

THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH ON  
MEANINGFULNESS OF WORK

Master's Thesis  
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### Abstract

Meaningful work has been an emerging research topic in the past decades for a good reason – employees are suggested to search meaningfulness instead of mere money from their work. Therefore, providing opportunities to experience meaningfulness at work has become an important factor in terms of retaining employees. Meaningful work as its essence means that work is significant, valuable and worth doing. Previous research proposes that meaningfulness is created through several alternative pathways, for instance through feeling interpersonally connected, having a positive contribution on others and fulfilling basic psychological needs. These pathways originate from various sources, such as personal values and organizational mission.

The study contributes to the unexamined topic of the influence of organizational growth on employees' experienced meaningfulness of work. The relevance of the topic arises from not only its undisclosed nature but also the observation that many companies aim at organizational growth which furthermore is studied to have negative psychological consequences, such as decreased job satisfaction and commitment, and increased stress. The goal of this study is to explore the kind of consequences organizational growth has on employees and their experiences of meaningfulness of work. Doing so, the study also aims at discovering current sources and pathways to meaningful work and providing practical implications to consider in order to maintain meaningfulness in sufficient levels during organizational changes.

In order to investigate the topic, the study is conducted by using a qualitative intensive single case study approach. The data is collected through semi-structured interviews from nine interviewees who are randomly selected with the assistance and definition of case company representatives. The data is analyzed on a thematic basis abductively indicating that the theoretical framework guides the analysis yet there is also space for inductive, emerging topics from the data.

The theoretical findings indicate that sources of meaningful work can be categorized in self-, job- and context-related groups. These sources are converted into meaningful work through different mechanisms which together constitute a framework of pathways to meaningful work. Based on different theoretical frameworks, integrative framework is constructed consisting of three pathways that are common to all frameworks: contribution on others, unity with others and self-realization.

The findings of this study provide supporting evidence for the integrative framework. In the sample of this study the most important pathway to meaningful work is self-realization, followed by unity with others and contribution on others. Negative and positive attitudes are attached to the organizational growth and these attitudes have diverse consequences on meaningful work. In the light of this study, on one hand growth offers possibilities to greater contribution on others, hence fostering this pathway, but on the other hand the unity with others and possibility to self-realization deteriorate, thus making it more difficult to experience work as meaningful.

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**Keywords** Meaningful work, organizational growth, relatedness, self-realization, contribution

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### Tiivistelmä

Kiinnostus työn merkityksellisyyttä kohtaan on lisääntynyt viime vuosikymmenten aikana, sillä merkityksellisyyden kokemuksen on ehdotettu olevan työntekijöille rahallisia ansioita tärkeämpää. Tästä johtuen merkityksellisyyden kokemusten tuottamisesta on tullut tärkeä keino työntekijöiden sitouttamisessa. Työn merkityksellisyys tarkoittaa, että työ koetaan merkittävänä, arvokkaana ja tekemisen arvoisena. Aikaisempien tutkimusten perusteella työn merkityksellisyys muodostuu esimerkiksi työn tarjoamien vaikutusmahdollisuuksien tai psykologisten perustarpeiden täyttämisen kautta. Näiden lähteinä ovat esimerkiksi yksilön arvot ja organisaation missio.

Tämä tutkimus pyrkii avaamaan, miten yrityksen kasvu vaikuttaa työntekijöiden kokemukseen työn merkityksellisyydestä. Aihe on tärkeä sen tutkimattoman luonteen vuoksi, mutta myös siitä syystä, että monet yritykset tavoittelevat kasvua tai muutosta, jolla puolestaan on havaittu olevan myös negatiivisia psykologisia vaikutuksia esimerkiksi työtyytyväisyyteen, sitoutumiseen ja koettuun stressiin. Organisaation kasvun yksilöllisten vaikutusten lisäksi tämä tutkimus pyrkii kuvaamaan merkityksellisyyden nykyisiä lähteitä ja muodostumista, ja tarjoamaan käytännön toimenpiteitä työn merkityksellisyyden kokemuksen ylläpitämiseen yrityksen kasvaessa.

Vastataksaan tutkimuskysymyksen, tämä tutkimus on toteutettu laadullisena intensiivisenä case-tutkimuksena. Tutkimuksen aineisto on kerätty yhdeksällä puolistrukturoiduilla haastattelulla, joiden osallistujat on valittu satunnaisesti case-yrityksen edustajien avustuksella. Tutkimuksen aineisto on analysoitu teemoittelemalla hyödyntäen abduktiivista lähestymistapaa, joka hyödyntää aikaisempaa tutkimustietoa analyysin tukena, mutta jättää tilaa myös tutkimusaineistosta nouseville teemoille.

Teoreettiset havainnot osoittavat, että merkityksellisen työn lähteet voidaan jaotella itseen, työhön ja ympäristöön liittyviksi. Nämä lähteet muuttuvat merkityksellisyyden kokemukseksi erilaisten mekanismien kautta, joista puolestaan rakentuu viitekehys työn merkityksellisyyden kokemuksen muodostumiselle. Tätä tutkimusta varten muodostettu yhdistelevä viitekehys muodostuu kolmesta polusta, jotka ovat yhteisiä eri viitekehyksille: muihin vaikuttaminen, yhteenkuuluvuus ja itsensä toteuttaminen.

Tämän tutkimuksen löydökset tukevat yhdistelevää viitekehystä, sillä itsensä toteuttaminen oli tärkein polku työn merkityksellisyyden kokemukseen. Tätä seurasivat yhteenkuuluvuus ja muihin vaikuttaminen. Kasvuun liitettiin sekä positiivisia että negatiivisia asenteita, ja näillä asenteilla on erilaisia vaikutuksia työn merkityksellisyyden kokemukseen. Tulosten perusteella organisaation kasvu mahdollistaa suuremman vaikuttavuuden, mutta toisaalta heikentää yhteenkuuluvuuden ja itsensä toteuttamisen mahdollisuuksia, jotka voivat vaikeuttaa työn kokemista merkityksellisenä.

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**Avainsanat** Merkityksellisyys, organisaation kasvu, yhteenkuuluvuus, itsensä toteuttaminen, vaikuttaminen

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the study

Viktor Frankl, the founder of logotherapy and a man who experienced the terrors of a concentration camp, stated that searching meaning in life is the primary motivation for one's living (Frankl, 1992). According to Frankl, this meaning is unique for every individual and we all pursue to satisfy our personal will to meaning. Frankl suggested that according to logotherapy, one potential way to find meaning in life is through accomplishments or achievements for instance by creating a work. In their study Steger and Dik (2009) noticed that at the modern times work has become an important source of meaning in life. In the work context, Erickson (2011) stated that indeed, workers are searching for meaning instead of money – employees who find meaning from their work feel more engaged to their work and their company, and consequently benefit the whole business with their commitment. Meaningfulness is something that can be achieved through for instance feeling one's actions significant and worth doing (Martela and Pessi, 2018). Actually, Achor et al. (2018) found out that over 90% of the American professionals from varying pay levels and demographics were willing to switch one percentage of their earnings to find more meaning at work. However, in the same sample Achor et al. noticed that the respondents experienced that their work offered only approximately half of its potential meaningfulness. This dissonance can lead to losing employees, even top talents, which can be harmful for the company (Achor et al., 2018). Losing a talent drives managers to struggle not only emotionally but also financially and operationally (Klotz and Bolino, 2019).

Meaningfulness in its essence refers to a positive meaning and especially significance of an activity (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). Regarding meaningfulness of work, or simply meaningful work, Martela and Pessi (2018) propose that the concept refers to work significance implying that work is evaluated as valuable and worth doing. Meaningfulness as a concept will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.1.1. Taken into account the fact that work is an important source of meaningfulness (Steger and Dik, 2009), it is not surprising that researchers have increasingly become interested in

investigating what actually makes work meaningful and what are the outcomes of this meaningfulness (Martela and Pessi, 2018). Previous research considering the topic is comprehensive, yet it has suffered from conceptual ambiguity regarding the concept of “meaningful work” (i.e. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzeniewski, 2010; Martela and Pessi, 2018) as well as lacked comprehensive view of the process (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzeniewski, 2010). Fortunately, in the last decade several reviews regarding meaningful work and its definition have been published (i.e. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzeniewski, 2010; Lepisto and Pratt, 2017; Martela and Pessi, 2018). The research considering the antecedents and outcomes of meaningful work suggests that meaningfulness arises from sources such as, organizational mission (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003), the role of leaders (Podolny, Khurana and Hill-Popper, 2004), intrinsic motivation (i.e. Hackman and Oldham, 1976) and personal values (Brief and Nord, 1990a). It is also proposed that experienced meaningfulness of work would arise from the fulfilment of basic psychological needs in one’s job (Martela and Riekk, 2018). Basic psychological needs are presented originally by Ryan and Deci (2000) who proposed that individuals have a fundamental need for autonomy, feeling competent and relatedness with other people. Martela and Riekk (2018) suggested that beneficence, having a positive contribution on others, could be considered as an additional basic need. The sources are discussed more in detail in chapter 2.1.2. Regarding the outcomes of meaningful work, research has indicated that experienced meaningfulness of work influences for instance work engagement (i.e. May, Gilson and Harter, 2004), job satisfaction (i.e. Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012), self- and supervisor rated performance at work (i.e. Harris, Kacmar and Zivnuska, 2007) and career choices (i.e. Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). The outcomes of meaningful work will be presented deliberately in chapter 2.1.3.

So far, the research has revealed that meaningfulness of work is created through different pathways. For instance, both Lips-Wiersma (2002) and Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) formulated a quadripartite framework of pathways that makes work meaningful. These pathways include for instance individuation and contribution in Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) framework and expressing full potential and unity with others in Lips-Wiersma’s (2002) framework. Moreover, Martela and Riekk (2018) suggested that meaningfulness of work is created and maintained by fulfilling the basic psychological



needs extended with beneficence. Naturally, as meaningfulness is a personal and a unique experience for every individual, research on the topic has so far focused mostly and comprehensively on individual aspects. However, meaningfulness is closely related to also organizational aspects (i.e. Thompson and Bunderson, 2003) and organizations are not static entities. Instead, many of them pursue economic growth. Theoretically speaking, following the definition of Bailey and Hope-Hailey (2016), organizational growth can be regarded as an organizational change that is incremental by its nature. The authors continue that the scope of an incremental change is to realign the original business.

Research suggests that in terms of an individual employee, growth can have diverse, yet mostly negative psychological consequences (Boardia et al., 2004a). Boardia et al. suggest that feelings of uncertainty are the most common consequences of organizational change, such as organizational growth. Furthermore, uncertainty has negative consequences and for instance Robbins and Judge (2015) identify it as a key driver for job-related stress. Stress, instead, can have physiological, behavioral and psychological symptoms, examples of the latter are for instance anxiety, irritability and procrastination (Robbins and Judge, 2015). In addition to stress, uncertainty is positively associated with turnover intentions (Johnson et al., 1996) and negatively associated with job satisfaction (Nelson, Cooper and Johnson, 1995), organizational commitment (Hui and Lee, 2000) and trust in organization (Schweiger and Denisi, 1991). These negative consequences are suggested to originate from feeling of lack of control and degradation of employee's freedom (Boardia et al., 2004b; Nesterkin, 2013) which could result in negative affective states.

Taking into account the previous findings from the literature, one might anticipate that organizational growth might have negative consequences to the experienced meaningfulness of work. Moreover, it could be hypothesized that growth breaches the psychological contract between a company and an employee (Zhao et al., 2007) if the growth negatively affects and modifies the most central elements of the contract, such as organizational mission, composition of a work team or organizational structure. On the other hand, hypothetically it is also possible that these previously mentioned examples of

potential key characteristics of psychological contract also improve as a consequence of organizational growth. Thus, due to the absence of proper, carefully designed research, the impact of organizational growth on the experienced meaningfulness of work is impossible to predefine. Therefore, it is extremely fascinating to explore the consequences of growth on meaningfulness particularly in a highly employee-dependent sector in which businesses success rely strongly on the success of employees. This background offers a fruitful soil for this study in this particular context.

My personal interest in the topic evolved from my background as a psychologist as I had seen that lack of meaningfulness in work or in life in general may have severe consequences in personal mental health. Furthermore, mental health challenges and not feeling well at work may lead to loss of productivity and therefore have severe financial and operational expenses (Mikkonen, 2016). The topic originated from discussions with the case company representatives as we discussed the importance of employee engagement and commitment as a key factor for employee retention. In the interviews I tried to understand the foundations of interviewees' organizational engagement. In a relatively early stage of data collection the concept of meaningfulness stood out as a central explanatory factor of the interviewees' experienced engagement and commitment to their organization. Hence, I decided to respect its importance and followed it in the analysis of data.

## 1.2 Research design and research questions

Basing on the background of this study presented above, I chose to explore how organizational growth influences individuals' experiences of meaningfulness of work. I try to achieve insights on what are the current sources of meaningfulness, how the organizational growth is perceived on an individual level and lastly, how these two features interact. Derived from the purpose of the study I presented above, my research question (RQ) is:

RQ. How does organizational growth influence employees' experiences on meaningfulness of work?

As a by-product of this research question I will also gain information about the current sources of meaningfulness of work and employees' attitudes towards organizational growth. Former of these by-product questions is also valuable itself and can be compared to the existing research literature. In practice these questions provide practical hints for companies in what ways they can influence employees' meaningfulness of work and what kind of actions might be needed to maintain this meaningfulness during organizational growth. In the long term these actions may have positive impacts on for instance employee retention (i.e. Scroggins, 2008).

In order to answer my research question, I chose a Finnish IT-service company as a case company. The company has asked for anonymity, thus I will call it simply "the Company" from now on. The Company has specialized in offering IT-consultancy and IT-projects. The Company's headquarters is located in Finland but it also has overseas offices. In general, consultancy or service sector offers an attractive context to investigate meaningfulness and for instance employee engagement since consultant companies' main resource are its employees (Eckardt, Skaggs and Youndt, 2016) – a failure to foster employees' engagement and experienced meaningfulness in work may result in employee turnover (Scroggins, 2008). Furthermore, this turnover refers to at some extent knowledge loss that can reflect in business success (Eckardt, Skaggs and Youndt, 2016). The context and the research method of this study will be discussed more in detail in chapter 3.

### 1.3 Structure of the study

The outline of the study is following:

In the first chapter I introduce the motives and background for the research including the key theoretical findings from the research literature. After that I present the research design and research question, which is followed by the presentation of the case company.

In the first part of the second chapter I deepen into the research literature starting with conceptual differentiation and definition, followed by sources and outcomes of meaningful work and theoretical discussion concerning organizational growth. In the

second part of the chapter I discuss the mechanisms and pathways that make work meaningful. At the end of the chapter I present a synthesis of the existing literature and present an integrative framework that comprehends the main elements from previous research.

In the third chapter I outline rigorously the research methodology of this thesis. The chapter flows from choice of qualitative research and presentation of the case company to data collection, participants, data analysis ending to an evaluation and ethical considerations of the methodology.

In the fourth chapter I present the empirical findings of the study. The findings from sources of meaningfulness of work and attitudes towards organizational growth are presented to set up a basis for more subtle findings. These subtle findings include the interaction of meaningfulness of work and organizational growth as the theme was addressed discreetly in the interviews. The chapter ends with a revision of a theoretical framework reconstructed in the end of the second chapter.

Finally, in the fifth chapter I summarize the main findings and theoretical implications followed by managerial implications. The chapter ends with concluding, final thoughts and suggestions for future research.

## 2. MEANINGFUL WORK AND ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

In this chapter the theoretical and empirical findings from meaningful work literature are presented. The chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first part I present conceptual clarification of meaningful work followed by thorough presentation of theoretical antecedents and outcomes of meaningful work. The part ends with a conceptual definition and exploration of organizational growth. In the second part I will deepen into the topic of how does work become meaningful and present the most influential frameworks that suggest pathways to the creation and maintenance of meaningful work. Ultimately, I present a summarizing framework of meaningful work which I will apply and revise in the empirical findings section.

### 2.1 Essentials of meaningful work and organizational growth

Meaningful work has gained a strong foothold as a research topic in the recent years (Martela and Pessi, 2018) which is sensible since nowadays work has become an important source of meaningfulness (Steger and Dik, 2009) with positive impacts on for instance career commitment and intrinsic work motivation (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012). However, Rosso, Dekas and Wrzeniewski (2010) pointed out in their review of meaningful work that researchers have overlooked the main concept and hence, used concepts of meaning and meaningfulness interchangeably. In this chapter I will clarify these ambiguities related to the definition of meaningful work. In addition, I will discuss the theoretical antecedents of meaningful work and highlight its importance by presenting the outcomes of meaningful work. At the end of the chapter I will address the essentials of organizational growth and explore its psychological consequences.

#### 2.1.1 Meaningfulness of work as a concept

Before presenting the antecedents and outcomes of meaningful work, it is critical to scrutinize it as a concept. Over the years there has been numerous ways to define meaningful work (i.e. Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Rosso, Dekas and Wrzeniewski, 2010). Fortunately, the definitions have been much alike. However, there has been an urge to standardize the definition in order to avoid confusions and misunderstandings

(Martela and Pessi, 2018). Both Lepisto and Pratt (2017) and Martela and Pessi (2018) encounter this challenge, and the latter provides the most up to date conceptual definition of meaningful work.

However, before defining meaningful work, first it is necessary to separate the concepts of meaning and meaningfulness because there has often been an interchange between the concepts (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzeniewski, 2010). The authors claim that due to relatively intuitive nature of the definitions, some researchers have presumably used the concept of “meaning” instead of meaningfulness even though the accurate concept would have been the latter. Whereas meaning refers to an outcome of a sensemaking process of something, meaningfulness implies the amount of significance an individual attaches for something (Pratt and Ashworth, 2003). Meaning is making connections between perceptions of the world and individual, subjective experiences (Baumeister, 1991; Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). In meaning making process an individual interprets connections based on personal mental representations of current phenomenon (Baumeister, 1991). Pratt and Ashworth (2003) note that even though these representations, meanings, are often constructed individually, they can also be socially constructed, shared representations or synthesis of the two. Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe (2003) argue reasonably that meaning of something is constructed individually but this process is influenced by social context and norms. Meaningfulness, instead, is both cognitive and emotional evaluation about something – in the context of this study, individual’s work (Martela and Pessi, 2018). Consequently, Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) point out that if something has a meaning it does not mean that it is meaningful. I illustrate meaning and meaningfulness of work applying Martela and Pessi (2018). Work can mean different things for different people: whereas to someone it indicates a paycheck or status, another one considers it as a calling. Depending on what kind of meaning an individual attaches to work, one can feel it meaningful or not – someone may experience a status as meaningful whereas another experiences it as meaningless. This evaluation of meaningfulness is influenced by for instance individuals’ values (Martela and Pessi, 2018). For the sake of clarity, I will use the concepts of meaningful work and meaningfulness of work in this thesis.

Building up on the definition of meaning and meaningfulness, meaningful work refers first and foremost to work significance so that whether the work is worth doing or not (Martela and Pessi, 2018). Martela and Pessi continue that it is an overall evaluation of work which depends on how much intrinsic value people attach and find from their work (2018, p. 6). The authors have concluded that significance is the primary determination for meaningfulness. They have derived their conclusion based on several researches. For instance, Hackman and Oldham (1976) define that meaningful work is generally valuable and worthwhile. Kahn (1990) instead regards meaningfulness as an experienced return on one's invested energy to work. May, Gilson and Harter (2004) consider meaningfulness of work by comparing the value of work with one's personal ideals and standards. In their extensive review of meaningful work, Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) state that work is meaningful if it is experienced as significant and it holds positive meanings for an individual. In another, conceptual review, Lepisto and Pratt (2017) define that meaningful work is something through which an individual can realize oneself and account for its worthwhileness. Martela and Pessi (2018) argue that the latter reflects work significance whereas the former, which Martela and Pessi call self-realization, is a subordinate dimension for the concept of meaningful work.

