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**DIGITAL ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AS A
CATALYST FOR A STRONGER ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

NOVEMBER 22nd, 2022



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***“Digital Economic Transformation As A Catalyst For A Stronger
Economic Recovery“***

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Fostering Meaningfulness: A Priority Agenda for the Digital Workplace

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Abstract

As the sharing economy grows, self-employment and contingent work will continue to grow. However, employment could become blurred, resulting in legal uncertainty. Many people claim that this situation has made workers and organizations disconnected. This situation will threaten the quality of work, and employees might lose the meaning of work. Therefore, creating a meaningful workplace has become a priority for organizations. This paper presents a conceptual framework that helps the organization foster a meaningful workplace. Fostering meaningfulness can be attained through job design, human resources practices, and leadership. This study also outlines the implication for HRM practitioners and future research endeavors.

Keywords: meaningful work, digital workplace, quality of work, job design, human resources practices.

Fostering meaningfulness: A priority agenda for the digital workplace

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Abstract.

As the sharing economy grows, self-employment and contingent work will continue to grow. However, employment could become blurred, resulting in legal uncertainty. Many people claim that this situation has made workers and organizations disconnected. This situation will threaten the quality of work, and employees might lose the meaning of work. Therefore, creating a meaningful workplace has become a priority for organizations. This paper presents a conceptual framework that helps the organization foster a meaningful workplace. Fostering meaningfulness can be attained through job design, human resources practices, and leadership. This study also outlines the implication for HRM practitioners and future research endeavors.

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1. Introduction

The emergence and growth of the sharing economy, along with the changing work methods, has reduced the meaning of work. For example, many jobs are offered in non-standard work arrangements; some jobs are being revamped, while others are eliminated by advances in technology. Employees also tend to work in the short-term, and the project-based may be limited in terms of employment duration. Furthermore, they have also been working much more intensely because of the technology usage, experiencing more significant mental strain and exhaustion (Green, 2006). Employees' working experience has become meaningless. The only thing they work for is to survive.

Even though life at work has become disorganized in this affluent economy, some research still shows that people are still striving to find meaningful work. Steger et al., (2012) and Hu & Hirsh (2017) stated that individuals nowadays still prefer meaningful work over other benefits that work provides, such as financial rewards. Meaning and purpose in work are fundamental components of human existence and quality of life (Frankl, 1963; Heintzelman & King, 2014; Martela et al., (2021); Steger et al., 2012). Experience of meaningful work is associated with a range of beneficial outcomes for individuals and employers, including high level of commitment (Allan et al., 2016; Shockley et al., 2016); engagement (Johnson & Jiang, 2017; Lee et al., 2017); job satisfaction (Allan et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2015) and self-rated job performance (Allan et al., 2016; Lam et al., 2016). A recent meta-analysis of the outcomes of meaningful work concluded that the results "broadly support the notion that people with meaningful work feel better and work better" (Allan et al., 2019). Therefore, this

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raise important moral questions about how organizations show responsibility to create and sustain meaningful work for their employees.

The aim of this article is to address these concerns and to contribute to our understanding of how organizations foster meaningfulness and put this as a priority agenda for the digital workplace. First, I extend prior literature reviews on meaningful work (Allan et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2017). Second, I explore ways organizations can boost meaningfulness through job design, human resources practices, and leadership. I argue that work played a central role in providing a meaningful life. Therefore, organizations should take a major role in creating meaningful working experiences at workplace.

2. Meaningful work and its characteristics

Meaningful work has been defined in a variety of ways across fields of knowledge. Rosso et al. (2010) defined meaningful work as work that is experienced as particularly significant. While Bailey et al. (2019) interpreted meaningful work as fulfilling, significant, directed, coherent with life goals, and contributing to a sense of belonging. The term meaningful work has been referred to as a positive concept. Martela (2010) defined meaningful work as “work that offers the worker positive significance in life, thus, contributing to the fulfillment of the human need for meaningfulness. Meaningful work also sees work as part of “calling“. In this sense, meaningful work broadly defined as work that is personally significant and worthwhile.

