say that the significance entrepreneurs attribute to their work is higher compared to employees, thus making their work more meaningful.

If we try to apply the theory to the findings, the results are not that surprising. Entrepreneurs are more immersed in their work on pretty much every level. That is due to their unique nature, which enables them to align personal, organizational, and arguably also societal meanings. But there is more beyond the theoretical categorization that is discussed in the next chapter.

While conducting the interviews, I was not just in the role of the researcher. My role has unexpectedly and unintentionally expanded as participants were gradually opening themselves up. Their answers were generalized and often described a perception, which later turned out to be false. For example, participants would say they are highly satisfied with their work and later provide a number of reasons and situations that speak against it. That is how I realized I should not be attentive just to the content of their answers but also to how they say them and what is behind their initial answers.

This was not just a business-related topic, nor psychological, but also a closely related subject to the very essence of our existence. People were describing their upbringing, family relations, a broad overview of their careers, and specific personal stories. Often we would find ourselves in a silence, where the interviewee would reflect deeply on his or her life and the work they have done so far, which is ultimately their mark and contribution to this world. It could be argued that the discussion triggered in them a will to experience more meaningful work. Namely, at the end or even in the middle of the interviews, participants expressed their gratefulness for having this discussion, claiming they had not thought about this topic, which actually is important.

If the reader of this text tries to answer, what is the meaning of their work, the answer is far from easy. Participants were faced with the same dilemma. However, the answer to the question of their meaning was usually hiding right in those seemingly redundant stories. It

felt like they had to start by telling a story; otherwise, they were not able to come up with their answers. Based on the answers from the participants, meaning is the simple answer to why. Why am I here, why am I doing it, or why does it matter. Meaning hides in a series of relationships between different entities. Same as every book, every work project, workday, or career has a certain story. That is congruent with the research that claims that meaning can be expressed in a variety of ways, including stories, personal narratives, and descriptions of everyday life (Hermans, 1998; Sommer & Baumesiter, 1998). Similarly, Harari (2016) argues that we make sense of the world by telling stories: "Meaning is created when many people weave together a common network of stories" (p. 170). Moreover, the meaning of work could then be understood as an effort to make something significant in relation to others. That was mostly expressed as a group of people collaborating to obtain a common goal. Of course, it can also be an individual effort; however, the end result has to be significant to others. The whole point of Frankl's (1959) philosophy is that the meaning can be only achieved via others, not individually, as the self-actualization theory suggests.

But as Michael Steger (The Singju Post, 2018) said, it is not about the meaning. Meaning is always present, and it just depends on what significance we attribute to it. Meaningfulness is defined as the amount of significance we attribute to the meaning (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). We certainly want more meaningfulness at work, as it is linked to better health, general well-being outcomes, and life satisfaction (Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012). Based on our research, we can say that entrepreneurs experience higher levels of meaningfulness, which is yet to be confirmed by a study where meaningfulness will be measured precisely. Also, we can argue that based on our research, employees are limited in their inability to act according to their beliefs and personal characteristics freely.

Entrepreneurs have a drive, a strong intent to do something, to change things, which could be described as a purpose. Although they were not clear in wording it, it resonated well with the words of Maslow (1954, p. 3): "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization ... This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming."

There has been extensive research made on how employees can enhance their meaningfulness at work and find their purpose. However, based on the interviews, it concerns to what extent they are able to redesign their work and reframe their experiences due to lack of autonomy. This becomes visible when you see the contrast between experiences reported by employees and entrepreneurs. While entrepreneurs were describing their work with optimism, a certain level of resignation was present among employees. That was especially evident when discussing their possibilities to influence their work environment and fulfilling their potential. As described in the next chapter, employees tend to retreat to the areas of work that they find the most meaningful. Yet, at the same time, they

are reducing their working space and, by doing that, reducing their possibilities to fulfill their potential. At this point, it is appropriate to quote Maslow (1971) once again: “If you plan on being anything less than you are capable of being, you will probably be unhappy all the days of your life.”

In Chapter 3, we proposed a model that depicts two ways of achieving well-being at work. After conducting the research, we think it is important to update it based on our findings. If employees are not able to align their work with their personal beliefs or redesign their work, they are more likely to perceive it as meaningless. This option should be highlighted in order to point out the possible negative consequences.