As Lepisto and Pratt (2017) proposed, the definition of meaningful work does not only consist of the significance of work. In their encompassing conceptual review, Martela and Pessi (2018) concluded that concepts of "broader purpose" and "self-realization" should be added to the definition of meaningful work. By broader purpose Martela and Pessi refer to serving or contributing to greater good and goal that is beyond the individual at hand. According to the authors self-realization, instead, is about autonomy and possibility to express oneself and one's personal values. However, Martela and Pessi suggest that these two concepts are subordinate for significance – as if both broader purpose and self-realization are pathways to work significance and hence, experienced meaningfulness.

The concept of meaningfulness is not positioned in the literature compared to other analogous concepts, however, the positioning can be derived from the definition. As Martela and Pessi (2018) define meaningfulness as a cognitive and emotional evaluation about one's work, it comes close to the definition of an attitude described by Robbins and

Judge (2015). Robbins and Judge phrase that attitude is made up of three components, namely cognitive, affective and behavioral component. The authors note that these three components are highly related and intertwined and hence, inseparable in many ways. As for instance emotions or affects are suggested to last only brief period of time, it can be deduced that meaningfulness is not timely stable construct, instead it is a malleable state which employee can pursue by for instance aligning own values with organizations one's (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). Therefore, I interpret that the concept of meaningfulness is by its definition an attitude and hence categorically similar to for instance job satisfaction and employee engagement (Robbins and Judge, 2015).

Summing up the conceptual definitions and following the reviewing findings, meaningful work comes from experiencing one's work as significant which furthermore is comprised of broader purpose of work and possibility for self-realization. However, as broader purpose and self-realization appear to be pathways to meaningful work, I will not elaborate the concepts further at this point. Instead, I will examine these pathways more precisely in chapter 2.2.2. Before examining the mechanisms and pathways to meaningful work more in detail, in the next chapters I will examine the antecedents and outcomes of meaningfulness of work as well as take a look at the essentials of organizational growth.

### 2.1.2 Sources of meaningful work

In the literature there are numerous proposed antecedents of experienced meaningfulness of work. In this chapter I try to make sense of this research by applying the framework of "factors that influence perception" presented by Robbins and Judge (2015). In this framework Robbins and Judge claim that a perceiver, a target and a situation can influence or distort perception. In the context of this study, the perceiver indicates a person or employee itself with one's personal characteristics, motives and for instance expectations. The target in this context refers to the job and its different characteristics, such as work tasks and coworkers. Lastly, the situation indicates the context in which the perceiver and the target are, such as temporal and societal aspects. I will categorize different sources presented in the literature under these three categories and anticipate that the experienced meaningfulness of work evolves from these sources. I suggest that



this happens through several mechanisms that are common to these different sources. I will present the mechanisms and encompassing pathways in the chapter 2.2.

#### 2.1.2.1 The self

Applying to Robbins and Judge (2015), the self as a source of meaningful work refers to the influence of individual's characteristics, such as motivations and values to the interpretation of meaningfulness of work. Individuals' perceptions about themselves and their attitudes towards work is an important, yet constantly changing source of meaningful work (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). The self-related features influencing to the meaningfulness of work which can be identified from the literature are values, motivations, beliefs and spiritual life.

To start with values, Rokeach (1973) argue that individual's values guide their actions, judgements and attitudes. Values are suggested to be products of not only cultural and institutional but also personal influences (Nord et al., 1990). Considering its impact to the experienced meaningfulness of work, it seems intuitive that personal values guide how much an employee values work and furthermore, the meaningfulness one achieves from it (Nord et al., 1990). Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) point out that instead of focusing on general values, meaningful work researchers have focused on work values and their influence on the meaningful work. Work values, as Nord et al. (1990) define it, are the end states that an employee desire and anticipate to be able to realize through work. Similarly to general values, work values are products of social norms, previous work experiences and interpersonal interactions (Nord et al., 1990). The research in the field of values and meaningful work is incoherent and full of different value categorizations (i.e. intrinsic versus extrinsic value orientations) which makes it difficult to generalize the findings (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). However, self-realization, possibility to fulfill one's personal potential, was found to be an important personal value cross-culturally (Super and Šverko, 1995). Regardless of the individual values, the research suggests that individuals select occupations that are aligned with their personal values (Gandal et al., 2005) and further, experiences from selected occupation are proposed to reinforce those original values (Locke and Taylor, 1990), hence influencing meaningful work.

Besides personal values, motivation is suggested to influence experienced meaningfulness of work (i.e. Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Hackman and Oldham suggest in their much cited “job characteristics model” that there is an interconnection between meaningfulness and internal work motivation. More precisely, the authors propose that experienced meaningfulness of work produces internal motivation because an individual feels that one’s work relevant. I will present motivation also as an outcome of meaningful work in chapter 2.1.3. In the literature researchers often use the concept of intrinsic motivation which is the most internally driven form of motivation (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Intrinsic motivation implies that activities are valued for their own sake without an expected reward out of it (Deci, 1975). Intrinsic motivation is proposed to arise from for instance perceived autonomy of own decisions (Deci and Ryan, 1985). In relation to meaningful work, for instance Hackman and Oldham (1976) suggest that for an individual, feeling intrinsically motivated indicates that work activities and self-concept are in congruence which results in greater meaningfulness of work. In contrast, the effect of external motivation to meaningful work remains unclear.

In addition to values and motivations, beliefs are proposed to be a source of meaningful work. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) clarify that beliefs in the context of meaningful work refer to the role or function the work has in one’s life. In their review the authors recognize three research streams considering beliefs as a source of meaningful work: job involvement and work centrality, work orientation and callings. Firstly, job involvement and work centrality indicate the level of involvement in one’s current job and how it shapes the meaningfulness of work. More precisely, both concepts refer to the centrality of job or work in person’s life (Kanungo, 1982; Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Job involvement is the extent to which an individual regards one’s job to be central in one’s life (Kanungo, 1982) and work centrality is about the importance of work compared to other domains in life (i.e. family) (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). The research suggests that the more involved a person is with the job and the more central work is in one’s life, the greater is the meaningfulness one may achieve from it (i.e. Brown, 1996). According to Highhouse, Zickar and Yankelevich (2010) work centrality has decreased slightly over time which may indicate the growth of importance of non-financial factors, such as meaningfulness, at work.

Another research branch in beliefs is work orientation which refers to the beliefs about the influence of work in one's life in general compared to beliefs about one's current job as in job involvement (Bellah et al., 2008, Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) suggest that person's work orientation determines how important work is in one's life which furthermore influences the meaningfulness one makes of work. Work orientation is divided into three parts: a job, a career and a calling (originally by Bellah et al., 1985, 2008). If the work is considered as a job, it is seen in a financial means and more as a necessity - a pleasure in life comes from somewhere else (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Work as a career implies that a person focuses on advancement in one's career and promotions or increase in pay are dominating focuses in work. Lastly, Wrzesniewski et al. argue that work as a calling implies that neither financial rewards nor advancement in career but the work itself brings the enjoyment. Considering own work as a calling creates enjoyment of doing socially useful work, which naturally creates a higher sense of meaningfulness in work. In addition to the impact of work orientation in the interpretations of meaningfulness of work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), work orientation comes close to the values discussed earlier in this chapter by guiding what a person values in life and work (Gandal et al., 2005).

As referred in the previous chapter, callings are considered as a source of meaningful work (i.e. Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). The callings are either secular or sacred callings. Secular calling, an internal call for certain type of work, refers to participating in work that is socially, morally and personally significant (Wrzesniewski, Dekas and Rosso, 2009). Enacting one's calling offers a path to one's deepest self and hence work makes a remarkable personal significance (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). In this way, if a person enacts one's calling, the work becomes more meaningful since one experiences work as personally fulfilling and impactful (Berg, Grant and Johnson, 2010). Sacred callings instead refer to a vocation and invitation one receives from God and hence, something that one is chosen for (Weiss et al., 2004). Furthermore, following this calling refers to executing God's plan on earth (Duffy and Dik, 2009). Regarding of meaningful work, following a sacred calling has a strong impact on experienced meaningfulness of work (i.e. Dik and Duffy, 2009; Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012). This is proposed to happen through for instance serving a greater good, such as God (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012)

or serving others and hence meeting the needs of a larger community (Lips-Wiersma, 2002).

Lastly, spiritual life and spirituality are the last self-related source of meaningful work. The role of spiritual life is essential when discussing about meaningful work since employees globally are suggested to consider their work in spiritual terms (i.e. Sullivan, 2006) and religion act as an important factor when searching purpose in life (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Spirituality in its essence refers to searching for something higher than oneself, such as higher power, that people consider as sacred and seek to discover and hold on to (Pargament, 1999). Maslow (1971) suggests that spiritual endeavors lead to connecting oneself into something greater, a process called self-transcendence. In respect of meaningful work, Lips-Wiersma (2002) states that spirituality leads employees to interpret career- or work-related incidents in relation to something larger and outside of themselves. This, instead, is related higher experienced meaningfulness or purpose of work (Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Sullivan, 2006). Lips-Wiersma (2002) also concludes that spirituality guides individuals' beliefs about which are meaningful purposes in life, which in turn influence on career behavior. In general, for instance Curlin et al. (2007) notice that compared to non-spiritual employees, spiritual employees perceive their work differently which instead enables experiencing one's work in more deep and purposeful sense.

After having discussed the role of the values, motivations, beliefs and spiritual life in the creation of experienced meaningfulness, I next move to another major source of meaningful work – the job.

#### 2.1.2.2 The job

According to the “factors that influence perception” framework presented by Robbins and Judge (2015), aspects related to the target, in this case the job, influence the perception of meaningfulness of work. I include to this category all of the work-related aspects of work, such as work tasks, organizational mission and financial circumstances, but also people-related aspects of work, namely coworkers, leaders and groups and communities. I will next elaborate each one of them more in detail.

To start with the work-related aspects and the essence of job, many studies have indicated the importance of job characteristics on the experienced meaningfulness of work (i.e. Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Grant, 2008). The idea was originally presented in job characteristic model by Hackman and Oldham (1976). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) build on the model and state that job tasks are important factors that shape the meaningfulness of work. In fact, already Fried and Ferris (1987) argued that job that offers high levels of autonomy, skill variety, task significance and task identity produce greater experienced meaningfulness of work. Furthermore, doing purposeful work tasks which have positive influence on others lead to higher experienced task significance and hence, meaningfulness as a consequence (Grant, 2008). In terms of autonomy and agency, job crafting, having the opportunity to craft one's job and the environment to match better for one's values, goals and skills, can increase the experienced meaningfulness of work (Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2010)

Enlarging from specifically job-related aspects to a broader organizational level, organizational mission is noticed to influence to the experienced meaningfulness of work (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003; Cha and Edmondson, 2006). Thompson and Bunderson (2003) describe organizational mission as ideological values which represent basic values and purpose the organization is dedicated to pursue. Organizational mission statement can increase the meaningfulness of work if organizational values are congruent with personal values (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003). This is partly a consequence of individually perceived increase in task significance. However, incongruence between personal and organizational values or breaking a psychological contract can lead to ideological breach and hence, cause loss of meaningfulness in ideologically oriented employees. Cha and Edmondson (2006) argue that drifting or diluting organizational mission statement over time can lead to disenchantment and loss of trust towards one's leaders and organization which can impede experiencing positive feelings towards work.

Additionally, economic or financial circumstances are proposed to be a source and explainer for meaningful work (Brief et al., 1995). Brief et al. (1997) notice that in times of economic pressure and financial stress people tend to value more monetary rewards instead of more high-level values such as self-fulfillment. Particularly, Leana, Stiehl and

Mittal (2012) state that poverty can limit the possibilities to work in an intrinsically meaningful work which emphasizes the value of monetary rewards.

Proceeding from work-related aspects to people-related aspects of work, firstly, relationships with coworkers at workplace can influence the experienced meaningfulness of work in couple of ways (Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe, 2003). Kahn (2007) suggest that close coworker relationships may increase the experienced meaningfulness of work if they offer opportunities to express person's genuine and valued identities at work context. Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) instead propose that individuals detect cues from coworkers about how to act or think at work and furthermore construct their own attitudes and meanings of work out of these cues. Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe (2003) elaborate on top of the social perspective presented by Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) and argue that individuals evaluate the meaning and value of their work and interpret the meaningfulness of work through interpersonal sensemaking from cues gained from for instance conversations with coworkers in the workplace. All of the mentioned ways highlight the role of coworkers have in the construction of experienced meaningfulness of work.

Secondly, leaders are argued to influence to the meaningfulness of work. This happens through for instance framing a mission, goals and organizational identity for employees which in turn have an impact on the meaning-making process of employees and hence, experienced meaningfulness of work (Podolny, Khurana and Hill-Popper, 2004). The authors alongside with Smircich and Morgan (1982) highlight the role of leader's communication and responses to different work events as an example which influence and frame work-related meaning-making of employees. Related to the example a leader sets, leadership styles are proposed to influence the meaningfulness of work – in particular, transformational leadership has argued to produce more experiences of meaningfulness in work (Bono and Judge, 2003). The authors continue that transformational leaders articulate an ideological vision and moreover frame the work in terms of higher-order values, thus providing a meaningful rationale for work for employees. As Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) summarize, leaders can foster

meaningfulness of work for employees by encouraging employees to transcend their personal goals for a greater organizational mission.

Lastly, the groups and communities that coworkers and leaders constitute act as a source of meaningful work (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). The authors refer to multiple different groups and communities such as work teams, professional networks and different social categories. One potential way these groups can influence the meaningfulness of work is through social identification to in- and out-groups, as categorized in social identity theory originally by Tajfel and Turner (1979). Pratt and Ashworth (2003) notice that the more closely an employee identifies oneself to a work group distinctive from others and consider the group as valuable, the more this identification can produce positive experiences of meaningfulness. Moreover, Pratt and Ashworth suggest that by creating a close-knit dynamics within the company, it will produce more experiences of meaningfulness of work for employees. However, there is also a risk that if not identifying to a group or evaluating it as unattractive, the group can produce negative meanings (Ashworth and Kreiner, 1999). Nevertheless, organizations can shape experiences of meaningfulness by for instance setting the organizational identity orientation (i.e. individualistic or collectivistic) to match the identity of an employee (Brickson, 2007) or by offering employees possibilities to contribute and influence on valuable features in larger organizational communities and hence, offering a sense of purpose and impact (Grant, 2007). In order to make the categorization of sources of meaningful work complete, in the next chapter I will go through in impact of the context on the experienced meaningfulness of work.

### 2.1.2.3 The context

The last feature in the “factors that influence perception” framework is the situation or the context in which an employee lives and works (Robbins and Judge, 2015). I consider that employee’s family, free time and national culture could be considered as sources in this category.

Regarding to the influence of the context into the experienced meaningfulness of work, it is inevitable to consider the role of an individual’s family. Rosso, Dekas and

Wrzesniewski (2010) point out that most often work and family are distinctive domains in life, even though the authors admit that occasionally they can overlap (i.e. in family-run businesses). Previous studies have connected family and meaningful work in two ways. Firstly, if family places financial pressure for work, economic rewards will most likely become more important determinant of experiences of meaningfulness (Brief et al., 1995). This is suggested to happen particularly among immigrants who can pursue better quality of life for their family and offspring, thus giving a broader purpose for their work (Bhagat and London, 1999). Secondly, if family provides a relaxing and recovering environment by acknowledging the role of job in one's life or giving mental support when needed, one is more likely to experience work as meaningful (Brief and Nord, 1990b). These both ways address the role of one's family in shaping the experiences of meaningful work (Brief and Nord, 1990b).

Secondly, non-work domains often refer to leisure- or home-time (i.e. D'Abate, 2005) and for leisure-oriented individuals, adding non-work-related activities to a workday can increase the experiences of meaningfulness during one's workdays (D'Abate, 2005). The importance of non-work domains is closely related to work orientation and work centrality discussed in chapter 2.1.2.1 (i.e. Kanungo, 1982; Bellah et al., 2008). Snir and Harpaz (2002) point out that leisure-oriented employees show lower levels of i.e. intrinsic work orientation and work commitment compared to work-oriented employees. Instead of work itself, leisure-oriented employees emphasize more interpersonal relations at work and naturally, experience more meaningfulness derived from these aspects.

Lastly, national culture is suggested to influence the experienced meaningfulness of work through for instance values that are products of for instance cultural and institutional influences (Nord et al., 1990). Already Marx in 1867 (Marx, 1967) and Weber in 1904 (Weber, 2001) proposed that the relationship between an individual and work are shaped by sociopolitical forces. However, one of the largest empirical efforts to study the influence of culture to the meaningfulness of work, Meaning of Working (MOW) study, reveals that meaning of work is more alike than different across cultures (MOW International Research Team, 1987). Even though the study indicates modest differences in for instance work centrality, the research team conclude that the variance in the work



meanings is higher within cultures than between cultures. The results indicate that key meanings of work come from for instance financial incentives, personal alignment with job demands and self-expression at work – the concepts that are already covered in this thesis. The findings are supported by for instance Super and Šverko (1995) in their cross-cultural study.

After having discussed the sources of meaningful work proposed in the literature by applying the “factors that influence perception” framework (Robbins and Judge, 2015), I will next examine the outcomes of meaningful work. I will deepen into the mechanisms that unify the sources to the experienced meaningfulness more in detail in chapter 2.2.

### 2.1.3 Outcomes of meaningful work

Why does it matter to engage in meaningful work? Even though it is acknowledged as an important antecedent for example for work engagement (Kahn, 1990), outcomes of meaningful work have not received systematic examination in the research until recently (Allan et al., 2019). Allan et al. conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis considering the relation of meaningful work to different outcomes. In their analysis they divide the outcomes on three different levels based on previous research: proximal, distal work-related and distal wellbeing outcomes. Additionally, the authors present a revised model of meaningful work’s outcomes and relations.

To start with, experienced meaningfulness of work has been shown to be linked into work engagement in several studies (i.e. May, Gilson and Harter, 2004; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012; Jacobs, 2013). Engagement is closely related to intrinsic work motivation which is suggested to be an outcome of meaningfulness (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). In addition to engagement, meaningful work is noticed to result in job satisfaction in numerous studies (i.e. Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012; Duffy et al., 2014). Lastly, studies have shown that experienced commitment to either one’s career or organization (Blau, 1995) is an outcome of meaningful work (i.e. Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012; Duffy et al., 2014). Engagement, job satisfaction and commitment are something that Allen et al. (2019) name as proximal outcomes of meaningful work.

Studies have indicated that meaningfulness of work influences also positively to self- (i.e. Harris, Kacmar and Zivnuska, 2007; Allen et al., 2016) and supervisor rated performance at work (Harris, Kacmar and Zivnuska, 2007), and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (i.e. Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012; Lam, Wan and Roussin, 2016). Furthermore, experienced meaningfulness of work has found to decrease turnover intentions (i.e. Scroggins, 2008; Arnaux-Nicolas et al., 2016) and absenteeism at work (i.e. Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012). Allan et al. (2019) define self-rated performance, OCB and withdrawal intentions as distal work-related outcomes of meaningful work.

