EDITORIAL

SEARCHING FOR MEANING AND PURPOSE IN HUMAN ACTION. WORK AND WORKING CONTEXT

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A large number of organizational scholars has devoted attention to the topic of meaning and purpose in human action, as an occasion to deepen the question about the scope and motives of organizational action. Such questions deal with a central question in organization design and behavior, but they also get to the core of organization studies, characterized by a strong disciplinary pluralism that comprises many possible perspectives and levels of analysis (Podolny et al. 2004).

Within this large field, a specific stream focuses on the attitudes workers have toward their organizational contexts in contemporary work settings. On the one hand, organizations look for motivated and positive employees, who deliver better performance, display collaborative behaviors, and ultimately improve team and organizational climate; on the other hand, people strive to find jobs that offers them a meaningful endeavor, from which they derive positive effects both on and off work. In fact, the valence (e.g., positive, negative or neutral) and amount (i.e., intensity) of *meaning* that people find in their work shape their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors related to both work and life dimensions (Rosso, Dekas, and Wrezesniewski, 2010). Importantly, meaning may stem from objective characteristics of jobs and organizational contexts, but it is also subjectively construed by people in the process of making sense of their working experiences. Work meaningfulness and meaningful work are thus related to work that is considered personally valuable, thus being related to a positive personal experience (Lysova et al., 2019).

Antecedents or sources of meaning at work may be connected to the self (e.g., personal values, motivation, and beliefs such as different work orientations and callings), others (e.g., coworkers, leaders, groups and communities, and family), work contexts (e.g., job tasks, organizational missions, national culture and non-work domains) and spiritual life (e.g., vocational callings) (Rosso et al., 2010).

Parallel to these topics, research has investigated the mechanisms through which meaning can be created. Among them, authenticity, self-efficacy (e.g., autonomy, competence and perceived impact), purpose (i.e., a sense of directedness and intentionality in life), belongingness and transcendence (which provide meaningfulness by helping individuals experience a positive sense of shared common identity, fate, or humanity with others), and the cultural and interpersonal sensemaking mechanisms have been highlighted. Particularly prominent constructs in recent research are identity and identity affirmation through work, as well as personal engagement in work, "where meaningfulness is derived from feeling personally immersed and alive in the experience of working" (Rosso et al., 2010: 109).

However, key mechanisms such as the ones involving purpose in life and at work, in an interrelated fashion, and the social and cultural ways in which meaning and meaningfulness are constructed – i.e., the social and cultural side of the coin as opposed to psychological one – have been less explored so far. Likewise, at the macro level, organizational culture and organizational identity, the influence of contexts outside the organization, and the relationship between personal values and higher-level constructs, such as purpose, remain less explored aspects of this fascinating research domain.

The theoretical models that have been considered central in the meaningful work literature include the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), relational job design (Grant, 2007), and job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). What these perspectives have in common is a focus on enriching work as one solution, whereas what varies across them is the "agent" that enhances work enrichment, either in a relatively top-down fashion (e.g., job design and relational job design) or a bottom-up fashion (e.g., job crafting).

Starting from this premise, a number of questions remain unanswered. For example, how should the job characteristics and relational job design models evolve considering the growing relevance of remote working that is profoundly modifying the traditional time and space working frames? In the same way, how will workers craft their job in the "new normal"? And what about the impact of artificial intelligence, robotics and Industry 5.0 at large on the meaning of work and work meaningfulness? More specifically, is robotization detracting to the human capacity to find meaning in work? Or, if this is not the case, what is robotization adding to the possibility of finding meaning in work? With regard to job crafting, what kind of behaviors and routines will workers have to carry out to shape work, when collaboration and control in the work setting is performed through smart technologies instead of humans? In this perspective, many other questions are emerging and others will be raised in trying to answer to the first ones in a continuous process of reflection.

As to the consequences of meaningful work, studies have highlighted the important performance-related outcomes, both at the individual and organizational levels. For example, meaningful work has been found to positively impact personal engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational identification, positive self-concept, career commitment, and motivation (Bailey et al., 2019). At the organizational level, meaningful work has been associated with perceived organizational reputation, organizational citizenship behavior, and creativity (Bailey et al., 2019). Besides the effect on work-related individual and organizational outcomes, meaningful work has been associated with "existential outcomes" impacting life as a whole, such as life meaning, life satisfaction (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2016; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012) and with those at the work-life interface, e.g., work-life enrichment and reduced levels of interference, or well-being (Johnson & Jiang, 2017).