“The challenge for leaders is to create an environment conducive to meaningfulness,” stated Bailey and Madden (2016). It is not just about the individual and his or her perception of meaning, but also what is the superior’s attitude towards that perception. The meaning of work is created via others as well. As previously mentioned, participants were happy to discuss the meaning of their work. Work is something we do almost every day, most of our lives, so we discuss it all the time. However, those are mainly brief and shallow conversations that can be easily taken for granted. Throughout the interviews, I wondered how many times and if ever people discussed such a matter with anyone. Understanding one’s personal wants, needs, and strengths are crucial for our well-being. To provide a good working environment, and increase well-being and meaningfulness at work, those questions should be addressed more often.

Research question 1: How is the meaning of work perceived by entrepreneurs?

The research on the meaning of work has been mostly conducted generally. To the best of my knowledge, I have not found any research on the subject that would specifically consider entrepreneurs. However, closely related to the phenomenon of the meaning of work is an individual’s well-being. Shir, Nikolaev, and Wincent's (2019) research show that entrepreneurial activity strongly correlates with well-being and, therefore, positive meaning.

This research puts the entrepreneur’s perception of meaning at the center of attention. The analysis of responses shows that the way entrepreneurs derive their meaning is like the existing research suggests. If we put findings from the interviews and theory side by side, we can see that interviewees mentioned various sources of meaning.

Based on the analysis of the answers from entrepreneurs, the most distinct source of meaning could be found in the category of ‘others.’ The literature on the meaning of work defines this area as a way interactions and relationships with other people and groups, inside or outside their work environment impact one’s meaning of work. Those entities could be coworkers, leaders, groups and communities, and family (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

In the realm of ‘others and the meaning of the work,’ interviewees discussed their influence on their coworkers. Relationships at work can strongly influence the meaning of work (Wrzesniewski, Dutton & Debebe, 2003). However, since all interviewees work in a position of a leader, it would be more correct to look at that perspective. Interviewees often stressed how they would like to provide the best possible lives to their employees. By setting organizational values, mission, purpose, and the identity of an organization, leaders can alter the way their employees or coworkers perceive the meaning of their work (Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper). As suggested by entrepreneurs during interviews, they can offer their employees to take their personal goals to a higher level for a common goal that fuels meaningfulness (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

Another category in the other domain is the family. The existing research covers topics such as family’s strain on the individual (Brief & Aldag, 1989), family support and assistance (Brief & Nord, 1990), or the way work-related experiences affect the other domain (Rothbard, 2001). In this research, participants often described their personal stories and, at the same time, unintentionally revealed how their family influenced their career choices and thus the meaning of their work. A precise study would be needed to confirm how high expectations or entrepreneurial activity in the family influences the meaning of work; nonetheless, interviewee 2 and interviewee 3 brought up this question and agreed with it.

One of the most widely discussed phenomena regarding the meaning of work was the help to others. In a way, others were mentioned as employees, as discussed earlier, but more focus was attributed to their customers, end-users, or simply non-defined individuals who benefit in this world because of interviewees’ entrepreneurial activity. Despite my efforts, I have not found this concept discussed in the existing literature. Additionally, Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski (2010) argue that literature in this area is limiting compared to the other sources of the meaning of work.

Finally, ‘belief’ as a source of the meaning of work was observed to be present to a greater extent. Research on belief studies how the self can form the meaning of work. Belief about the role of work in life is typically observed via the concepts of job involvement and work centrality (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). The concept of a job is defined as “the degree to which one is cognitively preoccupied with, engaged in, and concerned with one’s present job” (Paullay et al., 1994, p. 225), and it can be said that interviewees seemed to be highly preoccupied with their work and highly engaged in it. Same goes for work centrality, as participants attributed significant prominence to their work compared to other areas of life. Lastly, work orientation, especially calling, is studied when analyzing beliefs (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). The questions asked during the interviews did not directly target the interviewees to understand their work orientation. However, it would not be far from the truth to say that most of them seemed to display calling orientation. That can be observed in the statements where participants claim they just need to work and create something, thus seeing their work as an end in itself. Furthermore, they expressed their willingness and hoped they were contributing to the greater good.

Research question 2: What are the differences between the way entrepreneurs and employees perceive the meaning of work?