In addition to closely work-related outcomes, research has shown that meaningful work has also more general outcomes to an employee's life. There is evidence that meaningful work may result in life satisfaction (i.e. Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012; Shockley et al., 2016), less negative affect such as stress (i.e. Treadgold, 1999) and depression (i.e. Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012) and better general health (i.e. Arnold and Walsh, 2015) including better affective wellbeing (Arnold et al., 2007). Meaningful work may generalize and result even in experiencing one's life meaningful (i.e. Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012; Allan, Duffy and Douglass, 2015). Life satisfaction, negative affect, general health and meaning in life constitute distal wellbeing outcomes of meaningful work (Allan et al., 2019).

On top of the previously mentioned outcomes of meaningful work, experienced meaningfulness of work is suggested to influence on career choices (i.e. Bunderson and Thompson, 2009) and career development (Dik and Duffy, 2009), empowerment (Speitzer, 1996), occupational identification (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009) and organizational identification (Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006). However, these factors are not included in meta-analysis conducted by Allan et al. (2019). The results of Allan et al. statistical meta-analysis indicate that meaningful work predicts and precedes work engagement, commitment and job satisfaction. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that these factors predicted self-rated performance, organizational citizenship behavior and withdrawal intentions. The model Allan et al. composed explains best the impact of meaningful work and the authors add that also these indirect effects of meaningful work are significant. Additionally, the authors argue that meaningful work has positive impact on distal wellbeing outcomes apart from negative affect. However, these positive

relations between meaningful work and distal wellbeing outcomes are smaller compared to domain-specific variables, such as job satisfaction, since the authors note that many variables that are not related to work may influence general wellbeing. The authors conclude that the data from the analysis indicate that experienced meaningfulness of work produces primarily motivational or attitudinal changes, which in turn influence behavioral changes as a consequence.

Having discussed the theoretical conceptualization of meaningful work, its theoretical antecedents and its outcomes, in the next chapter I will elaborate the essentials of organizational growth as it is crucial for the research question. I will briefly overview the literature concerning the psychological aspects and consequences of organizational change before proceeding to discuss how does work become meaningful in chapter 2.2.

#### 2.1.4 Essentials of organizational growth

As the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of organizational growth to the experienced meaningfulness of employees, it is inevitable to explore what kind of consequences the growth can cause on an individual level. As discussed previously, there is no previous research considering the influence of organizational growth to the experienced meaningfulness of work.

##### 2.1.4.1 Organizational growth as an organizational change

To start with, applying the strategic change framework presented by Balogun and Hope-Hailey (2016), an organizational growth can be interpreted as an incremental change by its nature. Moreover, it could be defined that the scope of the change is realignment of the original business (Balogun and Hope-Hailey, 2016). The authors suggest that this kind of change could be called as an adaptation. Despite its rather organic nature, adaptation can be approached and initiated from three alternative sources: top-down, bottom-up and “pockets of good practice” (Balogun and Hope-Hailey, 2016). According to the authors, top-down approach of change refers to control and initiation of change from top management. Bottom-up approach of change instead refers to an emerging need for change by the employee level. Lastly, pockets of good practice of change refers to a

change that spreads from one part of an organization. Regardless of the approach, the change can be implemented either independently by one party (i.e. by top executives) or by collaboration with executives and employees (Balogun and Hope-Hailey, 2016).

#### 2.1.4.2 Organizational change creates resistance

Regardless of the change approach and the nature of change, the change itself can cause resistance (Robbins and Judge, 2015). This resistance can originate from different organizational and individual sources, and lead to alternative outcomes. The authors note that this resistance may appear in different ways, whether it is overt, implicit, immediate or deferred. Depending on the surface of this resistance, it can have differing consequences: overt and immediate resistance is easy to take into consideration whereas implicit and deferred resistance is difficult to detect and hence, more difficult to deal with (Robbins and Judge, 2015).

Robbins and Judge (2015) name several sources or reasons to perceived change resistance. The authors divide the sources into individual and organizational sources. On an individual level the resistance to change can originate from the need for change one's accustomed habits or ways of working, or threat that the change produces in the feelings of safety or security (Robbins and Judge, 2015). Nesterkin (2013) concludes basing on research literature that employees and people are in general risk averse which causes resistance. Additionally, on an individual level the resistance can result from general ambiguity and fear of unknown it engenders, from threats it poses to one's economic safety due to for instance potential temporary decline in productivity or lastly, from biased information processing in which individuals tend to keep their original perceptions and presumptions intact resulting in neglecting new, change-supporting information (Robbins and Judge, 2015).

On an organizational level, instead, resistance to organizational change can originate from either structural or group inertia which arises from the need to sustain stability within an organization or in a group (Robbins and Judge, 2015). Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988) call the phenomenon "Status quo bias". In addition to inertia, too limited changes can create resistance as subsystems of organizations are interconnected, and hence, changes

intended for small group or subsystem tend to be nullified by the larger organization. Lastly, resistance to organizational change can result from threat it engenders to either employees' expertise or established power relationships within an organization (Robbins and Judge, 2015). The authors have presented several tactics that would mitigate overcoming the resistance but these methods are out of the scope of this study.

#### 2.1.4.3 Psychological consequences of change

As in the scope of this study I am interested in the impact of organizational growth to an individual's experienced meaningfulness of work, it is reasonable to examine the psychological consequences of change and potential resistance it produces. Boardia et al. (2004a) argue that uncertainty is one of the most common psychological states that are attached to the organizational change. Boardia et al. categorize uncertainty into three different categories: strategic, structural and job-related uncertainty. According to the authors, strategic uncertainty refers to organizational level issues, such as uncertainty in terms of reasons for change and the planning and future dimension of the organization. Structural uncertainty, instead, refers to the uncertainty regarding to for instance reporting lines and functions of certain units of the organization. Lastly, Boardia et al. present that job-related uncertainty refers to for instance uncertainty in terms of job security or changes in the work role. Two formers refer to organizational level aspects that were called as organizational sources of resistance in the previous chapter whereas the latter resembles the individual sources of resistance. Boardia et al. (2004a) suggest that job-related uncertainty produces most stress as issues related to work possess high personal relevance to employees.

In terms of uncertainty, Boardia et al. (2004a) point out several negative psychological and individual consequences it can produce in the organizational context. To begin with, previous research suggests that uncertainty is positively associated with stress (i.e Pollard, 2001). Indeed, Robbins and Judge (2015) formulate that uncertainty is one key driver for experienced stress and topic will be discussed more carefully in the next paragraph. In addition to stress, Johnson et al. (1996) found out that uncertainty is positively associated to turnover intentions and for instance Nelson, Cooper and Johnson (1995) reported that uncertainty is negatively associated with job satisfaction. Regarding to trust and

commitment towards one's organization, uncertainty is noticed to be negatively associated with commitment (Hui and Lee, 2000) and trust in organization (Schweiger and Denisi, 1991). Boardia et al. (2004b) propose that these negative consequences originate from the feeling of lack of control. Nesterkin (2013) agrees with Boardia et al. (2004b) by suggesting that organizational change undermine employee's freedom, thus undermining feeling of control, which further leads to negative affective states. Furthermore, this lack of control is suggested to result in for instance anxiety (DiFonzo and Boardia, 2002) and learned helplessness (Martinko and Gardner, 1982).

As uncertainty is one of the key drivers to experienced stress (Robbins and Judge, 2015), it is worth to briefly discuss the consequences of work-related stress. In fact, Robbins and Judge claim that for the most people, work is the most important source of stress. In their publication, the authors divide the consequences of stress into physiological, behavioral and psychological symptoms. The authors present that physiologically stress is linked to many indicators of poor health, such as susceptibility to upper-respiratory illnesses and poor immune system (Schaubroeck, Jones and Xie, 2001). Behavioral symptoms include increase in turnover and reductions in productivity (Diestel and Schmidt, 2011). Lastly, Robbins and Judge (2015) point out several psychological consequences of stress, such as anxiety, irritability, procrastination and boredom.

Concludingly, organizational growth as an adaptative organizational change may cause resistance to change which originates from for instance the uncertainty on an individual level. Moreover, this uncertainty is one key driver to stress. Both uncertainty itself and the stress it creates can have negative individual consequences. However, it is important to notice that presumably these personal consequences are milder in adaptative change than in radical organizational change which could create much more uncertainty. In the next chapter I will deepen into the factors that makes work meaningful by integrating the features that are common to the sources discussed earlier in this chapter. After discussing and presenting different frameworks and ultimately, presenting an integrative framework, I will proceed to the research methodology and empirical results of the study.

## 2.2 How does work become meaningful?

The sources discussed in the chapter 2.1.2 does not as such turn into the experienced meaningfulness of work. Instead, there are several underlying psychological and social mechanisms that are common to the sources and which convert them into the meaningful work (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Furthermore, it is valuable to examine these mechanisms as they together constitute different alternative pathways to the experienced meaningfulness of work. In this chapter I will firstly examine the mechanisms that unite many of the earlier mentioned sources and further elaborate, how they contribute to the meaningfulness of work. After that, I will present different theoretical frameworks from different scholars considering how does work become meaningful – some of which are compositions of the mechanisms presented in this chapter. Ultimately, I will present a summarizing, integrative framework that covers the most essential elements from different frameworks.

### 2.2.1 Mechanisms

In this section I will follow the classification created by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) in their extensive review of the meaningful work as for instance Martela and Pessi (2018, p. 9) claim it as “one of the most comprehensive reviews of the meaningful work literature up to date”. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) state that the aim of the classification or mapping of the key mechanisms is to establish a framework that provides guidance for future scholars and hence, research in the field. The authors identified seven categories of mechanisms which scholars have suggested to lead to the experienced meaningfulness of work: authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, and finally, cultural and interpersonal sensemaking. The authors note that whereas some of these mechanisms are empirically tested, others are more theoretical propositions. Already before the organizing framework that is discussed here, for instance Baumeister and Vohs (2002) presented their own classification for needs for meaning which resembles a lot of the mechanisms discussed here, including purpose, values, a sense of efficacy and a sense of self-worth. However, the classification of Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) can be considered more comprehensive and distinguished by Martela and Riekkari (2018), and thus I will utilize it here. Indeed, several scholars, such

as Yu and Roto (2015) and Brunzell, Stokes and Waters (2018) have also utilized the organizing framework that is discussed here. The mechanisms are discussed more in detail in the following chapters.

#### 2.2.1.1 Authenticity, self-efficacy and self-esteem

The first three mechanisms presented by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) focus particularly on the self as a source of meaningful work. To start with, firstly, the authors define authenticity as a state in which an individual can express one's true self so that one's behavior and perceptions of the self are aligned and in coherence (i.e. Sheldon et al., 1997). Thus, being able to maintain consistency between for instance personal values and actions, and hence expressing one's true self while working is suggested to promote experiences of meaningfulness of work (Shamir, 1991). Authenticity is proposed to be one of the key mechanisms that help people promoting a sense of meaning in life (Gecas, 2006). Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) describe three alternative mechanisms through which authenticity can shape the experienced meaningfulness of work: self-concordance, identity affirmation and personal engagement. Self-concordance refers to the extent an individual believes that one's actions are aligned and consistent with one's interests and values (Sheldon and Elliot, 1998). This experienced self-connectedness and internal consistency as a consequence can shape the meanings one makes of work which may result in greater meaningfulness of work (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). Identity affirmation in the work context instead refers to verifying one's personal valued identities through working (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). This implies that once the work environment reflects one's experienced identity and abilities, an employee will feel more authentic at work (Elsbach, 2003). Furthermore, this verification may produce more experiences of meaningfulness (Gecas, 2006). Finally, personal engagement is the degree of how deeply an individual experiences oneself involved with work (Kahn, 1990). Experiencing oneself highly engaged with work implies that the work is important and relevant for an individual which furthermore signifies that the work in question reflects one's authentic self (Amabile et al., 1994). This feeling of expressing one's true self may lead, again, to greater meaningfulness of work (Shamir, 1991).



Secondly, self-efficacy is another mechanism through which work can become meaningful (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Bandura (1977) define self-efficacy as an individual's belief about how one can contribute and intentionally influence to events that are relevant in one's life. Bandura continues that self-efficacy is a strong motivator for accomplishing personally relevant goals. Self-efficacy as a mechanism is suggested to influence to the meaningfulness of work in three ways: through autonomy, competence and perceived impact (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Autonomy or feeling of personal control in work refers to managing one's activities at work and being able to exercise one's own choices. The need for autonomy is argued to be a basic psychological need (i.e. Ryan and Deci, 2000) and fulfilling this need offers feelings of meaningfulness as one experiences oneself as a powerful, agentic actor (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Both Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and Baumeister and Vohs (2002) conclude that a feeling of having a control over one's environment and one's fate increases the likelihood of feeling one's work meaningful. Competence, instead, results of overcoming work-related challenges (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010) which offers a sense of meaning to an employee (Gecas, 2006). This feeling of competence can be achieved through for instance learning and responding successfully to given challenges (Masten and Reed, 2002). Alongside with autonomy, the need for competency is argued to be another basic psychological need (i.e. Ryan and Deci, 2000). Finally, perceived impact, the feeling of making a positive and socially noteworthy impact in one's organization or other entities, can produce experiences of significance which further provides more experiences of meaningfulness of work (Grant, 2008). Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) rephrase that perceived impact stimulates experienced self-efficacy which leads to meaningfulness of work.

Thirdly, self-esteem is a mechanism that can convert sources of meaningfulness to the experienced meaningfulness of work (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). In this context self-esteem refers to a personal evaluation of one's own self-worth (i.e. Baumeister et al., 2003). In terms of meaningful work, the research suggests that either personal or group-related work accomplishments can offer a sense of being worthy and valuable, thus higher self-esteem, which further arouses experiences of meaningfulness of work (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). This self-esteem can be acquired either by

completing demanding work tasks personally and perceiving own contribution to the company (Spreitzer et al., 2005) or simply by identifying oneself as a member of personally valued group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Both of the ways produce meaningfulness as they foster a positive view of oneself (Gecas, 2006). Compared to self-efficacy which refers to a sense of control over one's work-life, the foundation of self-esteem lies in feeling oneself worthwhile and valuable (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010).

#### 2.2.1.2 Purpose, belongingness, transcendence and cultural and interpersonal sensemaking

The last four mechanisms, identified by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010), through which work can become meaningful are purpose, belongingness, transcendence and cultural and interpersonal sensemaking. These mechanisms are related not only to the self as a source but also to the job. I will briefly present each one of them next.

To start with, Ryff (1989) defines purpose in life as a sense of directedness and experience of intentionality. Frankl (1992) claims that having a purpose in life is vital for human survival. The source of the purpose can be either internally driven, such as goals, or externally driven, such as calling (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Regarding of meaningful work, Baumeister and Vohs (2002) argue that a sense of purpose connects present activities to the future events so that present events are considered to lead towards these anticipated future events or states. The authors continue that these purposes can be either simply objective goals or more subjective experiences of fulfillment, such as salvation or love. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) identify two distinct mechanisms of purpose in relation to meaningfulness of work from the literature, namely significance of work and value systems. Firstly, experiencing one's work efforts significant for instance in terms of serving a greater good or doing something important for one's community, is suggested to contribute to the meaningfulness of work (Grant, 2008). Value systems, instead, are a composition of values that a group of people share (Wiener, 1988). These values guide individual's actions and help to decide which actions are right and wrong, thus minimizing moral distress from one's decisions (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). Acting according to these values and experiencing that one has done the right thing brings meaning to life (Frankl, 1992). Wiener (1988) note that

organizations can provide a sense of direction and purpose to its employees through for instance clear mission statement. In this way employees have the opportunity to reflect their personal values to the organization's mission and act according to it. If personal and organizational values are in accordance, these value systems contribute to the meaningfulness of work (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) point out that compared to self-concordance discussed in previous chapter, meaningfulness from value systems results from a sense of purpose from participating in a larger system of shared values, not from a personal alignment of one's values and actions.

Fifth mechanism identified by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) is belongingness which has been one of the key interests among meaningful work researchers. Belongingness refers to a holistic aspiration to have enough personally significant, positive and permanent interpersonal relationships (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Belongingness as a mechanism to meaningful work functions in two different ways: through social identification with others at work and through experienced interpersonal connectedness (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Firstly, social identification creates meaningfulness if an employee belongs to a desirable social group which one experiences as special and whose beliefs and identities one shares (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Much cited social identification theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) implies that being a member of a valued group compared to other groups makes this identification powerful. The second mechanism of belongingness, interpersonal connectedness resembles relatedness which is one of the basic psychological needs (i.e. Ryan and Deci, 2000). Feeling of closeness in relation to the coworkers is suggested to contribute to the meaningfulness of work as positive relationships produce comforting and supportive emotions to individuals (Kahn, 2007) and additionally, it fulfills one of the three basic psychological needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Consequently, as Pratt and Ashworth (2003) note, the closer, family-like relationships one has in the work context, the stronger sense of support and connectedness it creates, which consequently produces more meaningfulness of work for an employee.

Transcendence is identified as the sixth mechanism through which work becomes meaningful (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Maslow (1971) define

transcendence as superseding or connecting oneself to something greater than oneself. Two alternative sub-mechanism in relation to meaningful work is recognized in the research: interconnection and self-abnegation (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). First, interconnection, feeling connected with others and serving greater good, produces meaningfulness that results from contributing to something greater than oneself (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). More specifically, if an individual perceives that one's work has a positive influence on a broader context (i.e. society), one is more likely to experience oneself as a part of interconnected persons of this larger system and hence, greater than oneself. This is suggested to produce meaningfulness to individuals. Secondly, self-abnegation, subordinating oneself and relinquishing control for something bigger than oneself, is proposed to have an impact on the experienced meaningfulness of work since an individual may feel that one does not have to be alone or in control (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). This controlling entity may be for instance a society, an organization or a family. A higher power can also be this kind of entity and following one's sacred calling can create faith for a pre-determined destiny and hence, meaningfulness as a consequence (Weiss et al., 2004). Self-abnegation, giving a control to others is an opposite to self-efficacy, having the autonomy for own actions (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Yet, both can produce meaningfulness of work.

Lastly, cultural and interpersonal sensemaking is the final mechanism that constructs meaningful work (Rosso Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). It differs from other mechanisms as it emphasizes the role of a social environment in the meaning-making process instead of self-related explanations. More precisely, the mechanism implies that sociocultural factors influence the work-related meaning-making process (Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe, 2003). Firstly, instead of an individually driven meaning-making process, cultural sensemaking perspective suggests that a broader cultural context influences which work-related meanings are considered as appropriate in each culture (Weick, 1995). Secondly, interpersonal sensemaking emphasizes the role of interpersonal cues which either directly or indirectly influence the meaning-making of an individual (Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe, 2003). The authors propose that employees scan for, codify and interpret these cues in their environment, for instance from their coworkers, and as a result individually decide what is meaningful.

As a summary, Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) identified seven mechanisms that convert the sources of meaningful work into actually experienced meaningful work. Although many of these mechanisms focus on the intrapersonal, psychological processes, the importance of social and cultural aspects are also taken into account. In the next chapter I will present how different scholars have proposed that work becomes meaningful – the mechanisms discussed above create a foundation for many of the frameworks presented next.