In conceptualizing meaningful work, You et al. (2020) described five characteristics of meaningful work. First, meaningful work emphasizes the autonomy and freedom of human beings. Human beings, through their own consciousness, constantly create and co-create their environment, their own values, personally determine a meaning to their life. Martela et al. (2021) stated that autonomy as a pathway to meaningful work. The argument is that when people have a sense of ownership of their work, feeling that they are able to do what truly interests them, this makes the work feel personally meaningful for them. With today’s ever-increasing complexity and dynamics in workplaces, this basic individual freedom may be one of the most powerful drivers to lead a meaningful working life. Second, meaningful work can be arisen from dynamic process of the work tasks, the roles that people perform, interaction at workplace, and organization. Bailey et al. (2017) stated that meaningful work is subjective construct that attained by individual perception or judgment. However, sense-making process involved both employees and an organization.

Third, job characteristics are a critical factor in creating meaningfulness. Hackman and Oldham (1980) stated that a motivational job design would enhance work’s meaning when a job provides task significance, identity, and skill variety. On the day-to-day duties, employees contributed to good work practices, influenced others, were valued at work, and benefited from their personal development. Fourth, meaningful work pay attention to connectivity and interaction at work. Bailey et al. (2017) indicates “individuals cannot experience meaningfulness entirely within themselves but seek to understand their place in the wider world and their contribution to society in the context of the organizations and institutions to which they belong.” Thus, social context is essential in fostering meaningful work as it is also part of basic human needs.

Meaningful work gives a positive impact on an employee’s life. Meaningful work should provide something “positive” to the individual. Work that not only makes employees feel good but also strengthening resilience and intensifying well-being (Lam et al., 2016). The aim of meaningful work is to meet human needs or promote human prosperity. Specifically,

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meaningful work contributes to human well-being by fulfilling psychological needs such as autonomy, authenticity, identity, self-efficacy, and self-realization (Schroeder et al., 2021). On top of that, my definition of meaningful work is based on the following attributes: positive and purposeful characteristics that contribute to individual and organizational growth as a whole. Meaningful work nourishes individuals, helping them fulfill their intrinsic desires and basic needs.

3. Digital workplace and meaningfulness

Over the past decade, one of the significant transformations in the world of work has been the emergence of online digital labour platforms, known as the sharing economy. Besides disrupting existing business models, this new type of work has also impacted employment models and workplaces. By working on digital labour platforms, workers can work from anywhere, at any time, and take up whatever jobs they like. It is also important to note that engaging in such work may risk their employment status, income, social life, health, and well-being.

The relationship between meaningful work and digital technologies has been studied in the past. For instance: Durward et al. (2016) revealed that the use of communication technologies in the workplace can increase accessibility and efficiency, whereas it also diminishes employee well-being. Employees are expected to remain accessible and connected during non-office hours. Whereas Schroeder et al. (2021) identified that the nature of digital work introduces a high degree of scheduling flexibility but in contrast decision-making and work methods autonomy may be generally low because of brevity and simplicity of typical digital task. Digital workers in particular often have little direct contact with their co-worker and supervisor (Durward et al., 2016; Green, 2006; Schroeder et al., 2021). In order to report their daily progress, they rely on the platform or management information system. In addition, the impact of technology-facilitated context has made task interdependence become lower in digital work. Often, digital platforms rely on professional expertise and project-based work, so employees don't necessarily need to be integrated. As a result, working in such a scheme may make employees feel isolated, and their need for connection might need to be fulfilled.