To the best of my belief, there is no research literature comparing the perception of the meaning of work for entrepreneurs and employees. In a way, the analysis of responses in both research samples shows similar results. Akin to entrepreneurs, employees derive their meaning from their coworkers, leaders, beliefs, and results of their work, internally or externally.

The main difference would be in the job involvement and work centrality. It is in the nature of entrepreneurs to create jobs that are central to their lives, and they expressed that in the interviews. Furthermore, they have shown that they do not understand their work as a job but rather as a lifestyle. High involvement in their work, which was pointed out frequently, indicates that it is more difficult for them to dissociate from their work, which makes their work more meaningful (Brown, 1996). Entrepreneurs' perceptions of their work also showed how strong their relationship with work is, which is another sign of experiencing more meaningful work (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010). On the other hand, employees were much less central to their work compared to other domains of life, especially free time. In the second research sample, employees repeatedly resorted to free time when discussing their meaning perceptions. Unlike entrepreneurs, they would frequently mention how important the right work-life balance is. Entrepreneurs, however, were very much focused on their work, unsurprisingly so since work is much more central for them. Furthermore, entrepreneurs would discuss losing boundaries between work and private life, working long hours, or even never stopping to think about work. In the case of employees, some would point out how they completely dismissed work after their work was over or how they also have hobbies as a counterweight to their job. Based on the findings from the interviews, job orientation from the tripartite model would be well suited for such statements (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz 1997). In that same model, entrepreneurs showed strong tendencies toward calling orientation, as discussed earlier.

Another important difference is in attributing work a negative meaning. In the case of entrepreneurs, meaninglessness was not brought up to attention as something significant, although entrepreneurs have claimed to think about the meaning of their work way more frequently. That is not surprising since entrepreneurs have way more freedom to choose what they will do and therefore have a higher potential to experience meaningful work. Employees usually talk about meaninglessness because of a need to do the work they find meaningless. That meant seeing no value in their work and not receiving fair treatment, feedback, or praise from their coworkers or superiors. Statements from the interviewees in the second research sample are aligned with the findings from Bailey and Madden (2016). They found the seven deadly sins for fueling meaninglessness, which were already discussed under the theoretical part of the thesis. In my research, taking employees for granted, giving people pointless work

to do, and treating people unfairly, were the factors congruent with the previously mentioned study that participants addressed directly.

Related to that matter is the general outlook people have on the opportunities regarding their work and how they are able to change their work environment as a whole. It is safe to say that entrepreneurs have a clear vision of what they want to do and are striving to achieve it. Ryff (1989) defined purpose as a sense of directedness and intentionality, which is in line with entrepreneurs' statements. The purpose is widely understood as a mechanism that gives life meaning and is regarded to be a strong predictor of meaningfulness (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

On the opposite, employees often claim they happen to find themselves in the current position or work setting, although that might not be their first choice. Their intent seemed to be low, with some participants claiming directly that they do not really have any goal or purpose and are just going through their lives. When those views were challenged, they would say nothing can be done, because of their specific life situation, work setting, rules, or a superior. As a result of that, negative outcomes such as demotivation or disappointment were discussed. Generally, employees seemed somehow resigned that they are not able to change their situations and should therefore rather focus on other things that they perceive to be better fitting for them. Many of the first research sample participants understood entrepreneurship as a way to escape this kind of feeling they were dealing with before becoming entrepreneurs. Thus, it was easier for entrepreneurs to talk about their work with greater enthusiasm.

Research question 3: Which factors contribute to meaningfulness at work?

The question of meaning is a question about something completely essential. Therefore, it is hard to argue what drives meaningfulness, as there could be completely different factors for every individual. That was especially the case in the second research sample, where employees listed several factors, so it is more difficult to draw any conclusions. However, the most persistently mentioned factor throughout the interviews was feedback. On the contrary, autonomy and creativity were without a doubt two strongly preferred answers of entrepreneurs.

Bailey and Madden (2016) arrived at a similar conclusion when trying to answer the same question in a much larger sample of 135 participants. They found out that meaningfulness was related to a successfully done job, receiving praise, recognition, and acknowledgment from others. Additionally, the same was true when people had a feeling that they had fulfilled their potential or found their work creative, absorbing, and interesting. While the former was, in our case, well congruent with the research sample of employees, the latter was as well on point for the entrepreneurs in the first research sample.