### 2.2.2 Pathways to meaningful work – proposed theoretical frameworks

Different scholars have proposed alternative, yet partly overlapping frameworks considering how work becomes meaningful. Next, I will present the most relevant frameworks starting with the framework suggested by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) since it offers a comparable starting point to any other framework. Moreover, Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski divide their framework into detailed single mechanisms that mitigate the comparisons between the alternative frameworks. At the end of this chapter I will present an integrative framework that in my opinion combines the key elements common to different frameworks.

#### 2.2.2.1 Four pathways, many mechanisms

Based on their comprehensive literature review, Rosso, Dekas and Wresniewski (2010) formulated a framework that captures the most fundamental elements that create and maintain the experience of meaningful work. The authors identify two main dimensions which separate the framework into four different parts. The first dimension regards whether an individual is driven by a desire to either agency or communion. Another dimension regards the direction of individual's actions – whether it is towards self or towards others. By dividing the pathways to meaningful work into these two dimensions, the authors emphasize the different ways employees can approach work and hence, derive the meaningfulness out of it. In fact, Bakan (1966) argue that there is a variation in an individual level in terms of desire for agency and communion. Bakan propose that individuals have two modalities in their existence: on one hand, existing as an individual by separating from others and creating on their own, but on the other hand, existing as a

part of some larger community by connecting and uniting to others. The individual variation proposed by Bakan reveals the complexity concerning what can be experienced as meaningful at work.

Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) estimate that in the intersection of the above-mentioned dimensions individuals will most probably experience work as meaningful. However, as individual differences do exist, the two dimensions constitute four pathways to the creation and maintenance of meaningful work. The pathways are individuation, contribution, self-connection and unification and I will briefly elaborate each one of them next. According to Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, in the individuation pathway the aim is to express individual agency and the actions are directed towards the self. The authors propose that meaningfulness arises from actions that highlight importance of the self and distinguishing it as valuable. Contribution instead refers to directing the actions towards others but individual is driven by a desire to agency. In this pathway perceived significance of actions and contributing to something greater than oneself creates experiences of meaningfulness of work. Thirdly, in self-connection a desire to communion motivates an employee but the actions are directed towards the self. Consequently, actions that foster the alignment with oneself and one's self-image produces meaningfulness. Lastly, unification refers to a desire to communion and directing actions towards others, and the meaningfulness arises from bringing oneself into harmony with others. Concludingly, in the figure 1 I will present how Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) propose that the mechanisms discussed earlier are connected to these pathways. In the following chapters I will present and discuss other frameworks representing the pathways to meaningful work.

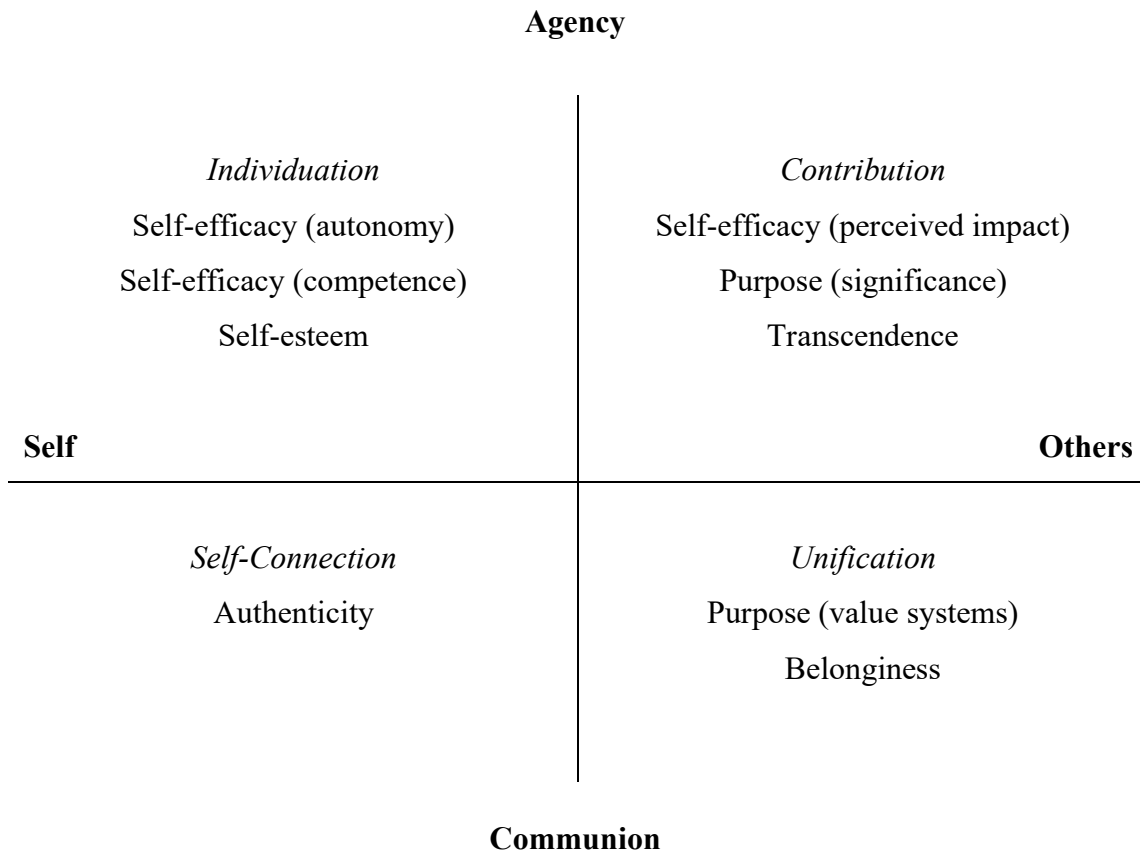


Figure 1. Pathways to meaningful work according to Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010).

#### 2.2.2.2 Frameworks that are utilized in questionnaires (CMWS, WAMI)

In the meaningful work literature there are two individual inventories that are built up for examining the meaningful work: Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale, CMWS (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012) and The Work and Meaning Inventory, WAMI (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012). Both of the inventories have an empirical background and hence a framework of meaningful work which I will next elaborate.

The framework created by Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) possesses many similarities compared to the framework of Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010). Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) built their measure on meaningful work based on two qualitative research projects. The foundation for CMWS is created by Lips-Wiersma (2002) as she presents that a framework of meaningful work has two process dimensions and hence,

four separate content dimensions. The simplified framework is presented in figure 2. The process dimensions are the need to meet the needs of either the self or others, and the need for either being and reflecting or doing. The process dimensions resemble the dimensions presented by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010). Additionally, the content dimensions that are categorized based on the process dimensions are: developing and becoming the inner self, unity with others, service to others and expressing full potential (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) state that these content dimensions make up the meaningful work itself.

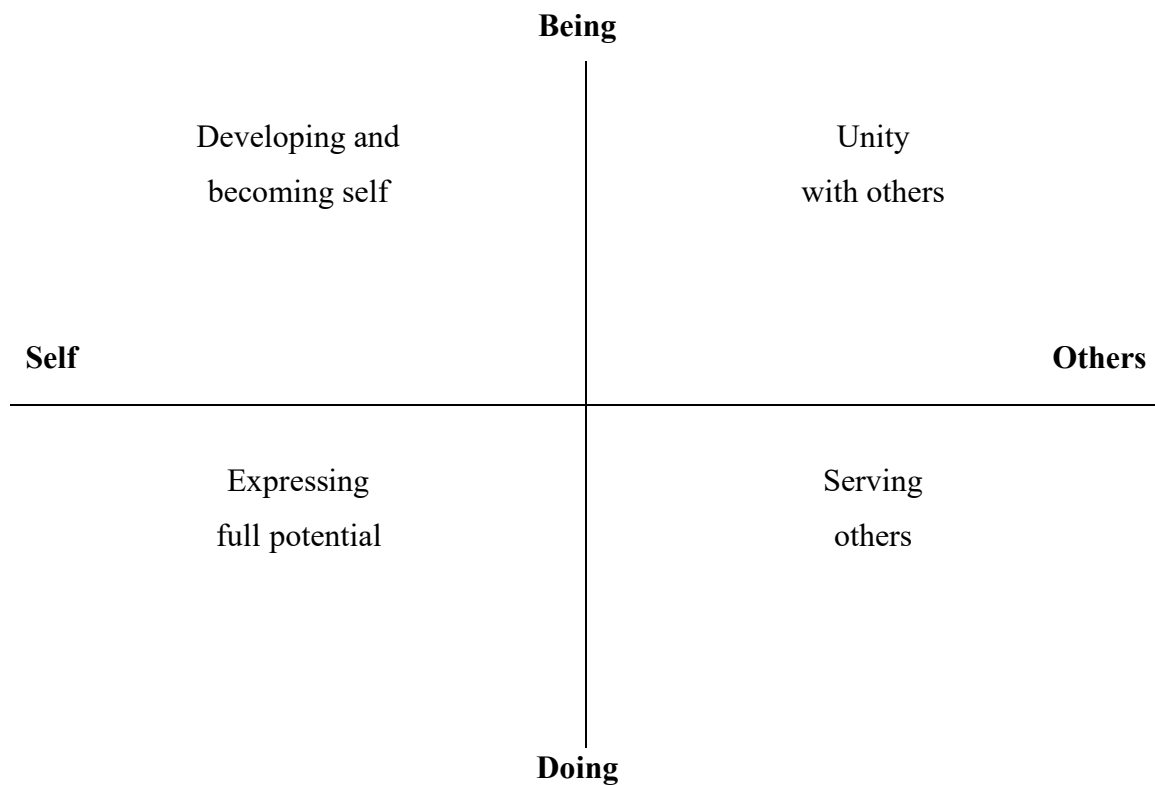


Figure 2. Framework of meaningful work according to Lips-Wiersma (2002).

Developing and becoming self refers to being with the self (Lips-Wiersma, 2002) and it is about personal growth, being aware of oneself and maintaining integrity towards oneself. It comes close to the self-connection depicted in the framework of Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010). Expressing full potential, instead, relates to doing for the self



– expressing one’s creativity through work, influencing and hence, having a sense of achievement (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). This resembles the individuation in Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski’s (2010) framework. Thirdly, unity with others reflects to being with others and refers to working together with others by sharing values and consequently having a sense of belonging (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). This comes close to the unification described by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010). Finally, serving others relates to doing for others and regards making a difference through one’s work (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). The pathway of contribution in Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski’s (2010) work possesses similarities compared to serving others. However, although there are many similarities compared to the four pathways presented by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, Martela and Riekkı (2018) claim that the dimensions described by Lips-Wiersma (2002) remind more like psychological satisfactions which serve as important sources of meaningful work instead of pathways to meaningful work as such.

The ground theory of the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) offers an alternative way to view the construction of meaningful work (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012). The authors consider that individuals experience meaningfulness through three different pathways: positive meaning (PM) in work, meaning making (MM) through work and greater good (GG) motivations. Positive meaning in work refers to that one’s work has a personal significance. Steger, Dik and Duffy elaborate that PM in work dimension would capture individual’s personal judgement about the meaningfulness and importance of one’s work. Compared to Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski’s (2010) framework, PM in work comes close to the individuation dimension. Meaning making through work dimension, instead, emphasizes the role of work in the meaning making process in life in general (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012). They suggest that working in general offers a way to experience meaningfulness in life. Thus, compared to Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski’s (2010) framework, I consider MM through work referring to both self-related dimensions, the individuation and the self-connection. Lastly, greater good motivations imply that work is considered as meaningful if it has a positive, broader impact on others (Steger, Dik and Duffy, 2012), thus coming close to the contribution dimension in Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) framework. However, as the ground theory of WAMI provides a slightly different viewpoint on the meaningful work

compared to other frameworks, I consider its usability in evaluation of meaningful work is lesser and more imprecise.

### 2.2.2.3 Basic psychological needs as pathways

As Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) asked for testing multiple potential predictors of meaningful work simultaneously, Martela and Riekkari (2018) conducted a research examining pathways to meaningful work cross-culturally – namely in India, in Finland and in the United States. In their studies, the authors investigated the role of the three universal basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence and relatedness in creation of the experienced meaningfulness of work. In addition, Martela and Riekkari tested for the impact of beneficence to meaningful work. As defined on self-determination theory, SDT, (i.e. Ryan and Deci, 2000), Martela and Riekkari (2018) define autonomy as a sense of free will and perceived causality of one's actions. In other words, a person feels that one is in control in one's actions and those actions reflect one's personal interests. Competence, based on SDT, refers to a sense of efficacy and mastery in actions a person is conducting – a person feels competent to accomplish one's goals (Martela and Riekkari, 2018). Lastly, as in SDT, relatedness refers to a person's feeling of interpersonal connectedness with and belongingness to others and to a community. Beneficence, in turn, is defined as a sense of having a prosocial impact and making a positive contribution on others (Martela and Riekkari, 2018).

Based on their empirical findings, Martela and Riekkari (2018) suggest that in India and in Finland the all three basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness, and beneficence were significant and independent predictors of meaningful work. In the United States the findings indicate that autonomy, relatedness and beneficence predict meaningful work whereas the role of competence is non-significant when all three other factors are controlled. In sum, the authors propose that the all four satisfactions explain totally from 60 to 70 percent of the variance of meaningful work. More precisely, the more one's job fulfills one's psychological needs (including beneficence), the more one experiences meaningfulness in one's work.

Compared to the framework proposed by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski's (2010) reference framework, according to Martela and Riekkari (2018) autonomy reflects the self-connection dimension. Competence, in turn, can be considered as a narrow definition of the individuation pathway in the reference framework (Martela and Riekkari, 2018). The authors exclude the self-esteem concept from the basic psychological need of competence as they consider it as a need satisfaction instead. Thirdly, Martela and Riekkari propose relatedness to be equivalent to the unification dimension in the reference framework. Lastly, beneficence, making a positive contribution, comes conceptually close to the contribution dimension in the reference framework – however, the mechanism of transcendence as proposed by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) is excluded by Martela and Riekkari (2018) as they consider it more as a potential outcome of making a contribution, not as a need on its own right.

#### 2.2.2.4 Meaningfulness as a concept and a pathway

As discussed earlier in chapter 2.1.1 in a conceptual manner, the concept of meaningfulness offers a relevant framework to examine the pathways to meaningful work. Martela and Pessi (2018) propose that meaningfulness is first and foremost about a sense of significance, whether the work is worth doing or not, and there are two pathways to achieve it: through self-realization and broader purpose. Martela and Pessi define self-realization as expressing oneself and one's values at work and having a sense of autonomy. Defined like this, Martela and Pessi suggest it to match the self-connection dimension in the reference framework suggested by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010). Broader purpose, in turn, refers to serving or contributing to greater good and goal that is beyond the individual in question (Martela and Pessi, 2018). The authors state that as such broader purpose comes close to the contribution dimension in the reference framework. Although Martela and Pessi consider self-realization and broader purpose as conceptual elements of meaningful work, they resemble much like pathways discussed in this chapter.

Compared to the framework of Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010), Martela and Pessi (2018) exclude unification and individuation from their conceptual framework. The authors argue that excluding the unification, or belongingness from their framework result

from their judgement that meaningful work refers to meaningfulness in working, not meaningfulness at work. However, Martela and Pessi also state that if one would define meaningful work as meaningfulness at work so that for instance work community would be included in the definition of work, then the interpersonal aspect of belongingness would be important factor, a pathway, to meaningful work. Lastly, when it comes to the individuation, importance of one's actions that highlight the self and distinguishing it as valuable (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010), Martela and Pessi (2018) consider it to loosely match the definition of work significance. However, Martela and Pessi note that they would exclude self-efficacy from significance (as defined in the individuation) as even though one would be effective in work and accomplish certain goals, it could be perceived as meaningless if the accomplishments do not align with one's self-image and personal values. Martela and Pessi (2018) continue that even though self-efficacy can increase one's sense of self-realization and mitigate contributing to a broader purpose at work, it could not be considered as such as a pathway to meaningful work.

Having discussed the different, alternative frameworks proposing the pathways to meaningful work, in the next chapter I will present a constituting framework that summarizes the findings from previous chapters.

#### 2.2.2.5 Integrative framework

To sum up the findings from alternative frameworks proposing the pathways to meaningful work, there are several unifying concepts or factors that are common to all frameworks: broader purpose perspective, self-related perspective and dimension that considers interpersonal relationships.

Having presented five different frameworks, broader purpose, or from now on "contribution on others" dimension exists in each one of them. As an example, Martela and Pessi (2018) name it broader purpose as such, Martela and Riekkii (2018) call it beneficence and Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) present it as the contribution dimension. Common to all definitions is that they deal with perceived personal impact on other people, institutions or even something greater. Considering the mechanisms discussed in chapter 2.2.1, this dimension is about self-efficacy in terms of perceived

impact and purpose in terms of significance. Transcendence, however, as argued by Martela and Riekkari (2018), refers more to an outcome of contribution and as in every framework the contribution is considered as an impact on others. Thus, it is not included as a mechanism in the integrative framework.

The second dimension has self-evidently something to do with the self, personal values and autonomy, as this kind of aspect is in every framework. Both Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) and Lips-Wiersma (2002) have a self – others axis in their framework, and they both propose that not only doing important work but also being one's true self are important pathways to meaningful work. These aspects come close to the basic psychological needs of autonomy and competence (Ryan and Deci, 2000), which refer to doing actions that are aligned with personal values and feeling competent to achieve personally important goals. However, instead of dividing the self in two dimensions, I think that the concept of self-realization by Martela and Pessi (2018) captures the essence of both of the discussed aspects. On one hand it implies doing actions that are important to oneself and on the other hand, realizing those intentions and actions by achieving one's goals. Thus, the dimension is called self-realization. Considering the mechanisms proposed by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) I regard the dimension includes authenticity mechanism and self-efficacy in terms of autonomy and competence. Self-esteem, however, is considered as need satisfaction by Martela and Riekkari (2018) and hence excluded in the framework.

The last dimension of the integrative framework considers interpersonal relationships, unity with others from now on. Even though Martela and Pessi (2018) do not include it in their conceptual framework, they also state that if one considers meaningfulness at work, it should be included in the definition. As relatedness is one of the basic psychological needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000), I consider it is an important element of the experienced meaningfulness of work. When it comes to the mechanisms discussed by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010), as this dimension is about desire to communion, I follow the mechanisms suggested by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski and include belongingness and purpose in terms of value systems in this dimension.

The three dimensions, contribution to others, self-realization and unity with others, constitute a framework that in my opinion covers all the essential pathways to meaningful work. By covering all the basic psychological needs and beneficence, satisfaction of these needs would presumably create and maintain the experiences of meaningful work. In figure 3 I summarize the integrative framework. In the next chapter I will cover the methodology I use to investigate the experiences about the impact of organizational growth on meaningful work. My aim is to examine the sources of meaningfulness of the interviewees, investigate how the interviewees experience the growth their organization is facing and finally examine how, if somehow, the growth has changed the experienced meaningfulness of the employees.