4. The role of management in fostering meaningfulness at digital work

There is general agreement that meaningfulness is subjective and innate to the individual. However, Michaelson (2011) argued that individual control of meaningfulness is limited. It is a dynamic process that involves employees, employers, and society. Thus, recently meaningful work and its related concepts have been increasingly studied in Human Resources Management (HRM) perspective that focusing on individual, job and organizational level (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017; Lam et al., 2016; Lysova et al., 2019; Martela et al., 2021).

Lysova et al. (2019) developed conceptual ideas about how different-level factors contribute to meaningful work. Four level factors are described in Lysova's model; they are individual, job, organization, and society. This framework depicts proposed relations between individual-, job-, organizational-, and societal-level factors as influences on meaningful work. This article's discussion will only focus on the role of management (organizational) in fostering meaningfulness. The rationale is that HRM should apprehend its primary role in

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motivating and developing people. The organization should address and understand employees' needs in these uncertain and constant changes. Working in this digital era needs organizational support demonstrated in a humanistic value-oriented program and policy.

Align with Lysova et al. (2019), the management of meaningfulness can be at the job level. As part of the job design, employees should have access to safe and fair working conditions and the flexibility, task significance, and skill variety to manage their schedules. Bailey et al. (2017) stated that jobs should fulfil basic human needs, like feeling connected, self-determination, and competence. The employee needs to have a connection and relations at work and freedom to modify work's aspects, known as job crafting. Bakker et al. (2016) stated that job crafting as a new approach to job design is a promising way to provide job meaningfulness. There creation and management of meaningfulness from the job level can be emphasize on the quality of work and job design. Job redesign in the digital era should point out some outline below (Figure 1).

4.1 Promoting flexibility

In digital workplaces, individuals are encouraged to work at times and places that best suit them, the needs of the customer, and the global marketplace. Employee perspective of flexibility provides a feeling of control over when, where, and how long they work. When people have a sense of ownership of their work, feeling that they are able to do what truly interests them, this makes the work feel personally meaningful for them (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). As a consequence of workplace flexibility, organizations tend to benefit more through expanded proficiency, viability, and noteworthy profitability. Meanwhile, flexibility promises the employee a better work-life balance, social needs, and money savings in the absence of commutation expenses (spatial flexibility).

The fact that a digital environment has promote flexibility and open to autonomy, prior research also found that flexibility should not be only on temporal and spatial flexibility. In some digital workplace, there are more rigid schedules (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). For example, some online platforms only expect the employees to do the tasks they are assigned. Schroeder et al. (2021) also mentioned that work methods autonomy are quiet low in digital work like eLancer due to the brevity and simplicity of the tasks. This could be a conjectured that digital workers would experience meaningless work and might see work as the way to survive.

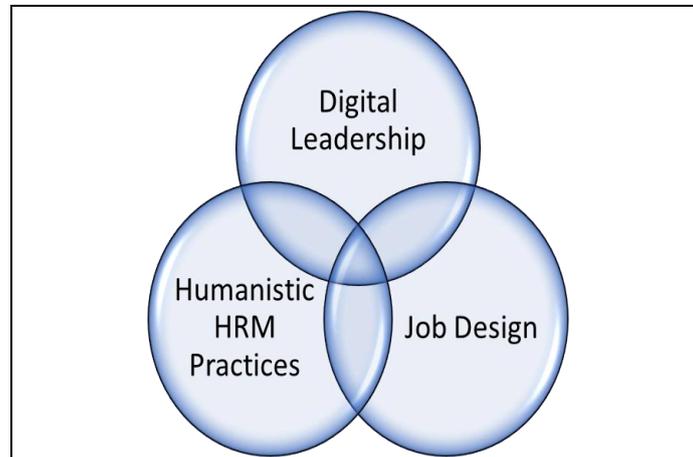
In line with this thought, HR managers should be able to stimulate meaningful work. A digital work environment creates a work atmosphere characterized not only by customization (temporal and spatial flexibility) but also by the ability to modify aspects of their work, known as job crafting. Bakker et al. (2016) stated that job crafting as a new approach to job design is a promising way to provide job meaningfulness. Job crafting could be demonstrated in three aspects:

- task crafting (shaping the number, aims, or kind of job tasks)
- relational crafting (modifying the social features and interactions of the job)
- cognitive crafting (changing the way employees think about their jobs)

This practice will enable individuals to shape the workplace to support meaningful work for them. Hence, some people may prefer spatial flexibility. As a result, they experience their

work as more meaningful. Others, however, may choose to modify aspects of their job (job crafting) in the workplace, fulfilling their basic need and making work more meaningful.