Moreover, Bailey and Madden (2016) continue that these factors alone were not sufficient to provide meaningful work experience. They further explain the nature of meaningfulness in greater detail. Furthermore, other models try to depict the creation of meaningful work in a more comprehensive way (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012; Park 2012).

In this research, factors were not analyzed to that extent, also considering the research sample was smaller. The findings are congruent with the hypothesis, however. Entrepreneurs find autonomy to be a highly significant factor for them to perceive work as meaningful. That is in accordance with the findings of Shir, Nikolaev, and Wincent (2019), who suggest that the main reason for entrepreneurship to have a positive effect on the individual's well-being is autonomy. Together with competence and relatedness, autonomy is one of the key basic psychological needs for satisfaction, according to self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Additionally, Cohen-Meitar, Carmeli, and Waldman's (2009) research shows that meaningfulness at work and meaningfulness in working boost creativity.

Research question 4: Do entrepreneurs or founders of organizations have a higher chance of achieving higher meaningfulness compared to employees based on their unique freedom in the work context?

To my best knowledge, the literature research that would compare how entrepreneurs and employees perceive meaning is not existing. The closest to this subject is again the previously mentioned research that compared the well-being of employees and entrepreneurs. It showed that compared to other work alternatives, entrepreneurship satisfies the basic psychological needs, resulting from the entrepreneur's autonomy and ability to self-organize work (Shir, Nikolaev & Wincent, 2019).

The work environment in which employees are positioned will never be fully aligned with their values, beliefs, personal characteristics, strengths, and other factors that could allow a sense of wholeness at the workplace to emerge. This was well observed in the interviews, where participants expressed a degree of meaninglessness, inability to change their work environment, and heavier reliance on other domains of life to derive meaning from.

Entrepreneurs, in opposition, have a unique opportunity to create organizations with an environment that are fully aligned with the factors they believe are important to them and are not a result of the external influence (deCharms, 1981), which was well confirmed in our research. Interviewees described autonomy and creativity as the key factors for fueling meaningfulness, or a key to joy at work, as Rindova, Barry, and Ketchen (2009) found out. The entrepreneur's ability to harmonize personal values with the organizational one and develop his or her talents has been well-researched and is present in the research literature, as already mentioned in Chapter 3.

Most people, however, are not entrepreneurs and will probably never be. One of the most researched topics on making work meaningful is job design. Throughout the interviews, I tried to understand if and how employees are redesigning their work. There has been only one case with interviewee I where job crafting could be observed. Other participants claimed they believe it is not worth trying because they can not change anything. Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer, and Weigl (2010) warned that the bottom-up approach is problematic due to the scope of job modifications workers need to accomplish. On the other hand, the top-down approach does not provide the adjustment for every individual, which has also been mentioned by the participants. As mentioned earlier, Von Devivere (2018) noted that according to Frankl, the will to meaning can not be found via someone externally but only with individual freedom and responsibility. Similarly, Bailey and Madden (2016) claimed that meaningfulness seems to be something employees discover for themselves.

Hornung, Rousseau, Glaser, Angerer, and Weigl (2010) also claimed that all job design approaches are subdued in relation to the authority. Interviewee I, who redesigned her job, argued how there was constant pressure from her boss to revert to working as other coworkers do, despite her being more satisfied and efficient. Other participants in the research sample expressed a wish to change; however, they might have not even tried because there was no support to believe in a possibility to change from their superiors.

Even more importantly, it was observed that in situations where personal and organizational values are not aligned or crashing, employees retreat. I believe it is a natural response to try to find the areas or aspects of work which people can derive the most meaning from. One could argue that reframing situations and changing perceptions are a part of job redesign. Nonetheless, the cost of such an endeavor is high. Instead of trying to redesign work in a way that would allow one to use his or her potential to the fullest, throughout the most of working time possible, the area of meaningful pursuits at work is shrinking. Thus, there is more space left for negative experiences at work to prevail, creating unsatisfied employees and inefficient workers. Moreover, the cost comes with an unused potential of employees, which is not just an organizational but also a personal tragedy for every individual.