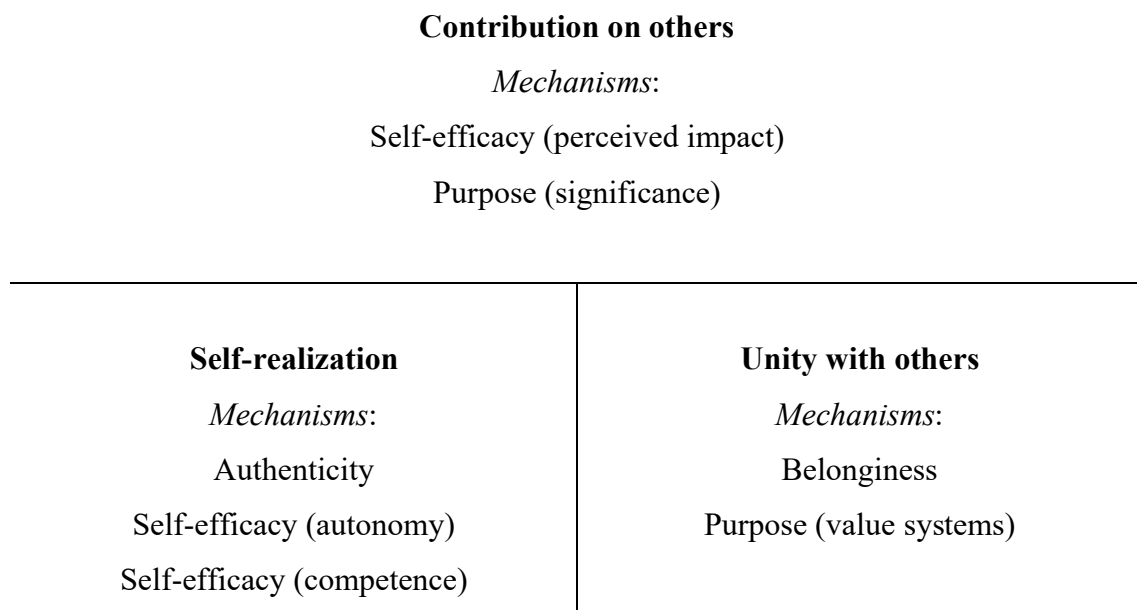


Figure 3. Pathways to meaningful work, the integrative framework.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will present the research methodology I utilized in order to answer my research question. First, I will introduce the research tradition followed by the methodological choices that are applicable to my research question. Including to these choices I will present the research context and introduce the case company. Then, I will briefly present data collection and data analysis methods of my study. I will conclude the chapter by discussing ethical considerations and evaluations of the present study.

#### 3.1 Qualitative approach

In order to answer my research question and describe and understand a phenomenon within a certain context, I chose a qualitative research method as it is best suited for these purposes (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Eriksson and Kovalainen continue that the purpose of qualitative research is to find meanings and experiences of people's real-life events. Moreover, contrariwise to quantitative research, qualitative research approach aims to answer how- and why-questions and in this study I am more interested in describing and understanding the phenomenon under examination than drawing causalities (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).

A critical and important step in qualitative research is acknowledging the philosophical starting point of the research (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). According to the authors, the reflection and identification of one's own ontological and epistemological starting points are highly recommended in order to be able to conduct transparent research and present credible interpretations. Hence, identifying researcher's foundations of thinking is an inseparable part of doing quality qualitative research. Thus, I state that I have adopted a critical realist way of thinking. Whereas positivism posits that one single truth exists and it can be observed irrespective of the observer, and constructionism claims that reality is constructed socially by shared meanings and for instance language, critical realism constitutes a synthesis of these mainstream paradigms (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Eriksson and Kovalainen specify that on one hand, critical realism agrees with positivism that there exists an independent reality irrespective of human consciousness but also that social interaction constructs general knowledge and understanding about the

world and its phenomena. In practical terms, related to my research question, I think that there are some universal factors that influence the experienced meaningfulness of employees but also that these factors are shaped through social interaction among peers and managers as suggested by the literature. This dual view allows me to search for these universal factors simultaneously acknowledging that these factors are tightly context-related.

### 3.2 Case study

In order to understand a certain phenomenon in a specific context, I conducted an intensive single case study. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), intensive case studies emphasize understanding and interpretation of the current case and moreover try to develop understanding of the people and make sense of the processes and people in predetermined, specific context. Furthermore, according to the authors, intensive case studies aim at thick and conceptualized description of one or few cases. Applying to the authors, an intensive case study suits better a social constructivist and as in this study, critical realistic philosophical starting point since extensive case studies would have relied more on the positivist research tradition. The case company I chose represents a typical case according to Patton's (1990) classification rather than for instance extreme or unique case. According to Yin (2009) in this kind of intensive studies one typical case can be sufficient. The case company in this study is typical as it reminds other companies within its industry in terms of for example staffing, operations and processes. To define the research methodology and case study further, in addition to being intensive, the research is exploratory in nature. According to Yin (2009), exploratory studies are focused on explaining and exploring new phenomena and patterns.

As a conclusion, the use of a case study method in this thesis is justified by the fact that in order to understand a phenomenon thoroughly, it is necessary to deepen into a specific context since in different contexts the underlying principles and processes may vary remarkably (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). The authors state that the aim of intensive case studies is not to produce generalizable knowledge but rather focus on working for the case itself, which applies to the context of this study.



### 3.1.1 Case company

The case company has requested to remain anonymous in this study which I will respect. Therefore, the company is called simply “the Company” in this thesis and I will not provide any information that would make it possible to recognize the company. The Company is a large IT-service company that operates mainly in Finland but it has also several international units in various continents. The company offers for instance software development and consultancy services for its client organizations. The purpose of company’s services is to lead digital transformation projects from the beginning to the end.

By its number of employees, the company is classified as a large company. Most of the employees work as consultants in client projects in various public and private sector organizations. Besides the consultants, the rest of the staff works in a supportive functions and sales. Similarly to many other reference companies within IT-sector, the Company has adopted an agile way of working. By this I refer to not only agile methods but also to non-hierarchical organization structure since the experts in the client processes do not have proper designated supervisors. Based on the Company’s representatives’ interviews, the task of these autonomous projects teams is to execute defined tasks efficiently and with high quality standards by highlighting effective communication and possessing all the necessary capabilities to achieve the goals.

The IT-service sector is an attractive context to study, since the sector has growth potential. Globally the sector is estimated to grow approximately 3,7% (Costello and Rimer, 2019) and in Finland 4% in 2020 (Kärki and Silvennoinen, 2019). As the companies in the IT-service sector are highly dependent on their consultant-like employees, the growth in the sector will most likely indicate growth in people. In fact, Grönqvist and Rautanen (2018) estimate that in times of growth, the lack of experts will create a bottleneck for organizational growth and hence, make up more competitive environment within the sector.

### 3.3. Semi-structured interviews

As I have so far presented the research methodology I am following, the philosophical underpinnings and the context of my research, I will next provide more details about the actual research process starting from data collection method. The data of this intensive case study consists of interviews which I conducted in a semi-structured manner. Additionally, I utilized some written documents of the case company's employee statistics.

Even though Eriksson and Kovalainen (2009) suggest that in-depth interviews are most commonly used as a data collection method, I chose semi-structured interviews in which I can focus on few main topics. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2010) argue that in this method the interviewees are able to freely describe their genuine feelings and perceptions in predetermined topics, which is relevant for my study since I am interested in the genuine experiences of the case company's employees'. The authors continue that compared to in-depth interviews, choosing semi-structured method most likely mitigates maintaining the focus on research-wise relevant topics. Additionally, they suggest that this may make the data analysis part more manageable. On the contrary, structured interviews would potentially exclude lots of important data that is not yet known (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2010). On the basis of abovementioned arguments, I consider that the decision to choose semi-structured interviews as a key data collection method is well justified.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) note that in semi-structured interviews the themes follow theoretical frameworks from the topic. Thus, based on previous research, I decided that the main themes of the interviews were background data, foundations for employee engagement, push- and pull-factors and lastly perceptions and thoughts of organizational growth. However, as Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) point out, the interviewer has a possibility to ask follow-up and additional questions, which was also necessary during the interviews. I conducted first interviews at the early stage of the research process in order to be able to make slight modifications for my interview guide by shifting my focus on the topic of meaningful work. By doing so I acknowledged the circularity of the qualitative research process (Ronkainen et al., 2011). Besides the interview data I gathered written employee data considering the growth of the company. Additionally, I

had several discussions with the Company's representatives in order to be able understand the essence of the Company, its processes, non-hierarchical organizational structure and identity. In this way I was able to link the observations from the interviews to a larger context.

The interviews were conducted in the winter 2020 between the end of January to the beginning of March. The interviews were conducted one-on-one and they took place in commonly agreed locations such as cabinets in a cafeteria or in the Company's or in client company's conference rooms. I had booked up to 60 minutes to the interviews, however in reality the interviews lasted from 45 to 75 minutes. I planned to interview up to ten interviewees but altogether I conducted nine interviews with software developers who were chosen based on predetermined criteria that I will outline in the next chapter.

### 3.4 Participants

As mentioned, the sample of the study consists of the software developers from the Company. The criteria for choosing the interviewees was formulated together with the Company's representatives. The target group for this study originated from the Company's representatives as they asked for a study that makes it visible to identify the factors that influence the retention of the employees. Hence, the criteria for the interviewees was firstly that they had been working from three to eight years in the Company. The rationale for this timespan was twofold: on one hand, the so-called onboarding to the company was stated to last approximately two years and employees who are still in onboarding phase were excluded from the sample since they would most likely have limited insights about the push- and pull-factors. On the other hand, employees with more than eight years of experience may naturally have a sense of moving forward in their career and hence, they were excluded from the sample. Secondly, I decided to focus on the software developers because they constitute the central operating unit of an IT-consultancy company and consequently their effort is critical for the Company's success (Eckardt, Skaggs and Youndt, 2016).

Recruitment of the interviewees happened randomly and was carried out through emails with the help of the Company's representatives who had promised to offer a list of all the

employees meeting the criteria. As I aimed to interview approximately ten employees, in the first phase I approached ten candidates, in the second phase another ten candidates and in the final phase three additional candidates. Altogether I sent the invitation letter to 23 candidates following with two reminder letters if the candidate did not reply. As a result, nine candidates accepted the interview invitation, four rejected it and nine candidates did not reply. After finishing the nine appointed interviews, I regarded that I had reached a saturation point and decided not to aim for additional interviews.

At the interviews, the anonymity of the interviewees was guaranteed in order to reach the most genuine experiences. The interview guide was not shared with the interviewees beforehand. All of the interviews were conducted in Finnish as it was a native language of every interviewee. Regarding the background data of the interviewees, all of the interviewees were males which also reflects the Company's male majority among the software developers' population. The working experience ranged from 3.75 to 5.25 years, on average 4.25 years. This experience was counted from the day the employee's current contract was signed. This indicates that previous working experience in the company, such as internships or previous contracts if an employee had been working elsewhere even for a brief period of time, was not counted in the experience years. During the interviews one interviewee mentioned that he had worked for the Company altogether more than ten years. The actual interviews flowed smoothly covering all the key topics.

### 3.5 Content analysis

After discussing the data collection method and participants, I will next present how the data was analyzed. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and afterwards every interview was transcribed by using word-for-word method. As the purpose of this study was to gather information about themes and concepts of the interviewees, I decided that word-for-word transcription is sufficient compared to more detailed transcription of the interviews. Once the data was in written form, I started processing the data by using thematic analysis approach which Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest to be suitable for unexperienced researchers. In general, my method of data analysis can be considered mostly as inductive which allowed me to explore new ideas and perceptions raising from the interviews, such as the importance of the experienced meaningfulness of work and

organizational growth. This refers to a data-driven approach for analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, as I also utilized the topics and themes from the interview guide and previous studies, my data analysis approach can be considered to be abductive, which tries to address the weaknesses associated with deductive and inductive approaches (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). This allowed me to explore and organize the research data in a way that it reflected the theoretical framework (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009).

In practice, after I had familiarized myself with the interview data in the transcription phase, I started initially looking for commonalities and patterns emerging from the data referring to thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following this I started the actual coding by identifying codes that reflected the experiences of the interviewees by using NVivo program to make this step easier. Once I had coded every transcription, I began to search and generate themes which consists of codes that have commonalities (Braun and Clarke, 2006) by utilizing the visualization tool in NVivo program. The authors continue that once the commonalities are found, these themes need to be reviewed by going through the original material in order to make sure that they represent the original data set. In this phase I utilized the theoretical framework and searched for the sources and mechanisms for the experienced meaningfulness of work. Once I was confident that these themes I found reflected the original data, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest naming these themes and moreover evaluating, how themes are interconnected. Doing so I compared these interconnections to the integrative framework I had formulated and finally, interpreted how the organizational growth has influenced the experienced meaningfulness of work. Both in theme generation and in theme interconnection phase I used visualization tools, such as mind maps. The main benefit for using thematic analysis with coding as presented above compared to not coding the data was that it allowed me to better find and spot some novel topics from the data. However, as there was lots of written data, having the theoretical framework in mind mitigated the processing of the data set.

### 3.6 Validity and reliability

As I have addressed my methodological foundations and choices, I will lastly briefly discuss the limitations and ethical concerns related to my study. Obviously, the first factor that has to be taken into account is that case studies, as the one in question, are not generalizable to population (Yin, 2009). The findings indicate only the situation in current context and additionally, according to Yin, they can be utilized in theoretical considerations. However, as Guba (1981) argues, in qualitative studies we should not discuss generalizability rather than transferability. In that sense I believe that findings from this study could be transferrable in similar companies inside the same industry in Finland and when it comes to software developers who meet this study's selection criteria.

Guba (1981) states that credibility is among the evaluation criteria for qualitative research. Credible research highlights that interpretations of the researcher are in line with research population's actual opinions. In this study one key challenge in terms of credibility is related to the potential challenges in the recruitment of interviewees. I am afraid that there is a possibility that employees who have stronger, even negative opinions and experiences related to the Company and to push- and pull-factors are more eager to participate in the research. This can distort the representativity of the research population. I attempted to tackle this challenge by sending as neutral and informative invitation emails as possible. Another challenge related to credibility is that in terms of this study I do not have the possibility to interview massive number of employees as this is not a large research project rather than a master's thesis. In that sense it is possible that by interviewing nine software developers I did not acquire all of the potential experiences and arguments related to the meaningful work. This may cause that the results do not represent the opinions of the entire population of software developers in the Company. However, with randomized sampling and reaching some kind of saturation points in the interviews, I argue that the sampling is large enough to cover most important aspects.

Confirmability and dependability are the two last evaluation criteria for qualitative research (Guba, 1981). Dependability refers to consistency and repeatability of the findings and confirmability to neutrality and objectivity of the findings. First challenge in this area are potential biases in the analysis of the data. This could happen as I presented

that I analyzed the data abductively – it is possible that I will let findings from previous studies unintentionally steer my analysis. I decided to overcome this by using computer software as a tool to help me and consciously take the inductive analysis viewpoint. Furthermore, by reviewing the data in analysis phase I considered that I reduced this shortage. Another challenge in terms of confirmability and objectivity is that this study was conducted in cooperation with the Company which may have caused the interviewees to filter their responses. However, this challenge ought to be have dealt with complete anonymity of the respondents. Also the fact that I as an interviewer was not an employee in the organization hopefully reduced interviewees' concerns. In fact, most of the interviewees noted that the interviews reminded like a reflection session.

All in all, the potential features mentioned above may cause ethical challenges but I gave my best effort to overcome them in an appropriate way. I tried to do my part as a researcher as respectfully and adequately as my skills allowed me to do. During the writing process I tried to justify my decisions and interpretations in a transparent way and highlight the reflexivity of the process. These are the overall standards for high-class qualitative research (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). By doing so I also tried address to the potential challenges related to dependability. In the end, it is the reader's responsibility to assess the trustworthiness of my study based on the arguments and choices I have made. In the following section I will first present my empirical findings and link them to the findings from the literature.

## 4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this chapter I will present the empirical findings from the interviews I conducted with the software developers of the case company. Firstly, I will introduce the sources of meaningful work which were discussed in the interviews. I will do this under the heading “Sources of meaningful work”. Secondly, in the chapter “Mechanisms and pathways to meaningful work” I will discuss and interpret the pathways to meaningful work in the present sample covering all the mechanisms that were referred in the interviews. I am going to examine and reflect the findings compared to the integrative framework presented in the chapter 2.2.2.5. Thirdly, I will introduce how the organizational growth is experienced and perceived in the chapter “Perceptions towards organizational growth”. Lastly, I am going to interpret and conclude the impact of organizational growth to the experienced meaningfulness of work in chapter “The impact of organizational growth on meaningful work” by synthesizing the findings from previous chapters.

### 4.1. Sources of meaningful work

To start with, in this chapter I will introduce what kind of aspects are experienced as meaningful in work. I will cover the themes and factors the interviewees experienced as meaningful and shed light to different aspects of these factors. The examination of the sources of meaningful work will make it more reasonable to study the more abstract concepts that are reflected in the mechanisms and pathways. To briefly summarize the findings, many of the sources were related to the job (or target in the “factors that influence perception” framework) yet many of them were simultaneously connected to the self (or the perceiver) as well. The three most referred sources were coworkers and work community, meaningful work projects and the functionality of the organization.

#### 4.1.1 Coworkers and work community

The theme that was most cited in the interviews as meaningful or similar concepts was related to other people in the workplace. Apart from one interviewee, every interviewee considered that colleagues or community have a strong influence on how the interviewees experienced about their work. Various facets of other people were reflected in the



responds: fellowship, competence of coworkers and minding attitude of other employees. The meaningfulness from other people arises from both colleagues in the same project team and employees from so-called supportive functions of the case company.

First and foremost, the interviewees emphasized the fellowship, belongingness, that is distinguishable throughout the organization. Applying Wrzesniewski, Dutton and Debebe (2003) it is possible to detect the indicators of fellowship through interpersonal sensemaking from cues from different interactions between employees in the workplace. The following example indicates the experience of one employee, yet it reflects the thoughts of other employees as well.

*Fellowship is distinguishable throughout the organization. Whether you are a fellow software developer, a member of a so-called HR-team or sales team or something else. You can feel it.*

Overall, strong sense of fellowship and an attitude that reflects a strong commitment towards for instance team members were referred multiple times in the interviews as next two examples point out. This kind of commitment to other people can reflect social identification to an in-group as presented by Tajfel and Turner (1985). Pratt and Ashworth (2003) elaborate that stronger identification to a group or a close-knit dynamics within a company can produce more experiences of meaningfulness of work compared to a lesser social identification.

*We do not have much this “someone else’s problem” -thinking in our community. We solve problems together instead of trying to avoid taking responsibility or letting someone else to solve it alone. We take responsibility and help each other. And I think this is very important in this kind of organization in which it is not always clear what should be done next.*

*This [meaningfulness] arises very much from the people one works with. It is one obvious factor that I want to mention. It is neither about the things we are doing nor the technology we are using. The fact that the environment*

*is like it - - you know there are competent people working who also are nice people outside the work context.*

The close coworker relationships may increase experiences of meaningfulness if they allow an individual to express one's true and genuine self (Kahn, 2007) and furthermore, if a group of people share similar values with an individual, the accordance of the values can contribute positively to the meaningfulness of work (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). Returning to the citations above, the latter one points out an important factor that was mentioned on several interviews – the competence of coworkers. It seems that this competence can enhance commitment towards other employees as referred in the former of the previous citations. Besides the commitment, the competence seems to indicate that the employees share the same values of willingness to develop one's skills and keep up with continuous learning – hence influencing on the meaningfulness of work.

*I want to work with people who are per se competent but who also want to constantly learn and develop their skills. And from my perspective and experience, what I have seen and heard from other companies, we have an excellent concentration of top-notch employees.*

Furthermore, this competence and shared, positive attitude towards learning and developing one's skills may foster personal competence of a perceiver as a following example points out:

*It [feeling of engagement] has remained in the same level primarily due to technical challenges. Here we have really skilled employees, competence and challenging projects. I feel that I can develop myself here and work in interesting project at the same time.*

Feeling personally competent is one the basic psychological needs presented in the self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Hence, it is natural that fulfilling a basic need might increase the experienced meaningfulness of work.