Besides the 'classic' approach that assumes meaning depends on the characteristics of the work activities, there is a second one that focuses on the person who performs the work, how she perceives herself and her identity. In this case, meaningfulness relates to the interpretation of what work represents for the employee and what it provides to her (Michaelson et al., 2014). Such a research stream, which postulates the centrality of individuals in evaluating work meaningfulness, speculates that an individual's identity, as defined by their beliefs, needs, values, but also social relationships influence the understanding of the meaning of a job and of what its meaningful tasks are (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010; Michaelson et al., 2014). To this end, the dynamics of construction of organizational identities, as well as sense-making and sense-giving processes occurring within organizations, can help decipher the behavior of organizational members, their feelings about the organizational context, and the texture of the interpersonal relationships that they build over time.

This Special Issue aims at providing a deep reflection on how organizations are dealing with the previously discussed topics so to enrich the debate stimulating future interactions among scholars interested in such a field.

Considering the several developments that the discourse can take up, the variety of topics that can be investigated through the lens of "meaning & purpose" is extremely wide. Many lines of research that have developed in recent years may find space for further study or reconsideration in the perspective accepted here. For example, the studies on creativity at work and those on job crafting; the emerging theme of remote work, in its multifaceted declinations and interpretations; the debate, never exhausted, on those organizational practices aimed at gaining flexibility. We also think about the question of job social impact and the role of personal values in the construction of the meanings attributed to the content and context of one's work; and finally, the question of multiple identities, which increasingly characterizes single organizations and not just organizational networks.

The proposed matter, in turn, deserve to be studied in-depth, in the perspective of "meaning & purpose", regardless of the sector of activity and the size of the companies. It seems appropriate that scholars look closely at the public sector, in which the changes enacted by the current pandemic are generating relevant and, in some cases, disruptive changes.

The resulting Special Issue consists of nine manuscripts, which have endured a competitive and judicious review process. Some of the papers submitted were presented at the XXII Italian Workshop of Organization Scholars organized in September 2021 in Genova, the focus of which ("Organizing for what? Meaning and purpose in human action") served as a basis of this Issue. Other were proposed outside this channel.

In general, the papers selected for this Special Issue refer to different disciplinary areas, confirming that the suggested "hot questions" ask for diversified approaches. Taken together, they depict an original and relevant snapshot of the complexity of meaning and meaningfulness in work experience and work organization dynamics in

contemporary organizations. Analyzing the whole topic from different perspectives and in different contexts, the papers included in this Special Issue offer interesting contributions.

The study by Barbara Barabaschi, Laura Barbieri, Franca Cantoni, Silvia Platoni and Roberta Virtuani, entitled "Learning from the COVID-19 emergency. The remote working organizational experience in Italian SMEs" tackles the important matters of disruptions induced by the breakout of the pandemic. The analysis, conducted on 60 SMEs in a geographical area particularly affected by the first-wave pandemic in Italy, aims at studying the adoption of remote working in SMEs to verify how the organization of work has changed. This survey-based research has investigated variables related to perceived productivity, technological preparation, coordination, programming, and control. Results show that work organization in SMEs did not change substantially as an effect of forced remote work. Even though, presumably due to the unpredictability of the breakout in the first wave of the epidemic, remote working has been considered as a mere replica of face-to-face work (thereby not taking advantage of its distinctive opportunities), the investigated SMEs turned out to be remarkably resilient. The bottom line is that, thanks to the availability of technologies and workers' ability to use them, productivity has not decreased. The study is particularly encouraging in that it shows the opportunity of transitioning to remote working (and possibly other kinds of changes in work organization or other transitions) not jeopardizing firm performance, as SMEs can trust their employees even without a direct control.

The paper proposed by Raimondo Ingrassia is entitled "Organizing for What: Job Rotation as an Organizational Development (OD) Strategy or as an Organizational anti-Corruption Tool?". The purpose of the article is to understand the relationship between strategies of job rotation aimed at fostering organizational development and job rotation practices adopted to curb organizational corruption. The author wonders if, beyond an apparent contradiction between the two strategies, those oriented to OD are compatible with those aimed at curbing organizational corruption. After illustrating the main questions about job rotation in organizational studies, theoretical contributions in organizational anti-corruption are more deeply explored. Then, the laws and documents of the Italian National Anti-Corruption Agency (ANAC) on job rotation-based anti-corruption policies in Italian Public Administrations are examined, as well as some cases reported in the same documents. The results of this study, which has the merit of having dealt with a scarcely addressed or explored topic in organizational research, seem to suggest that job rotation strategies that are OD-oriented are not necessarily incompatible with strategies for combating organizational corruption.