Another factor that increases meaningfulness is responsibility. Having responsibility, an individual needs to understand why, how, and for whom he works. This is a vital factor in the nature of entrepreneurship; in fact, an entrepreneur is defined as “someone who specializes in taking responsibility for and making judgemental decisions that affect the location, the form, and the use of goods, resources, or institutions” (Hebert & Link, 1989, p. 39). Compared to employees, the very nature of entrepreneurs is to expose themselves to a greater risk of negative outcomes that comes with entrepreneurship (Harris, Saltstone, & Fraboni, 1999; Jenkins, Wiklund, & Brundin, 2014; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). The responsibility entrepreneurs bear for their organization, employees, customers, investors, and other stakeholders, as well as their families, is enormous. The existence of the other is

constantly present and highly intensified, therefore shifting the focus from self-interest to something greater, which is, according to Frankl, the only way we can experience meaningful lives (Wong, 2014).

6.2 Limitations

The research sample in the case of entrepreneurs and employees was relatively small. To be able to draw more valid conclusions, the sample would need to be larger and more heterogenous. That would allow us to better identify and understand the underlying factors that contribute to meaningful work. In the case of entrepreneurs, the research sample could better cover factors such as the industry, age of the participant, years of experience as an entrepreneur, size of the organization, phase of the company in the maturity cycle, etc.

The same goes for the second research sample of employees. I tried to get a relatively broad spectrum of different ages and an equal share of males and females. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to see how the perception of meaning changes with the position or level of education. A great majority of participants had higher education or were positioned on a high level in the organization.

Furthermore, the topic was fairly broad, encompassing various topics related to the meaning of work. Since the existing research on the topic is almost non-existent for entrepreneurs, I wanted to gather as many different aspects as possible. More detailed research, focused solely on the factors that fuel meaningfulness or understanding their purpose, would provide much greater insight.

Different data collection methods could be used or combined with an in-depth interview. Questionnaires would enable us to measure the degree to which participants reported certain states, perceptions, and feelings. In-depth interviews could be used to gather their personal stories and characteristics. Meanwhile, a questionnaire would enable us to better explore the correlation between phenomena.

It is also worth considering the influence of bias. That could have been present, especially in the interviews with entrepreneurs. Their answers might have portrayed entrepreneurship as more favorable to employee status. Nonetheless, they have a specific role compared to employees. This concern was even raised by participant 3. However, entrepreneurs were far more likely to question their initial answers and change their opinions to provide the answer that would resonate with them the most. Generalizations and opinions heavily aligned with a common societal's beliefs were also present with employees.

Some of the interviews were conducted in person, others via technology services. Interviewees that discussed their answers in person could have been more likely to open up themselves. That was a crucial factor, as the topic of this research stretches well beyond the sphere of just work or business.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

Research on the meaning of work has been flourishing in recent years. However, there are still many misconceptions, disagreements, and paradoxes; as Bailey and Madden (2019) pointed out, I believe this is a part of this research subject's nature. This is a very broad and multi-disciplinary field with various definitions and possible arguments.

As I have not found any research on the meaning of work from the entrepreneurship perspective, despite my best efforts, it would be interesting to see more of that. More research is needed to understand and determine how underlying factors could work with each other. The effort to boost meaningful work in organizations could be based on the knowledge gained from the perspective of entrepreneurs. I believe the meaningfulness experienced by entrepreneurs could help researchers uncover mechanisms to come up with powerful insight and guide them to build the right strategies.

Furthermore, the topic of "other and meaning of work" as a source of the meaning was the most evident. In my research, the other could be understood as an individual, a group of people, or even a product as the end result, but always in relation to a person. There is plenty of room to study how those relationships between different external entities contribute to the final experienced meaningfulness. As Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) suggested, more research is needed right in this field.

It would be intriguing to research the way the meaning of work is perceived in different work settings and forms of work. There are groups of people whose work is characterized by high autonomy and creativity, such as athletes, artists, or craftsmen. Moreover, there is a wide variety of people who identify themselves as entrepreneurs. The perception of the meaning of work possibly significantly differs between self-employed individuals, start-up founders, medium-size company leaders, or corporate CEOs, who were at some point all entrepreneurs or still perceive themselves as such.