Lastly, in terms of coworkers or other people, some interviewees point out that the minding attitude of colleagues and other employees of the company influences the

meaningfulness of work and feeling engaged to the company. Some interviewees mentioned safety and caring in times of illnesses as an important factor particularly, if an employee considered oneself as a safety seeking person. However, it was more common that employees appreciated the fact that they experienced that the company is engaged to them which makes an employee more engaged and working more meaningful.

*I have not seen any other company that would have come as close to this company in terms of attitudes towards an employee, their working conditions and how they are willing to hear what an employee wants to do. I think that the company's starting point is the wellbeing and wants of an employee. - - And that makes me engaged to working in here.*

*The fact that they [the company] care and are committed to me makes me involved in this job.*

In terms of minding attitude, the responses reflect slightly more about the engagement of employees than pure meaningfulness of work. However, as discussed in the conceptual definition in chapter 2.1.1, engagement as a concept comes close to what is considered as meaningful in this context. Summarizing the findings in this section, it is worth noticing that the sources arise from not only job, or target, reflecting to the original classification in chapter 2.1.2 but also from the self as the concordance of personal and shared values seems to increase the experiences of meaningfulness of work.

#### 4.1.2 Meaningful projects

Besides the coworkers and work community, the presence of meaningful projects has a major impact to the experienced meaningfulness of work. All except two interviewees mentioned the importance of projects and the responses reflect different aspects that the interviewees attached to them. These aspects include the ideological meaningfulness or purpose of the projects, autonomy that the projects offer, possibility to learn something new and challenge oneself on a technical side and lastly the project teams. Many of the concepts are overlapping and referred in the same comments of employees, yet the categorization enables a fruitful comparison of the sources and later the mechanisms.

Firstly, many interviewees mentioned the ideological importance or societal relevance of the projects as personally meaningful. Moreover, the interviewees experienced that if the project feels generally interesting for them, it has an important influence on their experienced meaningfulness of work.

*The meaningfulness of projects is important for me. For instance, my current project is like it, that we aim to do societally meaningful and important projects.*

*The present project has a personal significance for me. - - It is a primary thing that the key values [personal and organizational] are aligned.*

*For a frontline coder like me, although that is not something we call ourselves here, but for person who likes coding, it is important that the project I work with feels interesting and I personally find it attractive. And that is something that engages me to put my best effort in the project.*

An interesting remark is that in terms of meaningfulness of work, some interviewees mentioned that they do not have to personally attend the project. Rather they consider it sufficient if the company takes part in meaningful projects. This is depicted in the following example:

*The possibility to work in projects that are important [fosters engagement]. And even though I have to work in a project that does not match my personal values, the fact that I know the company does such meaningful projects is important for me.*

Already Hackman and Oldham (1976) highlighted the importance of job characteristics in employee's experienced meaningfulness of work. The projects the interviewees attend in the case company reflect the job tasks that Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) state to shape the meaningfulness of work. Although the job tasks may vary from project to project, the project itself constitutes boundaries for job tasks and hence, will probably influence the meaningfulness of work. In addition to job tasks, high levels of autonomy and opportunity to craft one's job and environment can increase the meaningfulness of

work (Fried and Ferris, 1987; Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2010). Indeed, many interviewees experienced that the autonomy that the projects offer influences the meaningfulness of work. This autonomy considers not only the way of working in the projects but also choosing the project.

*We have the authority to make decisions ourselves and that is something that makes me engaged to the company.*

*One thing [that is meaningful] is that I have an active role and I can contribute what should be done. Because I have worked in companies in which I have been told what to do, do not think and just do your tasks, and that is not okay for me at all. I want to be active and contribute to the potential outcome of the project.*

Again, referring to the self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), the need for autonomy is argued to be a basic psychological need and hence, its fulfillment could increase the experienced meaningfulness of work. According to the interviews, the level of autonomy is high in the company and it seems to be deep in its culture. However, as it differs slightly from the job crafting aspect discussed above, I will cover it later on in this chapter.

Thirdly, the possibility to learn something new and possibility to technically challenge oneself were important factors to many of the interviewees. Indeed, third and last basic psychological need presented in the self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) is the need for competence. In this light it was, as anticipated, that the urge for competency stood out from several interviews and it appears to be distinctive for the case company.

*The possibility to develop my skills and being able to work in interesting projects [feels meaningful]. And interesting in this context comprehends the characteristic of being challenging enough for me.*

*The most unique and distinctive thing in this company [that engages me] is the technical challenges we face. -- And that is why I feel that I can evolve and do interesting things in here.*

*For me the meaningful thing in this company is the aspiration to do things a bit better than other companies. For instance, if a client wants to buy from us, our asset is that we do things better than others and I consider this mentality attractive as well.*

Besides the fact that need for competency is one basic psychological need (Ryan and Deci, 2000), one possible explanation for the meaningfulness of self-development and technical challenges is that these challenges foster the intrinsic motivation which may increase the meaningfulness of these actions (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). This could be due to the mechanism that feeling intrinsically motivated indicates that the work-related activities are aligned with the self-concept. The following citation from one interviewee illustrates excellently the importance of self-development and challenging on the experiences of meaningful work:

*Personally, I get the most out of it [the work] when I can do something novel or deepen my knowledge in something I already know. In a way I can find and reach a new level in my skills and way of working - - that is the thing why I like doing this job.*

Lastly, the feature that some interviewees pointed out distinct from the factors discussed already in the coworker and work community chapter was that the project teams makes the working smooth and efficient. This could be due to the fact that shared practices and goals may mitigate to reach one's work-related potential with the help of coworkers and hence, reach not only personal but also collective goals.

*In terms of project work, we have a shared vision that we want to get things done. It means that we do not use time on explaining why we cannot do something – instead, we get things done. And if you want to do things well and you have competent colleagues, it naturally supports the goal of getting things done.*

Concludingly, even though this source of meaningful work appears to be the job-related in many of the previously mentioned aspects of project work, one may see that they are

tightly related to the self. For instance, the source might be the self in terms of personal values by enabling self-realization and fulfillment of personally important goals. Or alternatively motivation that is fostered by technical challenges. Moreover, the project work fosters both autonomy and competence, which may increase the meaningfulness of one's work.

#### 4.1.3 Functional organization

The third major theme that emerged from the interview data considers the way the organization works and functions, and how this functionality increases the meaningfulness of work. The theme consists of different elements: smooth organizational processes, the investment on employees' training, organizational hierarchy and organizational culture.

To start with, many interviewees appreciate their employer due to highly functional and smooth processes that mitigate the working. It could be so that these supportive processes create a foundation and the context for the work itself and hence, increase the meaningfulness of the work as such. The smooth organizational processes show up for instance as effortless communication and minimized bureaucracy related to work.

*Generally speaking, I appreciate the Company as an employer. Usually, all the things I have had to deal with have worked out smoothly and rapidly. Even though this is a rather large company, there is not unnecessary bureaucracy in the processes.*

*The fact is that when the working conditions are meaningful and projects are meaningful, it is difficult to see that any other working option would be more meaningful.*

One interviewee mentioned that the absence of filling forms and applications makes it possible to focus on the work itself which is considered as essential.

*If something has to be done, I just do it instead of filling applications three weeks in advance which could be a disease of a big company. But that I can focus on what is essential in the work [is meaningful].*

Not only the functional organizational processes and the absence of corporate bureaucracy but also the investment the company makes in employees' training feels meaningful and engaging in the employees' side. Some interviewees highlighted the importance of training possibilities whereas some discussed the positive effect of career development in terms of meaningful work. The trainings that the company offers were mentioned as excellent. In many cases, these two aspects, training possibilities and career development go hand in hand in the minds of employees as the following example demonstrates:

*I value that if we want to learn something new, it is supported by the company level. I mean, I think if I would like to make a career shift within the organization and if I feel I have the competency needed in it, I would most probably have the possibility to do it. - - Possibility to develop myself is very important thing for me.*

The variety and the number of the projects were considered as an asset of a larger company:

*We have a big company which does different kinds of projects, which means that we have variety in our projects. And if we have variety in projects, it means that I have a possibility to switch a project.*

However, even though the career development was valued by some interviewees, a minority highlighted its importance due to lack of organized career development and absence of vertical development possibilities due to a flat organization structure.

*If I would like to work as a so-called superior, it naturally does not work in our company because we do not have such [role].*



Career development was mentioned to be drifting and dependent on a chance, as a following example illustrates:

*We have pretty late become aware of the fact that there is plenty of us and people just drift to their work tasks. And at the same time, we lack the structure how an employee could develop within the organization.*

The minority discussed above noted that making these processes explicit and visible would make the work more meaningful. Nevertheless, despite the absence of vertical career development, the flat organizational structure was highly valued by the employees. Some interviewees highlighted the uniqueness of the way the company is organized, and the responses were related to the effortless communication and collegial mentality within the organization, thus influencing on the meaningfulness of work.

*We do not have much hierarchy in here so that someone would say what to do. We have to navigate in this ambiguous environment but we do it together. That mentality of doing together is deep in the culture and that is wonderful.*

In spite of the positive effect of flat organizational structure, some pointed out problematic issues related to that. These issues comprehend the lack of a leader and the complex networks within the organization. One interviewee stated that the lack of a leader makes the work slightly less meaningful since the gentle and supportive guidance is missing from day-to-day work.

*Maybe something that is missing here is that no one is asking me what I want to do next or supporting me. So if you think what makes me less engaged in the work, I would say that the absence of a supervisor is a such factor.*

The lack of a leader as a negative factor in terms of meaningful work is reasonable since a leader could influence the meaning-making process of employees by for instance framing a mission and organizational identity (Podolny, Khurana and Hill-Popper, 2004). In other words, a leader could help converting personal values and goals into greater

organizational mission (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Regarding the overall complex organizational structure, the complexity makes it more difficult to find the right person if one would like to ask for instance for advice. This will diminish the meaningfulness of work as a consequence. Concludingly a flat organizational structure and the absence of supervisors are considered both positive and negative within the organization.

*That you would find a right person with just few contact and hence find every opinion you would need to. That is something we do not have in here - - and that feels un motivating for me.*

Lastly, in terms of a functional organization, the interviewees considered the culture of the company meaningful. The core of the culture is in the autonomy and in the responsibility that is attached to that freedom. The importance of autonomy was discussed previously in this chapter under the heading of meaningful projects, and hence, it will not deepen into it at this point. One interviewee encapsulated the importance of the culture in a following way:

*Here are enormous number of factors that are engaging and make working meaningful. For instance, I highly value the culture of this company which has definitely lasted all these years and was called as “responsibility and freedom”. It means that we are in charge of our own actions and what is the right thing to do.*

As a conclusion of this chapter, I argue that the organization and how it works has a major impact to the meaningfulness of work. It could be interpreted that functional organization removes the obstacles that might hinder experiencing work as meaningful. Thus, it appears that meaningfulness arises also from smooth organizational processes, offering training for employees, hence indicating caring towards employees. In addition, having a flat organizational structure makes the communication effortless yet some asked for a leader to guide the day-to-day work. Lastly, the culture that is the core of the company, the autonomy, provides opportunities to make meaningful judgements in one’s work.

Considering the sources discussed in the literature review, the sources in this chapter are distributed again more on the job-related aspects but also slightly on the self.

#### 4.1.4 Organizational mission, financial circumstances and non-work domain

In this last chapter of the sources I will cover the missing elements that arose from the interviews. The following factors, organizational mission, financial circumstances and non-work domain were mentioned by couple of interviewees and hence, less than previously presented three factors.

Firstly, the organizational mission was mentioned important factor that makes the working more meaningful. The meaningfulness seems to arise from alignment of personal and organizational values as suggested by Thompson and Bunderson (2003) as described by one interviewee:

*It is so that the company's values match my personal values and thoughts considering what is important in the world and what should we do for the humanity [makes work meaningful].*

However, over time the organizational mission statement may drift or blur which might make it more difficult to feel the work as meaningful (Cha and Edmondson, 2006). Two interviewees referenced that losing the edge from the organizational mission would decrease their engagement towards work. Some even experienced organizational mission as diluted as a consequence of organizational growth which I will cover more in detail in chapter 4.3.

*Maybe one thing that would decrease me engagement is that the doing in here becomes too flat. That the edge of our company and its vision is gone, then I do not know what is left anymore.*

*The identity has diluted over time as a consequence of the organizational growth that has happened in the previous years.*

In addition to organizational mission, some interviewees mentioned the importance of financial circumstances in terms of engagement to their work. However, the amount of monthly salary was not a deal breaker to any of the interviewees. Instead, the interviewees were rather satisfied with their income but pointed out that slight increase in paycheck could enhance their engagement to work. In addition to salary, the fringe benefits were considered as satisfying.

*Of course, you can always increase the salary and it would probably enhance my engagement but I consider that our salaries are already sufficient so this is not an issue for me.*

Some interviewees discussed and pondered if the financial aspects would affect their engagement and meaningfulness of work but concluded that they do not consider financial circumstances as important. The notion that financial circumstances are not an issue for the interviewees is reasonable, since the monetary rewards are noted to have an impact on meaningful work particularly in poverty (Stiehl and Mittal, 2012) and in times of financial stress (Brief et al., 1997). The sample of this study consists of, instead, relatively well-to-do expert consultants.

Lastly, the non-work domain was mentioned as important in terms of meaningfulness of work by couple of interviewees. The non-work domain in this context implies that the case company respects employee's free time and time with one's family in particular. The interviewees appreciated that the company does not demand using too much time away from one's family and additionally, closely related to smooth organizational processes discussed in the previous chapter, that practices and support related family and free time are flexible. These responses point out that a minor component of meaningful work might be also from non-work domain as D'Abate (2005) suggests. However, in the context of this study, it seems that the question is not that the employee would derive meaningfulness of work from one's free time per se, but the free time may support the meaningful factors in the work context instead.

*I appreciate more and more that the company pays regard to families and that there are practices that support families. This aspect will be highlighted in the future.*

Concludingly, as discussed throughout the chapter of sources of meaningfulness, it could be summarized that the meaningfulness of work is highly related to the job-related aspects, which comes hand in hand with self-related aspects. The three main elements that creates work as meaningful are coworkers and the work community, the job itself which in this context refers to the projects and lastly, how the organization functions. Particularly, it seems important that the personal, organizational and collegial values are at least to some extent in concordance. Hence, separating self- and job-related aspects is slightly artificial. However, compared to the previous findings from the literature, there were not any implications considering for instance work as a calling or central element to life. This may indicate that the meaningfulness is created by factors related to daily work and working environment. In the next chapter I will broaden the analysis to a more abstract level and evaluate what kind mechanisms are concealed on the sources discussed in this chapter.

#### 4.2. Mechanisms and pathways to meaningful work

As the focus of this study is to evaluate the impact of organizational growth to meaningfulness of work, it is necessary to comprehend the mechanisms that create meaningfulness at the initial situation. In this chapter I will reflect and investigate which mechanisms presented by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) are covered by the sources discussed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, I will compare how these mechanisms fit in the integrative framework created in chapter 2.2.2.5. Additionally, I will naturally revise the framework if needed. At the end of the chapter I will reflect the adequacy of the framework compared to other frameworks discussed in chapter 2.2.2. I will examine the mechanisms under the headings from the integrative framework. However, I will not duplicate the illustrative examples or citations I presented in the previous chapters – instead, I will depict the mechanisms in a more theoretical manner.

#### 4.2.1 Unity with others

The natural starting point for this examination is the dimension that considers interpersonal relationships as coworkers and work community were the most cited source of meaningful work. In the integrative framework presented in the chapter 2.2.2.5 the dimension consists of the mechanisms of belongingness and purpose in terms of value systems. The belongingness mechanism can be divided into two different sub-mechanisms, namely social identification with others at work and feeling of interconnectedness (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Belongingness, interconnectedness in particular, was often referred source of meaningful work:

*The community is one of the most important things [that makes work meaningful]. We have such a good team spirit throughout the whole company - - and the interaction with others is so easy.*

The citation above highlights the high degree of interconnectedness within colleagues. Other interviewees mentioned as well that the fellowship is distinguishable throughout the company and essential part of the meaningfulness of work. Interconnectedness is suggested to contribute to meaningful work because it produces comforting emotions to individuals (Kahn, 2007) and fulfills one of the basic psychological needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The interconnectedness came up also in responses regarding meaningful project teams that were discussed in chapter 4.1.2. In addition to interconnectedness, there seems to be social identification with colleagues as following example illustrates:

*In terms of work community, I would emphasize that community has been nice to me and I have found friends, even good ones from this company.*

Having many friendships in the work context might indicate that a person has socially identified oneself into an in-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and that a person most probably shares the beliefs and identities of this group (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Closely related to latter, I interpret that the interviewees share the same values with fellow employees which constitute a foundation for feeling united and connected to others (Wiener, 1988). The topic was discussed in chapter 4.1.1 in which I presented how the

competence of coworkers would influence to meaningfulness of work. The next quote reflects the shared values among employees:

*The thing is that people in here are very good in things they are doing but also nice. The entirety fosters itself: it is nice to work here, here are competent people who share the same idea of what is good and important to do and finally do it.*

As a summary, all the elements of the unity with others dimension that were presented in the integrative framework can be recognized from the interviews. Perhaps interconnectedness has the strongest influence, but social identification and purpose in terms of shared values are clearly visible as well.

#### 4.2.2 Self-realization

Despite the highest frequency of responses under the unity with others dimension, I argue that the self-realization perspective has the strongest impact on the experienced meaningfulness of work in the sample of this study. In terms of mechanisms that convert sources of meaningful work to actual meaningfulness of work, the self-realization dimension in the integrative framework comprehends the mechanisms of authenticity and self-efficacy in terms of autonomy and competence. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) propose that authenticity consists of the sub-mechanisms of self-concordance, identity affirmation and personal engagement. Both self-concordance and identity affirmation refer to the alignment of personal values and personal actions (i.e. Sheldon and Elliot, 1998) whereas personal engagement refers to the degree of engagement or absorption into the work. Consequently, this absorption would indicate that the work one is doing is personally relevant and hence reflecting the authentic self (Amabile et al., 1994). In the light of the definition of personal engagement, I argue that this particular mechanism cannot be recognized in the responses of the interviewees. However, all the rest of the previously mentioned mechanisms could be observed from the responses.

Authenticity in terms of self-concordance and identity affirmation were important mechanisms for the interviewees. The importance of alignment of values was reflected in numerous comments considering meaningful projects and coworkers.

*I am in a challenging position [in terms of projects] compared to a typical coder since I have demands towards the projects. That they have to match my values.*

*For me to leaving this company would require that the other company would do meaningful projects and aim to do things that I consider as valuable.*

The previous examples reflect that some interviewees not only hope but also even demand that the projects and the actual work would be aligned with personal values. Same kind of citations were presented in the previous chapter under the heading meaningful projects. A descriptive citation in chapter 4.1.2 pointed out that it is not necessary to personally participate in the projects that match personal value systems if one knows that the company itself does some meaningful and valuable projects.