Figure 1: Meaningfulness in Digital Workplace Framework



Source: self-exploration (2022)

4.2 Promoting digital leadership

Leadership style has been shown to play a critical role in promoting meaningfulness at work. However, leading team in a digital work situation will be different with conventional work situation. According to Sandel (2013) digital leadership is the capabilities and capacities that could provide the creativity environment by optimizing the technology and digital capability. The digital characteristic are the creativity leader, inspiring leader, credibility leader, wider knowledge leader, collaborative and interactive leader and trust the subordinates. Under the perspective of digitalization, job requirements need to be profoundly transformed and as a result leaders ought to be highly aware of all demanding challenges. Leaders' ability to motivate and inspire employees to deal with these changes will positively associated with employees' positive experience at work.

Kane et al. (2015) provide insights on how firms can drive a digital transformation by hiring digital leaders, refreshing digital literacy, creating a good environment, and cultivating an experimentation culture. Digital leaders can contribute to the meaningfulness of their followers' sense of work by aligning their daily work with their personal value and the organization's mission. For instance, giving workers busy work without acknowledging their contribution will give them a meaningless experience. Conversely, engaging employees in specialized tasks and goals will provide employees with a sense of belonging and significance. Digital leadership is a crucial parameter that is necessary to be promoted in digital workplace because it help employees achieve a sense of meaningfulness (Henstra, 2020; Zeike et al., 2019).

4.3 Promoting a humanistic HRM practices

Prior literatures have shown that HRM's primary goal is to improve organization performance. A performance-oriented perspective has ignored humanistic side of workplace and tend to maximize profit through employee's exploitation (You et al., 2021). A humanistic

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HRM practices focused on strong person-organization fit and aims to enhance the experience of meaningfulness. Scholars of HRM have explored how humanistic HRM practices such as a healthy work-life balance policy, a fair compensation package policy and an equal promotion policy can help enhance the experience of meaningfulness of the work ((Bailey et al., 2017; You et al., 2021). Moreover, Albrecht et al. (2015) propose that those human resource practices (employee selection, socialization, performance management, and learning and development) which are strategically focused on stimulating engagement will influence the psychological experience of meaningfulness.

5. Conclusion

Frankl (2014) claimed that work could be a source of human connection and creativity. Therefore, work plays a significant role in fulfilling basic human needs like feeling connected, self-determination, and competence. This situation has changed the quality of work and the meaning of work.

Meaningful work defined as work that offers the worker positive significance in life, contributing to the fulfillment of the human need for meaningfulness (Martela et al., 2021). Meaningful work also sees work as part of "calling". In this sense, meaningful work is broadly defined as work that that is personally significant and worthwhile. The understanding of meaningful work in the digital workplace is still infancy.

The digital workplace has a unique characteristic that leads to a meaningless working experience. Fostering meaningfulness in the digital workplace should become a priority. Michaelson (2011) argued that meaning-making is a dynamic process involving employees, employers, and society. Thus, the organization should play a crucial role in enhancing the meaningful working experience.

Fostering meaningfulness in the digital workplace from an organization's (Human Resources Management) perspective can be obtained through job design, human resources practices, and leadership. By understanding how the organization can provide a suitable job design, humanistic HRM practices, and develop a digital leader, organizations will enable employees to construct their meaningfulness in the digital workplace.

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