Wong (2014) noted the discrepancy between humanistic and existential psychology. The mysticism behind the why and the purpose that drives entrepreneurs was not well researched in this thesis. However, it could serve to fill the gap between more practically oriented positive psychology and more philosophically oriented existential psychology.

CONCLUSION

The meaning of work is a part of the big question of our very existence. Research on this matter has always existed and captivated thinkers from various fields. In recent years, the research on the meaning of work has caught a lot of attention as a part of a bigger movement to bring employees' happiness and general well-being to the center of work. There are dividing views on what the meaning of work represents and its role in organizational

behavior and organizational psychology. Nonetheless, its benefits to an individual's well-being and flourishing are evident.

This thesis aimed to better understand the meaning of the work phenomenon and how entrepreneurs perceive it in particular. I hypothesized that entrepreneurs are in a favorable position to experience their work to be meaningful to a greater degree because of their unique position of work and the environment they are able to create. In-depth interviews I have conducted with 10 entrepreneurs confirmed my beliefs. Entrepreneurs possess a high degree of autonomy, which enables them to shape their work and their general work environment to guarantee the highest possible congruence of their personal beliefs, needs, and wants with the organizational's setting they have formed themselves. Apart from the big amount of significance entrepreneurs attribute to their work, they are also highly driven to deliver the best in their work. Participants also argued that the ability to express themselves, creativity in general, was fueled by autonomy and presents a significant factor. As a result of the fulfillment of their personal freedom, their meaningfulness in work can thrive. Additionally, it is in the nature of entrepreneurs to deal with far greater responsibility for themselves and others, which also boosts meaningfulness.

Subsequently, I conducted 10 in-depth interviews with employees to be able to compare the way the meaning of work is perceived and try to better understand the differences. Based on the answers, it would be safe to say entrepreneurs find their work more meaningful compared to employees. Although, a more detailed study is needed to confirm this finding. Employees can find their work meaningful but to a lesser extent. Entrepreneurs are more involved in their work than employees, where involvement is lower or more fluctuating. Furthermore, work is much more central in the lives of entrepreneurs. On the other hand, employees derive their meaning from other domains of life, especially family and free-time activities, more profoundly. Additionally, there was a strong tendency towards calling orientation in the research sample of entrepreneurs, meanwhile, that can not be said for the second research sample of employees, where the elements of job orientation were most present. One of the factors particularly important for employees is the feedback from their coworkers, superiors, or customers. The level of involvement of entrepreneurs presumably makes feedback self-evident.

When discussing meaningfulness, it is also worth mentioning its opposite. Employees had a lot to say about the negative meaning experienced at their work. Namely, taking them for granted, giving them pointless work to do, and treating them unfairly were the answers pointed out by employees that were also identified in the research as one of the most contributing to the meaninglessness at work. While entrepreneurs showed a strong drive for work-related activities, employees displayed less intent in their work. Having a purpose can prove to be crucial when you face difficulties. Employees reported demotivation, disappointment, and avoidance when they found work meaningless. Those who do not identify as entrepreneurs still have the opportunity to redesign their work; however, those efforts are often destined to fail. Even if there is a will to change, they are subdued to

insufficient autonomy and superior's authority. By retreating to areas of work they find meaningful, which was commonly observed, and reducing the meaningful space at work, instead of trying to redesign it, human potential is lost.

A lot can be learned from the way meaningfulness is experienced by entrepreneurs. Meaningfulness has to be discovered by employees themselves and can not be imposed externally. Therefore, it is of vital importance to establish a meaningful relation to the meaning of work. That can be achieved by openly discussing an individual's strengths, needs, and contributions to the common goal. The most surprising discovery of this research is the realization of how significant work can become if we let workers speak about their work in its entirety.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek

Smisel pri delu je pomemben del velikega vprašanja o našem obstoju. To vprašanje je vedno pritegnilo pozornost mislecev iz različnih področjih. V zadnjih letih se je raziskovanje na področju smisla pri delu okrepilo kot del večjega gibanja za doseganje sreče in zadovoljstva pri delu. Mnenja glede definicije in vloge koncepta smisla pri delu na področju organizacijskega vedenja in organizacijske psihologije niso enotna. Vendarle pa ne gre spregledati pozitivnih vplivov na well being in flourishing zaposlenih.