Besides the concordance of values, self-efficacy in terms of autonomy is a significant mechanism contributing to meaningful work in the sample of this study. As discussed related to autonomy that the projects offer and the freedom of personal actions related to the company culture, autonomy seems to be valuable for employees. One interviewee even estimated that if the autonomy of working would be taken away, one would revise whether one wants to further work for the company:

*If the flexibility and degree of autonomy would decrease or even vanish, working in here would not be as meaningful as it is now and I could consider working somewhere else.*

As a basic psychological need (Deci and Ryan, 2000), the possibility to craft one's job and work is an important factor influencing to meaningfulness of work but it is also an essential part of working and the functionality of the case company.



*Typically working in here is natural and there is not any organization commanding what to do. We can ourselves decide which projects to attend, in what kind of specs we do it and finally what we in practice do in the projects. The fact that the responsibility is on you and your team instead of a supervisor for instance, has an impact on how [meaningful] the work feels.*

It might be so that as the interviewees appreciated the competence of coworkers and the mentality of getting things done, the autonomy may be an enabler for achieving those goals or needs. Taking the autonomy away, it could be so that the competence of employees would not become maximized. Building on this, the mechanism of self-efficacy in terms of competence seems to be a major influencer to meaningful work. Acknowledged as a third basic psychological need (Ryan and Deci, 2000), competence was reflected in multiple comments in the interviews. The comments were related to the appreciation of the trainings the company offers, to the competence of coworkers and to the technical challenges that the projects offer that were discussed in the sources of the meaningful work. Competency can be achieved through responding successfully to given challenges (Masten and Reed, 2002). Thus, being enabled by the autonomy in the projects, the competence of coworkers and the technical challenges in the projects constitute a foundation for feeling oneself competent.

*At the end of the day those [fringe benefits] are not meaningful. Instead, being able to constantly elevate my working and myself to a next level and hence create value to others is genuinely meaningful for me. - - And not being able to do that is a show-stopper that violates my engagement.*

Additionally, being able to pursue competency through the previously mentioned factors may be motivating for the employees, hence positively influencing on the meaningfulness of work (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) as following comment describes:

*I know myself that I would not stay motivated in too easy tasks either - - It is good to have a certain degree of difficulty in the things you are doing.*

Concludingly, I interpret that the self-realization dimension has potentially greater influence on the meaningfulness of work since both the concordance of values, a sense of autonomy and a sense of competence were important for interviewees and cited in many different contexts. The dimension combines the core of the work in the company, the projects, and the people to a personally significant aspects of values and needs, thus forming a powerful pathway to the meaningful work.

#### 4.2.3 Contribution on others

The last dimension in the integrative framework is the contribution on others dimension which constitutes of the mechanisms of self-efficacy in terms of perceived impact and purpose in terms of significance. Whereas perceived impact refers to feeling of doing a noteworthy impact in one's organization or other entities, significance refers to doing something important for one's community (Grant, 2008). It can be derived that whereas the perceived impact is at some extent directed towards already executed actions, significance holds future-related expectations. Compared to the previously discussed pathways, the importance of the present dimension is lesser yet recognizable. From the two mechanisms, the purpose in terms of significance is observable from the responses or comments in terms of importance of personal values – some interviewees mentioned and hoped for that the company takes part into meaningful and purposeful projects, hence having a true significance.

*I think that making a difference or doing truly significant things is personally something that makes me willing to work for the company. And if we can moderately increase the company and its societal influence, we can do even more important and significant things that genuinely matter.*

*I hope that the company would focus even more on projects that match my values and, in this way, having an impact on and helping the society.*

As the comments illustrate, some interviewees hoped for significance and having a societal impact. However, not everyone asked for societally important projects. Instead,

some mentioned one's personal impact as important and just wanted to see concretely what one had done.

*Quality is important for me and I also want to do meaningful and significant things so that I can see concretely what I have done. It does not mean any societal impact, I have not thought it that way, but that I have done something tangible.*

The aspect of perceived impact fits well under the self-efficacy mechanism since it has a strong personal relevance instead of being directed towards a common good. However, it could be so that the employees enjoy having an impact on others by influencing to the colleagues in the same project and hence, fostering their competence. At least many interviewees emphasized the importance of team member's competence in their own competence. Yet, this was not something that the interviewees explicitly discussed and hence, it is at large extent an interpretation.

Having discussed all three separate dimension it can be concluded that the most powerful pathway to meaningful work appears to be the self-realization. This is natural in the context of the case company which is reputable and acknowledged for its high-technology projects. To prioritize the pathways, it seems that the unity with others pathway is the second important to producing meaningfulness of work in the sample of this study following with the pathway of contribution to others which also appears to produce meaningfulness of work. In the next chapter I will investigate the functionality of the integrative framework and explore potential missing elements of it.

#### 4.2.4 What is missing – revising the integrative framework

Having discussed all the mechanisms that were included in the original integrative framework, I will next briefly examine whether there are some missing or additional elements in the data. To start with, I consider that the mechanism of transcendence could be included in the framework in term of interconnection. As Lips-Wiersma (2002) defines, interconnection refers to feeling connected with others and having a positive influence on for instance society. Furthermore, having this positive influence on others

could make one to experience oneself as a part of this larger system greater than oneself. Having this in mind, it would be justified to add the mechanism into the framework as it emerged from the data as follows:

*I would like to do projects that would aim to offer solutions for the climate crisis. With my own input to do something relevant on this important area. That would be meaningful.*

Even though the transcendence in terms of interconnectedness was excluded from the original framework, it seems to influence slightly differently compared to other mechanisms that were included in the contribution on others dimension. Hence, yet its impact is minor, I will add it to the dimension. However, another sub-mechanism of transcendence, self-abnegation, subordinating oneself and one's control to something bigger than oneself (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010) did not emerge from the data. Similarly, cultural and interpersonal sensemaking as a mechanism did not come up in the responses. The last mechanism that was proposed by Rosso Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010), self-esteem, does not seem to fit to the framework as a mechanism mainly due to the fact that it is suggested to be a need satisfaction (Martela and Riekkii, 2018) and moreover, it did not emerge from the data. Taking into account the slight modifications discussed here, the present study indicates that the integrative framework could be revised as in figure 4. Despite the absence of personal engagement as a sub-mechanism of authenticity in the sample, I still keep it in the framework.

As such the framework reflects the initial pathways to meaningful work. Summarizing the findings, the framework and the experiences support at large extent the extended view of basic psychological needs (Martela and Riekkii, 2018): autonomy, competence and relatedness appear to be the three most important mechanisms to meaningful work and some kind of aspect of beneficence, having a positive impact on others, could be interpreted from the data. However, whereas the beneficence is directed towards other people, the interviewees appeared to direct their actions towards greater, common good instead of other people per se.

**Contribution on others**

*Mechanisms:*

Self-efficacy (perceived impact)

Purpose (significance)

Transcendence (interconnectedness)

---

<p><b>Self-realization</b></p> <p><i>Mechanisms:</i></p> <p>Authenticity</p> <p>Self-efficacy (autonomy)</p> <p>Self-efficacy (competence)</p>	<p><b>Unity with others</b></p> <p><i>Mechanisms:</i></p> <p>Belonginess</p> <p>Purpose (value systems)</p>
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Figure 4. Pathways to meaningful work, revised integrative framework.

After the investigation of the initial sources and mechanisms of meaningful work, in the next chapter I will briefly present the interviewees’ perceptions towards organizational growth and lastly evaluating, how the growth could impact to the different pathways of meaningfulness of work.

4.3. Perceptions towards organizational growth

Before proceeding to the final chapter in which I will examine the influence of organizational growth to the experienced meaningfulness of work, it is worthwhile to explore what kind of perceptions the interviewees attached to the organizational growth of their company. A couple of interviewees noticed that the growth in a consultant company happens mainly through hiring more employees to the company:

*Naturally, in consultancy business, the growth happens by recruiting more consultants. Whereas in a product-company you can scale the business with the scaling of the product which does not have to influence the size of the company.*

On this scaling of the business the interviewees attached diverse opinions. Considering the current phase of the growth, one employee described it as follows:

*There have been different phases related to the [organizational] growth and now we are in some kind of critical period which I observe with high interest. We will see how this goes and evolves.*

Building on these premises, I have divided the chapter into the most important concerns and possibilities related to the growth that were discussed in the interviews. Based on the analysis I was able to identify three different categories, namely people-related issues, project prospects and issues related to organization such as structure and dilution of organizational mission.

#### 4.3.1 Increase in the number of employees

People-related issues were the most often cited factor in the interviews considering the organizational growth. The interviewees attached several concerns or possibilities to the increasing number of employees. To start with, some interviewees were concerned about the team spirit among the colleagues. More precisely, some interviewees pondered the potential consequences of growth in the fellowship discussed earlier in the empirical findings chapter. One interviewee speculated whether the fellowship could remain the same if there are lots of people one does not know in the organization.

*I have been thinking that it is not nice when you do not know people in the company. Then it is more difficult to find the right people you would like to discuss with. I have a feeling that this alienates people from the central organization for some reason.*

The previous example illustrates the thoughts of a single interviewee. However, although another interviewee shared the same threat in terms of organizational growth's consequences to fellowship, this particular interviewee did not experience that the threat has realized:

*Sometimes I have considered that how this [growth] might affect to the fellowship and team spirit. Because we work in so many different locations. But after all I have not experienced that these considerations or threats would have realized.*

In addition, one interviewee hoped that the growth does not lead to building up separate sub-organizations within the company.

*Even though the business expands, I think we should avoid splitting the company into separate sub-units of sales, recruitment and operations.*

Whether the threats have realized or not, a couple of interviewees identified two reasons that might influence to the fellowship: language and on-boarding. One interviewee pointed out that if it is impossible to discuss with one's native language, the communication loses its nuances which may have an impact on the fellowship:

*In the past we used to recruit Finnish speaking employees because we wanted to maintain the communication sensitive. And this happens when people can use their native language.*

Additionally, couple of interviewees stated their concerns regarding the on-boarding of new employees in terms of having the possibility to bring own ideas to the company:

*It is kind of nice to have new employees to the company but at the same time I am slightly concerned that are we able to get the new ideas from them - - because we have done it this way and it works.*

Especially the uncertainty in terms of the language may cause stress (i.e. Pollard, 2001) and the lack of control in the on-boarding phase may generate negative affective states (i.e. Nesterkin, 2013). Besides the concerns related to the fellowship, some interviewees pointed out the potential consequences to the quality of the projects if the company grows as follows:

*The concern is that we forget the guiding principles [of quality] for the sake of net revenue and recruitment of new employees, simply because the company just have to grow.*

*I hope our company still recruits only top-notch employees instead of growing the business in the light of numbers. That we still search for top employees.*

The concerns related to the expertise of employees resonates with the meaningfulness of working with competent colleagues and moreover, being able to develop one's skills. Lastly, in terms of people, some interviewees reflected how the increasing number of employees will influence to the culture of the company. Its consequences were considered as neutral or even slightly positive. One interviewee summarized that becoming diversified in terms of employees will be a richness for the company:

*I think that diversification that is happening as we speak, is a richness and does good for this company.*

Concludingly, the interviewees experienced that the organizational growth may cause some threats for the fellowship and even to the quality of the projects but at the same time acknowledged that the diversification might be good for the company. I will reflect the perceptions and its consequences in terms of meaningful work at the end of the empirical findings section. Before that I will present the additional considerations related to the organizational growth.

#### 4.3.2 Enhanced project prospects

Some of the interviewees experienced that the organizational growth offers enhanced project prospects and hence, generally associated positive consequences to the growth. To be precise, the responses regarding positive and negative consequences were not excluding implying that same interviewees may have mentioned negative and positive aspects to the organizational growth. Related to the projects and organizational growth, several interviewees anticipated that the growth creates more possibilities in terms of choosing projects.



*If it [the growth] makes it possible to acquire better client cases and do extraordinary things, then it is great.*

One interviewee acknowledged that the bigger the company is, the better projects it will have:

*Even though it would be nice to work in a small company, it is so that then we could achieve much less than we do now. In terms of the level of ambition and meaningfulness of the projects, it is necessary that the company grows. I have accepted this.*

The same interviewee pointed out that the growth enables doing international projects that would not be possible in a smaller company.

*At the moment there is the globalization and the change it produces, and it is fascinating to see where it leads. And what kind of projects we are able to do as an international collaboration.*

All the previously mentioned comments reflect the importance of meaningful projects for the experienced meaningfulness of work. However, despite the increase in the potential number of projects, a couple of interviewees recognized challenges related to matching the right person to the right project. Thus, even though there would be many possible and attracting projects, it is possible that an employee ends up in an unsuitable project. In this way the potentiality of the projects in terms of meaningfulness would not be utilized.

*For the sales team, the growth may generate some challenges regarding matching a right person into a right project and furthermore, composing functional project teams. It must have been easier previously in a smaller company when you approximately knew everyone. But now in a bigger company it is not realistic to think that you would know everyone when people are working in different countries and this poses challenges for matching an employee to a project.*

Enlarging from the project and operating aspect, one interviewee mentioned another potential positive aspect related to the organizational growth – career possibilities. The interviewee noted that instead of changing an employer and a workplace, it could be possible to even change a country in which one works without changing a company. This increases the autonomy and possibilities for personal development.

*I see it [globalization] as a possibility. In that way you can, if you want, change a workplace somewhere else, even to another country, within a company. This is much easier than changing an employer as a whole.*

As a summary, the interviewees held positive expectations towards organizational growth in terms of increasing project prospects, thus supporting an important source of meaningful work. Having discussed the project-related aspects and perceptions towards organizational growth, in the next chapter I will cover the aspects related to the organization, its processes and its mission.

#### 4.3.3 Organization-related aspects

The third and the last theme that emerged from the data in terms of organizational growth is related to the organization itself. The aspects regard the structure and the hierarchy of the organization, the organizational processes and the organizational mission. Firstly, several interviewees expressed their concerns regarding the formation of the hierarchical organization structure. Since many of the interviewees appreciated the flat and non-hierarchical organizational structure, they considered that the organizational growth threatens the present state of the organizational structure. One interviewee described that the formation of more hierarchical structure is more a necessity and natural consequence of the growth:

*The complexity in the organization increases [as a consequence of the growth]. And it leads inevitably to the formation of new organizational structures. - - There will be all sorts of problems although I see lots of possibilities as well.*

Generally, if an interviewee mentioned the topic, the tone was negative as following two citations illustrate:

*In my opinion there are much more negative aspects in this [potential] hierarchy thing. By no means I want it. I have seen it in so many places and the problem there is the absence of top-notch supervisors.*

*Something that would make me to hesitate my choices [of working in the company] is the formation of the hierarchical organizational structure. I am sensitive to that.*

The interviewees seemed to appreciate the functional organizational processes as discussed in the chapter 4.1.3 and formation of more hierarchical structure could be perceived as a violation for that. One possible explanation for this negative opinion could be that the interviewees may experience that more complex organizational structure could violate their sense of autonomy which is one basic psychological need (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Supportive evidence for this is that some of the interviewees pondered that due to the organizational growth, the decision-making in the organization could become more scattered and rigid. Although one interviewee mentioned that the daily decision-making would remain untouched, some interviewees anticipated that not only the daily decision-making but also more importantly the company-level decision-making would become more difficult and distant for a single employee:

*As long as we work in projects it is easy since the daily decision-making happens in the project teams. But when the company grows, all the major, company-level decisions, such as which projects to take part in and with what kind of effort - - I do not know how we can scale it. It is already now very difficult.*

*When we all [employees] know each other, all this independent decision-making is really smooth. And we can rely on each other and everything works fluently. - - But it is not possible in the company of this size, and that is something that makes me anxious.*

Anxiety is something that is suggested to result from lack of control (DiFonzo and Boardia, 2002) which furthermore could originate from the uncertainty related to the organizational change (Boardia et al., 2004a). As already discussed, the organizational growth can affect employee's freedom and, in this case, undermine employee's autonomy in decision-making, which can lead to negative affective states (Nesterkin, 2013).

Having presented the attitudes towards organizational structure and organizational processes, the last theme that can be identified and separated from the interview data was the dilution of organizational mission and identity. One interviewee described that the edges of the identity and what the company represents, might soften and become standardized:

*Since we [the company] have grown remarkably during the years I have worked here, it means that there are more of us employees and together we are more an average of everything. I wonder if that is something that polishes our edges. And of course, because we grow, I think and wonder if the company becomes more as an average of its members - - and our culture is more like a consensus-culture.*

Besides losing the company's identity, some interviewees were afraid that the company would evolve too business-oriented which would lead to losing its mission and guiding principles as two following examples illustrate:

*I can imagine that within the next ten years the original ideas and ideals may have diluted and some new needs would have emerged. And then I would not necessarily experience that this is the same workplace in which I have been working and why I have been working in here. And that could be the situation in which I might think of going to work in a smaller company.*

*I consider it as aversive if it appears that the company puts business in front of its people. Since I have experienced that it has been people before the business in the past. And the business success results from this order of importance.*

It could be interpreted that the shifting or drifting of the organizational mission and values might disturb the alignment between personal and organizational values, thus complicating fulfilling self-concordance of values and actions. This might influence the experienced meaningfulness of work that I will discuss in the next chapter (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002). Summarizing the attitudes towards organizational growth in terms of organization, its structure, processes and mission, the interviewees related threats to the growth due to potential formation of hierarchical organization, diminished possibility to influence on the decision-making and drifting of the organizational mission and identity.

As a conclusion, the interviewees had mostly negative attitudes and perceptions towards organizational growth but there were some positive considerations as well. The positive attitudes were related to the increased project prospects whereas the negative aspects included the threats for the fellowship, quality of the projects, exacerbation of the organizational processes and lose of organizational mission. The negative attitudes towards growth may originate from mostly organizational level sources as classified by Robbins and Judge (2015). These negative attitudes, or resistance, might originate from structural inertia resulting from instability on a group or organizational level or threats that the change poses to the established power relationships within an organization. Regarding to the power relationships, it is possible that the employees experience the growth is more top-down driven change as categorized by Balogun and Hope-Haley (2016) which may reinforce the threat it poses to the current state of power relationship within the company. On an individual level the resistance may result from the threat the change produces to the feelings of security or safety (Robbins and Judge, 2015). However, despite the negative attitudes towards growth, its consequences are not as negative as the literature would suggest for instance in terms of psychological stress (Robbins and Judge, 2015) or experienced job satisfaction (Nelson, Cooper and Johnson, 1995). This may result from the deliberate nature of the change compared to a more radical change. Following the classification of Balogun and Hope-Hailey (2016), the incremental change that realigns the original business may be better tolerated by the side of the employees. Proceeding to the next topic, in the next chapter I will interpret what kind of consequences these discussed attitudes might have in terms of meaningfulness of work.

#### 4.4. The impact of organizational growth on meaningful work

The final topic considered here under the empirical findings section considers the consequences of organizational growth to the experienced meaningfulness of work. The considerations regarding the topic were not clearly addressed in the interviews which allows me as a researcher the authority to investigate and interpret the responses. I have drawn my conclusions based on the findings discussed in the previous chapter and I will reflect them to the integrative framework of pathways to meaningful work that was addressed and revised in the chapter 4.2.4. The three pathways are the contribution on others, the self-realization and the unity with others. To avoid repetition, I will not repeat the same citations which I have used in the previous chapters and therefore, there will be less illustrations than in the previous chapters.