The article written by Filomena Buonocore, Davide de Gennaro, Alessandra Lazazzara and Domenico Salvatore, and entitled "How Public Managers Craft their Job? A proposal for a JC Intervention in the Public Sector", offers an in-depth study on job crafting practices in the public sector in light of the growing interest and the expected positive impact at the individual and the organizational level. Drawing on the Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation Behavior (COM-B) model, the authors

propose an intervention study and the results of a pilot study among public-sector managers. In particular, they investigate the context of a training program addressed to Italian public managers belonging to different administrations. The research provides interesting insights into how job crafting is shaped within a highly formalized workplace context, moving from the premise that such a context may prevent people from crafting their job and induce people to have more passive behavior at work. In particular, the results emphasize the role of relational crafting and shed new light on how job crafting takes shape in the public sector.

The article entitled "Searching for creativity in innovative working contexts. The role of embeddedness in collaborative spaces", written by Ludovica Leone, Carlotta Cochis, Anna Chiara Scapolan and Fabrizio Montanari, is focused on collaborative spaces as a resource for creative workers. The authors explore whether the perception of being embedded in a "space community" positively impacts creative workers' creativity. The study, based on quantitative research carried out among co-workers from collaborative spaces in Emilia-Romagna, suggests that creative workers perceive higher levels of creativity only when they perceive fit with the space community, develop links with coworkers, and perceive sacrifice in leaving the collaborative space. In light of the results, which confirm the positive influence of an inspiring physical work environment on the generation of useful ideas, the study offers meaningful insight as regards both the determinants of creativity and the search for meaningfulness in creative work and in innovative work contexts. Moreover, the study offers practical implications for the management of collaborative spaces.

The paper by Adriano Solidoro, Gianluigi Viscusi and Francesco Aleotti, entitled "Distributed sensemaking and organizing in Crowdsourcing: a case study", tackles an interesting topic. Crowdsourcing has been used by an increasing number of organizations for searching for innovative ideas, especially in the form of contests. The success of a contest depends on several factors, such as the number of participants, their level of engagement (which is related to the meaning attributed, and participants' intrinsic motivation and sense of purpose) as well as the quality of their contributions. The paper finds that a positive performance in crowdsourcing initiatives is accomplished seeking for a complementary understanding of the meaning, which is correlated to the complex intertwining of social interactions and influence as actions enacting organizing and distributed sensemaking outside a formal organization. The research thus indicates that even in extra-organizational contexts, such as networks, there is a need to coordinate, connect, and temporarily stabilize the "system", and that meaning could be a key mechanism for accomplishing that.

The paper by Anna Marrucci, Riccardo Rialti, Cristiano Ciappei and Marina Gallucci regards how the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted traditional organizational business models. Considered that the pandemic has led to workers' prolonged absence from the workplaces, the authors investigate how it is possible to contrast the lack of cohesion deriving from reduced organizational-sense making. Relational goods

deriving from inter-subjective and reflexive relationships could represent a means of sense-making within the organization, and thus a defense mechanism against the risk of disintegration. The study proposes a conceptual model that considers the effects of relational goods on affective commitment, willingness to share information online, and turnaround intention. The model is then tested trough a survey administered to employees of several Italian enterprises recurring to smart-working during the pandemic. Results show that relational goods are significant antecedents of employee affective commitment and digital information exchange; in this way, relational assets give new meaning to remote work activities, creating a relational ecosystem in which employees truly feel part of a whole. The study thus testifies to the importance of creating and maintaining meaning, all the more in a situation where the traditional work environment falls apart (or is modified) due to external conditions.