Namen te naloge je bil okrepiti razumevanje koncepta smisla pri delu, in še posebej, kako ga razumejo podjetniki. Postavil sem hipotezo, da imajo podjetniki možnost za doseganje višjih ravni smiselnosti pri delu, glede na njihovo zmožnost, da prosto ustvarjajo delovno okolje. Opravil sem 10 poglobljenih intervjujev s podjetniki, ki potrjujejo mojo hipotezo. Podjetniki pri delu uživajo višje ravni avtonomije, kar jim omogoča, da delo in delovno okolje zgradijo tako, da s svojimi osebnimi prepričanji, potrebami in zahtevami v največji možni meri uskladijo z organizacijo in njenimi značilnostmi. Sodelujoči v raziskavi so kot pomemben faktor, ki ga tudi omogoča avtonomija, navedli kreativnost. Kot rezultat možnosti uresničitve njihove osebne svobode, lahko pride do visokega dojemanja smiselnosti pri delu.

Poleg tega sem izvedel še 10 poglobljenih intervjujev z zaposlenimi, da bi lahko primerjal, kako se dojemanje smisla pri delu med tema skupinama razlikuje. Na podlagi odgovorov in njihove analize, si upam trditi, da podjetniki pri delu dosegajo višje ravni smiselnosti. Za potrditev te teze bi bila sicer potrebna še bolj poglobljena študija. Zaposleni lahko prav tako dosegajo visoke ravni smiselnosti pri delu, a v manjšem obsegu. Podjetniki so visoko vpleteni v svoje delo, medtem ko je to pri zaposlenih nižje oziroma bolj niha. Delo podjetniki tudi veliko bolj postavljajo v center svojih življenj. Na drugi strani zaposleni v prostem času vidijo protiutež, ki je za njih v primerjavi s podjetniki bolj pomemben vir smisla. Med podjetniki gre zaznati tudi calling orientiranosti, medtem ko to težje trdimo za zaposlene, kjer so prepoznani elementi job orientacije. Za zaposlene so pri delu še posebej pomembne povratne informacije s strani sodelavcev, šefov ali strank. Visoka raven vključenosti pri delu bi lahko bil razlog, da podjetniki te potrebe nimajo tako razvite, ker zaradi svoje narave dela že prejmejo dovolj povratnih informacij. Prav tako lahko na primeru podjetnikov prepoznamo veliko večjo odgovornost pri delu, kar se prav tako odraža pri večji smiselnosti.

Ko govorimo o smiselnosti, je vredno omeniti tudi nasprotje tega pojma. Zaposleni so imeli veliko za povedati o dojemanju nesmisla pri delu. Ta občutek se je pojavil, ko jih delodajalec jemlje za samoumevne, ko morajo opravljati nesmiselne delovne naloge in ko so deležni nepoštenih obravnave, kar je skladno z raziskavami na tem področju. Podjetniki so pokazali tudi visoko angažiranost za delovne aktivnosti, medtem ko je bilo to pri zaposlenih manj izrazito. Ravno namen pri delu pa je lahko ključen, ko pride do težav. Ko je bilo delo zaznano kot nesmiselno, so zaposleni poročali o demotiviranosti, razočaranju in izogibanju. Seveda imajo tudi zaposleni možnost, da svoje delo preoblikujejo, a ti napor pogosto ne obrodijo

sadov. Tudi če obstaja želja po doseganju sprememb, se lahko te ne uspejo uresničiti zaradi pomanjkanja avtonomije in razmerij avtoritete na delovnem mestu. Kot kažejo ugotovitve v moji raziskavi, se zaposleni nato umaknejo na področja dela, ki se jim zdijo bolj smiselna. Ob tem pa zmanjšajo področje dela in možnost za doseganje smiselnosti, namesto da bi delo poskušali preoblikovati, kar predstavlja izgubo človeškega potenciala.

Iz dojetanja smisla podjetnikov, se lahko marsikaj naučimo za boljše doseganje smiselnosti pri delu. Smiselnost lahko odkrijejo samo zaposleni sami, do tega bo težko prišlo kot posledica zunanjega vpliva. Zato je pomembno, da vzpostavimo smiseln odnos do smisla pri delu. To lahko dosežemo tako, da imamo odprto razpravo o sposobnostih, potrebah in željah posameznika ter kako bo prispeval k skupnemu cilju. Najbolj presentljivo odkritje te raziskave je dognanje, kako pomembno je lahko delo za posameznika, če mu le damo priložnost, da o tem celovitno spregovori.

Appendix 2: Interview questions for entrepreneurs (research sample 1)

In-depth interview questions:

- 1) Kakšen vpliv ima delo v vašem življenju, kakšen pomen mu pripisujete?
- 2) Ali menite, da je delo, ki ga opravljate - vaša kariera, ima smisel?
- 3) Ali aktivno razmišljate o smislu, namenu dela, ki ga opravljate – kako pogosto?
- 4) Kako razumete smisel dela, ki ga opravljate?
- 5) Ali se kdaj soočate z občutki nesmisla in kdaj?? Kako ga razumete?
- 6) Kako bi lahko opisali, kaj daje smisel vašemu življenju?
- 7) Ali menite, da vaše delo prispeva k vaši osebni rasti? Kako?
- 8) Ali menite, da z vašim delom delate spremembo v svetu? Kako? Ste zadovoljni s svojim dosedanjim prispevkom?
- 9) Ali menite, da ima vaše delo višji smisel?
- 10) Ali ste bili pred podjetniško potjo zaposleni? Kako bi opisali to izkušnjo?
- 11) Zakaj ste se odločili za podjetniško pot?
- 12) Kako primerjate vaš odnos do dela, ko ste bili zaposleni in danes?
- 13) Kako se je dožemanje smisla dela razlikovalo?
- 14) Ali s podjetništvom bolje razumete vaš smisel v svetu? Kako?
- 15) Kako je odločitev za podjetniško pot vplivala na vaše zadovoljstva?
- 16) Ali ste v podjetništvu bolj srečni ali bolj zadovoljni?
- 17) Ali je podjetništvo bolj naporno? Kako se to kaže?
- 18) Kaj najbolj cenite pri podjetništvu, česar vam zaposlitev ni omogočala?
- 19) Kateri dejavniki najbolj vplivajona vaše zadovoljstvo pri delu?
- 20) Katere so vaše lastnosti, ki menite, da so najbolj pomembne, da ste uspešni v podjetništvu?

Source: Own work.

Appendix 3: Interview questions for employees (research sample 2)

In-depth interview questions:

- 1) Ali radi opravljate svoje delo?
- 2) Kakšen pomen pripisujete delu v vašem življenju?
- 3) Ali vam večje zadovoljstvo predstavlja delo ali prosti čas? Zakaj?
- 4) Ali vam je pomembno, da je delo, ki ga opravljate smiselno?
- 5) Kako bi opisali smisel vašega dela?
- 6) Ali se pogosto sprašujete, kakšen je sploh smisel dela, ki ga opravljate?
- 7) Ali bi rekli, da vaša kariera ima smisel? Se o tem pogosto sprašujete?
- 8) Kaj vam na delovnem mestu ni všeč, česa vam manjka?
- 9) Kaj bi na delovnem mestu spremenili, če bi lahko?
- 10) Kakšno se vam zdi delovno okolje?
- 11) Ali se ukvarjate s tem, da bi si izboljšali delovno okolje? Kako se to odraža?
- 12) Katere so vaše osebne značilnosti, ki najbolj pripomorejo, k temu, da ste uspešni na delovnem mestu?
- 13) Ali menite, da na delovnem mestu lahko dobro uresničujete svoje potenciale? Zakaj?
- 14) Ali menite, da bi jih lahko bolj razvili, če bi imeli možnost za to ali na drugem delovnem mestu?
- 15) Kako se prepleta smisel vašega dela in smisel v vašem zasebnem življenju?
- 16) Ali delo prispeva k vaši osebni rasti? Kako?
- 17) Ali imate občutek, da ima vaše delo nek višji smisel? Ali ste zadovoljni z vašim dosedanjim prispevkom svetu, ki ste ga pustili z delom?
- 18) Kateri dejavniki najbolj pripomorejo k zadovoljstvu na vašem delovnem mestu?
- 19) Kako se je smisel spreminjal skozi čas?
- 20) Kaj je vaše gonilo, kaj vas usmerja pri vašem delu in v vaši karieri?

Source: Own work.