In the paper entitled "Power between emotions and identities: how designers navigate M&A processes", Chiara Paolino, Martina Valera and Wendy Angst, drawing on literature on emotions management and identity work strategies, investigate how, following some mergers and acquisitions process with a consulting firm, emotion and identity work strategies might explain the patterns of change in the designers' identity. Relying on an ethnographic study, including data from 64 in-depth interviews with designers and consultants, as well as participant observation, this study elaborates a theoretical model which illustrates the processes underpinning the relationship between emotion management and identity work strategies for designers who experienced the processes of acquisition. The research emphasizes a processual view of the link between emotions and identity, and contributes to the extant literature by providing a more fine-grained explanation of power-based processes. Building on research rooted in discourse approaches to identity and emotions, the study shows how controlling processes based on these constructs can range from asserting to giving up power and status.

The paper proposed by Roberta Cuel, Aurelio Ravarini, Renato Ruffini and Luisa Varriale is entitled "Smart working in the Italian Public Administration: A Socio-Technical Analysis". Through the lens of the Socio-Technical perspective, this paper aims to investigate the adoption and the implementation of remote (agile or smart) working in a public administration context, to identify the major factors encouraging it and clarifying their features. Using the multiple case methodology, the study suggests that, by adopting a more evolutionary perspective, the Socio-Technical framework can be used to reveal a list of critical aspects and interdependences between social and technical features that may improve innovation and change management. Furthermore, the paper underlines the needs for a new set of norms and policies for managers of the Public Administrations.

Finally, Davide de Gennaro, Francesca Loia and Gabriella Piscopo propose a contribution entitled "Job Crafting for Total Quality Management: A Qualitative Investigation in Italian Secondary Schools". The authors discuss the results of an exploratory inquiry conducted in Italian secondary schools, in order to understand how an organization that emphasizes TQM principles should be organized according

to job crafting behaviors and practices. In-depth interviews from 56 participants and qualitative techniques are used to collect and analyze data. The results show that organizing work following a bottom-up perspective is of vital importance for pursuing total quality. The findings of this study suggest that policy makers, school managers, educators, and leaders should carefully consider the relevance of crafting jobs for achieving TQM in the educational sector.

The studies collected in this Special Issue offer an insightful overview of some relevant implications that huge ongoing contextual and organizational transformations are bringing about in the literature on meaningfulness and meaningful work.

A large group of articles look at purpose and meaning as dependent variables. Among them, some contributions focus on organizations facing the unexpected that stemmed from the Covid19 pandemic. Evidence by Barabaschi and colleagues highlights that Italian SMEs' promptly reacted to the pandemic breakout and were able to continue their activities simply by going virtual. A main assumption is that these companies did not suffer lack of productivity despite hierarchical control became ineffective. This happened because employees were competent but also thanks to the sense of intimacy that inspired them, thus making them aligned with the organizational purpose. Similarly, the study by Marrucci and colleagues proves that relational assets act as an organizational mechanism that enable sense-making and consequently the sharing of common meanings among employees, when interpersonal interaction is inhibited because they are forced to work remotely. In the same vein, but going beyond the pandemic emergency, Cuel and coauthors aim at suggesting an effective approach to designing agile work in the public administration. The authors show that, thanks to its evolutionary perspective, the Socio-Technical framework can help disclosing specific implications of hybrid work in the public administration, thus advancing useful hints for such a transition.

Two articles focus on new organizational settings: coworking and crowdsourcing respectively. The study by Leone and colleagues shows that embeddedness in the coworking community enhances meaningfulness in creative work, which leads to higher individual creativity. In the article by Solidoro and coauthors, sharing the meaning and purpose of a crowdsourcing experience is treated as independent variable. In fact, evidence proves that it supports the participants' engagement, which, in turn, positively contributes to the success of a crowdsourcing initiative.

The last article in this group (Paolino et al.) looks at new organizations stemming from mergers and acquisitions, highlighting those processes involving emotions and identity work explain power relationships and shape the identity of the evolved professionals.

The other contributions that compose this Special Issue consider meaningfulness as a dependent variable. In particular, they focus on job design and emphasize its central role in supporting work meaningfulness. Buonocore and colleagues found that managers of Public Administrations practice job crafting despite the high level of formalization of such contexts. This result highlights that training courses can

stimulate job crafting, which is an effective bottom-up strategy to develop work meaningfulness in Public Administration organizations as well. Similarly, de Gennaro and his coauthors suggest that job crafting is positive for organizing to pursue Total Quality Management in the educational sector, whereas the exploratory work by Ingrassia highlights that job rotation required to enforce anti-corruption actions is consistent with similar initiative aimed at organizational development.

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