##### 4.4.1 Project prospects and bigger contribution

To start with the positive aspects and attitudes towards organizational growth, the enhanced project prospects could be interpreted to increase the possibility to experience meaningfulness of work on the contribution on others pathway. The pathway of contribution on others comprehends the mechanisms of self-efficacy in terms of perceived impact and purpose in terms of significance. The interviewees especially highlighted that the growth enables to participate in more interesting projects with potentially significant areas. As discussed already earlier, one interviewee anticipated that the growth would make it possible to put more effort for finding solutions to the climate crisis which would undoubtedly enhance purpose and significance of one's work. And doing something important for others, for a broader community, is suggested to make work more meaningful (Grant, 2008). Moreover, if the growth and potential global collaborations would succeed, it could increase the perceived impact of one's work. I argue that this kind of anticipations are included in the interviewees' responses. As the importance of alignment of personal and organizational values came up in the sources of meaningful work, the increased project opportunities could make it more probable to be able to actualize these values in practice. As one interviewee noted in the citation described earlier, the bigger the company is, the better projects it will participate in. The

following citation captures the essence of the anticipations included in the organizational growth in terms of enhanced project prospects:

*Maybe the thing that I wait in the future is the international networks and possibilities it offers. I anticipate that it enables new kind of organization and new types of projects.*

The projects prospects make it more probable to experience meaningfulness of work through working in meaningful projects. However, as the interviewees pointed out and expressed some negative attitudes towards the organizational growth, it is important to examine and deepen into the potential negative consequences in the following chapters.

#### 4.4.2 Threats to autonomy and self-realization

Proceeding to the potential negative consequences of the organizational growth for meaningful work, the organization-related aspects pose threats to these positive experiences of meaningfulness particularly in the self-realization pathway. These negative consequences originate from the following negative attitudes towards organizational growth: threat of increased organizational hierarchy, estranged decision-making processes, drifting and changing of the organizational values and mission, and lastly, worry about the competency of coworkers. These negative considerations affect to different mechanisms than the ones included in the contribution on others pathway. To start with, according to the interviews, potentially biggest threat in this area is that the growth might undermine the autonomy of the employees. Being acknowledged as a basic psychological need (Ryan and Deci, 2000), autonomy in terms of being responsible of own actions and decision-making is at the core of the company's identity. Even a slight narrowing in autonomy may have remarkable consequences in the minds of employees. And the threat of formation of organizational hierarchy and potentially estranged, more rigid decision-making processes as a side product for this increased hierarchy may represent a threat for the experienced autonomy. Illustrative examples are described already earlier in this chapter, and the following citation highlights the importance of autonomy for working in the company:

*As long as I can say things and have an impact on things, then it is ok. But if saying my opinion would have no influence on things at all, then I think it would be better to change a place to work.*

Another mechanism that would weaken as a consequence of the organizational growth, is the authenticity. Due to drifting, changing or diluting of organizational values and mission, the employees may find it more difficult to realize one's personal values through working. In practice, if the values of the company change over time but one's personal values remain largely intact, then it is possible to find oneself in a situation in which the personal and organizational values are no longer aligned. Thus, particularly the self-concordance mechanism might impair. The following citation indicates this potential threat:

*I wonder whether the values of the company can remain the same if the company and the number of consultants triple.*

In the light of the importance of doing meaningful and significant projects with like-minded employees, it is comprehensible that gradually shifting values or becoming an average of values as some interviewees stated, might be unattractive for employees who value self-concordance of values. Lastly in terms of self-realization and closely related to the latter, the worry about the competence of coworkers may have consequences to employees' personal feeling of competence. As described at the beginning of the empirical findings section, the possibility of working with highly skilled individuals is one major source of meaningful work for the employees – working with talented individuals encourage to raise one's own skills to the next level. And the possibility and threat that there will be less of those competent workers may be harmful for the self-efficacy mechanism in terms of competence which is, as mentioned, one of the basic psychological needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, at the same time some interviewees noted that the increased project prospects may increase career opportunities and hence, opportunities to apply one's skills in novel areas which might increase the feeling of competence. Therefore, the effect for the sub-mechanisms of competence could be insignificant.



As a summary, the organizational growth may threaten the self-realization pathway for meaningful work particularly in the mechanisms of authenticity and self-efficacy in terms of autonomy. In the next chapter I will investigate the potential consequences for the unity with others pathway.

#### 4.4.3 Threats to fellowship

The last pathway considers the relatedness and connectedness with other employees which were the most frequently cited source of meaningful work. As the fellowship and team spirit were acknowledged as important influencers for the meaningful work, it is no wonder that some employees doubted that the common spirit might become disturbed. The reasons for that are the absence of common language for work and increased distance between employees in the organization. As presented in chapter 4.3.1, one employee suspected that not knowing your fellow employees might alienate one from the central organization and noted that it is natural that this alienation happens as a consequence of organizational growth:

*We should use energy on coaching people to work better together. Because it is natural that when groups of people balloon, smaller groups will be built up.*

In spite of previous concern, at the same time another interviewee stated that this threat of alienation has not realized because employees continue working in small project teams. Even still, absence of common, shared language as discussed earlier together with the fact that employees may not recognize one's fellow employees as well as they did in the past, may disturb the feeling of belongingness and hence the mechanism of belongingness for meaningful work as a natural consequence.

Lastly, building up on the interpretations in the previous chapter, due to the increase in the number of employees, it is possible that these employees will not share the same value systems. Particularly if the company's identity has drifted or changed, or will do so in the future, it is less likely that the future employees will share the same values with older employees. As Wiener (1988) suggested, clear organizational mission statement could

offer a backbone for reflecting one's own values and enable the self-concordance of values – and if the mission statement differs from the past statements, employees might no longer share the same values. Furthermore, this would influence negatively to the mechanism of purpose in terms of shared values. However, the mismatch between the values of newer and older employees could be avoided by clear communication of organizational mission statement and by holding on with the recruitment criteria as one interviewee indicated:

*If we have to recruit new employees rapidly, it is not possible that the recruitment evaluation is thorough enough. And then it is possible that people who do not match with the company [values] will get in and then potentially quit and leave relatively soon.*

I will offer more managerial implications to avoid the decrease in the sources of meaningful work in the final chapter. Concludingly, it is worth noticing that the organizational growth does not have solely negative consequences on the pathways for meaningful work. Instead, enhanced project prospects might increase the probability of experiencing one's work as meaningful as the contribution on other pathway, the significance of one's work might increase. However, a downside for organizational growth is that employees might experience that their autonomy is restricted compared to the past, the authenticity of one's actions could be negatively influenced since the concordance of organizational and personal values might weaken due to changed organizational mission statement and the belongingness, identifying oneself to a group of people, feeling connected with them and sharing the values with others, might deteriorate due to increased number of employees. These negative experiences may have negative consequences on the experienced meaningfulness of work. In the final chapter I will present some managerial implications in order to avoid the decline in the meaningfulness of work and propose direction for future research. Before that I will summarize the main findings from the study and make my final interpretations.

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this final chapter I will go through the study once more. First, I will recall the starting point of this study and why the topic was important to study. Secondly, I will briefly summarize my key findings followed by the discussion of the theoretical contribution of this study. Lastly, I will present some managerial implications and provide my suggestions for future research.

### 5.1. The summary of the main findings

The purpose of this study was to answer to the research question of “*How does organizational growth influence employees’ experiences on meaningfulness of work?*”. The topic is important and actual to study since in the work context employees are suggested to search meaning instead of mere money and experiencing one’s work as meaningful may benefit company’s business success as a whole (Erickson, 2011). One study indicated that work does not utilize its potential for offering the experiences of meaningfulness for employees which might result in losing talents and therefore, being harmful for the company (Achor et al., 2018).

In the past decades the topic of meaningful work has been an important topic to study for many researchers, and particular interest has directed to the question, what makes work meaningful (Martela and Pessi, 2018). Therefore, the research has focused on the sources of meaningful work and on the mechanisms that convert these sources to the experienced meaningfulness. Building up on these foundations, several researchers have formulated their own models which describe the pathways of how does work become meaningful. And based on these frameworks I formulated an integrative framework that covered the most essential elements of the existing frameworks. This integrative framework comprehends three pathways, namely the contribution on others, the unity with others and the self-realization. However, as experienced meaningfulness of work is not a constant state and it may vary over time, it is somewhat surprising that there is not existing research considering the impact of organizational changes and growth on the meaningfulness of work. The lack of research in this area is surprising for two reasons. Firstly, for instance IT-sector has estimated to grow remarkably in upcoming years (Kärki

and Silvennoinen, 2019) which implies that the companies in the sector are likely to grow as well. Secondly, the research has pointed out that organizational growth may have negative psychological consequences on an individual level (i.e. Boardia et al., 2004a). These negative consequences comprehend for instance job related uncertainty (Boardia et al., 2004a) which is a key driver for stress (Robbins and Judge, 2015) and is negatively associated with job satisfaction (Nelson, Cooper and Johnson, 1995) and organizational commitment (Hui and Lee, 2000). In the light of this research, the organizational growth might have negative consequences to the experienced meaningfulness of work. Nevertheless, the topic is not studied and hence the form of the impact of growth is unknown.

To ground my study, I considered it as essential to examine the sources and the mechanisms of meaningful work and thus comparing the findings to the existing research literature. This constituted a backbone for the study and evaluation on the impact of organizational growth on meaningful work. In a sample of this study the interviewees discussed three main sources that emerged clearly from the data, namely coworkers and work community, meaningful projects and the functionality of the organization which all emerged on nearly every interview. Additionally, some interviewees pointed out the importance of organizational mission, financial circumstances and non-work domain. In terms of coworkers and work community the interviewees noted several different aspects that makes work meaningful, most importantly fellowship and sense of belongingness which according to the interviewees is distinguishable throughout the organization. Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed that individuals have a fundamental need for belongingness and being connected to other people. Thus, fulfilling this need may naturally produce experiences of meaningfulness. Moreover, identifying oneself as a member of a valuable in-group may generate positive feelings related to work (Pratt and Ashworth, 2003). Not only the fellowship and minding attitude of other employees but also the competence of coworkers was mentioned as an important source of meaningful work. Indeed, the competence of others may foster one's personal competence and a need for competence is suggested to be another basic psychological need (Ryan and Deci, 2000) and hence, fulfilling this need might increase the experienced meaningfulness of work.

In addition to coworkers, the interviewees mentioned that meaningful projects increase the likelihood of experiencing work as meaningful. Especially working in purposeful, valuable projects that are in accordance with personal values was important to the interviewees. The interviewees hoped for personally interesting and societally impactful projects which could generate meaningfulness of work as the job tasks, if meaningful, is suggested to produce meaningfulness of work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Furthermore, the interviewees appreciated the autonomy that the projects offer and technical challenges they face which both could produce experiences of meaningfulness (Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2010; Ryan and Deci, 2000) by fulfilling basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Lastly, the third major source of meaningful work was the functional organization which constituted the functional and smooth organizational processes, minimized corporate bureaucracy, organizational culture that values autonomy and for instance investments on employee's training. These factors have a significant impact on the thoughts of employees in terms of meaningfulness of work and I interpret that it is due to the fact that these smooth and functional processes removes obstacles that might disturb experiencing the work itself as meaningful.

Three major sources together with three minor sources emphasize the importance of the concordance of personal and organizational values and the significance of fulfilling basic psychological needs. Compared to the categorization of sources, the sources in the present study reflect mainly the job- and the self-related aspects, or target and perceiver as stated in the literature (Robbins and Judge, 2015). The environment had little significance on the meaningfulness of work which may indicate the importance of daily, work-related aspects. Moreover, there were no mentioning regarding for instance work as a calling or the importance of higher power which may symbolize that work has become more secular than in the past. Altogether these sources constituted a framework of pathways to meaningful work which is in line with the integrative framework presented in the literature review section. The three pathways, namely the unity with others, the self-realization and the contribution on others, appeared to be important pathways of making work meaningful. Moreover, the mechanisms that were presented in the integrative framework were complemented by adding the mechanism of transcendence in terms of

interconnectedness into the framework, thus reflecting better the responses and experiences of the employees. All the same, there were differences in the importance of these pathways.

The most influential pathway in the context of this sample was the self-realization pathway which included the mechanisms of authenticity and self-efficacy in terms of autonomy and competence. The importance can be justified by considering the importance of concordance of personal and organizational values to the interviewees that is included in the mechanism of authenticity. Furthermore, autonomy and competence are categorized as the basic psychological needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Together these factors put the highest weight to the self-realization pathway. The second influential pathway was the unity with others pathway as themes related to this particular pathway were discussed in all but one interviews. The importance of the pathway arises from the observation that the belongingness, fellowship and sharing the same values were highly valued by the employees. The observation is not surprising since, again, the belongingness is acknowledged as one of the basic psychological needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The order of importance between the self-realization and the unity with others pathways is justified by the fact that, even though value-aspect and fulfilling a basic need are visible in both of the pathways, in the self-realization pathway there is two basic needs instead of one in the unity with others. Moreover, the self-realization was heavily valued and weighted by the interviewees. Lastly, contribution on others pathway was a third, yet not insignificant pathway to the meaningful work. It resembles beneficence which is proposed to be the fourth basic psychological need (Martela and Riekkari, 2018). Having a significant purpose in work was important for most of the interviewees and its importance appeared to increase as the company grows.

Regarding the fascinating and unexamined topic of meaningful work and organizational growth, there were some impact of organizational growth on the experienced meaningfulness of work. The interviewees held both positive and negative attitudes towards the growth of their company, yet bigger weight were on the negative aspects. The interviewees experienced that organizational growth and increasing number of employees may threaten the close-knit dynamics in the company and consequently threat

the fellowship and even quality of the projects if the recruitment criteria would loosen up. Moreover, some interviewees anticipated that the growth might make the current, smooth organizational processes more complicated and rigid and additionally, they experienced that the organizational mission had become more unclear or it had drifted over time. More precisely, some interviewees were afraid of that the growth will diminish their possibility to participate in decision-making and lead to formation of more hierarchical organization. These negative attitudes appear to result mostly on organizational level sources as classified by Robbins and Judge (2015), including structural inertia and threats to current power relationships. These may be fostered if the growth is experienced more as forced and top-down driven. In addition to this, on an individual level the growth may produce feelings of uncertainty which may have negative consequences. On a positive side, some interviewees attached positive attitudes towards the growth since they considered that it enhances the project prospects due to for instance globalization. Being a member of a company, which participates in ambitious projects was important to some interviewees and as a consequence of the growth, there may be more of these significant projects. Altogether, despite mostly negative attitudes towards organizational growth, it seems that the consequences of the growth are not as negative as the literature might imply. This may result from the incremental nature of the change which is easier to tolerate for employees (Balogun and Hope-Hailey, 2016).

As an ending of this study I interpreted the consequences of organizational growth on the experienced meaningfulness of the employees. Taking into account the attitudes towards the growth, it is rather easy to make conclusions on the influence of growth on the pathways of meaningful work. Firstly, it may be more difficult to achieve experiences of meaningfulness through the self-realization pathway as the interviewees felt their autonomy and competence threatened. Moreover, they considered that actualizing one's values would become more difficult as the values of coworkers and company might drift and become unclear over time. Secondly, experiencing meaningfulness through meaningful interpersonal relationships and through belongingness becomes more difficult as the interviewees felt the fellowship and team spirit threatened due to increasing number of more heterogenous group of employees. The growth may threaten the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and belongingness, which may hamper the

feeling of meaningfulness. Lastly, the weight of contribution on others pathway as a provider of experiences of meaningfulness appears to increase as the organization grows. The employees experienced that bigger company may offer better possibilities to participate in projects that are aligned with one's personal values and ideologies. Thus, it is noteworthy that the organizational growth does not have only negative consequences on the meaningfulness of work. Instead, it alters the weights of the pathways and emphasizes the importance of having diverse pathways that might generate feelings of meaningfulness of work.

In the next chapter I will summarize the theoretical contribution of the present study before proceeding to the managerial implications and final thoughts of the study.

## 5.2. Theoretical contribution

The present study participates in the trending topic of meaningfulness of work (Martela and Pessi, 2018). Previous studies have lacked congruence in terms of conceptual clarity (Martela and Pessi, 2018) which I tried to overcome in the present study by carefully considering the conceptual starting points and definitions. Whereas the present study opens a novel aspect for the topic in terms of organizational growth, it simultaneously offers viewpoints for the previous studies. Based on this study, it seems that meaningfulness of work is a rather down-to-earth concept which implies that most of the meaningfulness is experienced through daily aspects of work such as work colleagues and the work itself. Compared to "factors that influence perception" framework which I utilized to explore the sources of meaningfulness (Robbins and Judge, 2015), it appears that most of the meaningfulness comes from the perceiver (the self), such as personal values, and the target (job), such as job tasks and organizational mission. This indicates that the context does not act as dramatic role as I and the literature might have anticipated. Not only that but also the notion that meaningfulness is achieved through mundane aspects instead of bigger than oneself aspects or calling, dissociate the findings in terms of sources from the existing literature (i.e. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010).

Despite these minor differences in the sources, the pathways to meaningful work resemble much alike the ones proposed in the previous research. Moreover, the pathways



resemble particularly much the extended basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, relatedness and beneficence as proposed by Martela and Riekkari (2018). Hence, as such the sources and pathways to meaningful work support the implications and observations from the literature. The most considerable difference between the integrative framework presented in this study and the frameworks presented in the literature (i.e. Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010) is that I considered a tripartite framework more suitable and sufficient to capture the essence of meaningful work.

In terms of organizational growth, the interviewees had more negative than positive attitudes towards organizational growth as was suggested in the literature (i.e. Boardia, 2004a). However, the consequences were not as negative as expected based on the previous research. This may be explained by the incremental, deliberate nature of the growth and organizational change compared to more radical ones as categorized by Balogun and Hope-Hailey (2016). This kind of change might be better tolerated by the employees and hence the individual, psychological consequences remain petite.

Lastly, the present study opens a novel branch in the meaningful work research by discussing the impact of organizational growth on the experienced meaningfulness of work. The present study indicates that due to the growth in size of the company the potential significance of one's work increases if the company participates generally in more valuable and meaningful projects. However, as a downside for the growth, the number of employees naturally increases which may affect negatively to the social identification to an in-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and close-knit dynamics between employees (Pratt and Ashworth, 2003). Moreover, increasing number of employees creates pressure for more complex, structural organization which may be unattractive to some employees. Due to this, the autonomy might also be threatened. Lastly, also realizing one's personal values through working becomes more difficult if the organizational mission is either changed or unclear. All in all, as mentioned earlier, it is important to notice that the growth does not have only negative consequences on the meaningfulness of work. Whereas the contribution on others pathway becomes more influential, the unity with others and the self-realization pathways lose their influence.

However, naturally this may not be the development in the case of some other growing company. Based on these observations, I will next present my managerial implications for organizations.

### 5.3. Managerial implications

In order to avoid losing talented employees due to the lack of meaningfulness, I offer some practical, managerial implications to consider with. For the managers it is critical to acknowledge that Erickson (2011) suggested that employees value more experiences of meaningfulness instead of mere money in their work. Moreover, as the growth is one key driver for many companies, it is extremely important to understand that the sources and pathways to meaningful work may vary over time, particularly if the company grows or changes. Firstly, to attract employees it is important to offer employees experiences of meaningfulness when they enter the company. This could happen through offering possibilities to fulfill employees extended basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, relatedness and beneficence. In practice this implies providing enough autonomy in terms of own work by for instance job crafting, and cherishing the competence of an employee by offering challenging enough job tasks and possibilities for skills development. Moreover, managers ought to focus on building on team spirit and providing a mission and a purpose against which the employees can reflect their values, hence enabling to work as their personal values postulate.

In times of change and organizational growth, to avoid the decrease in experienced meaningfulness of employees and losing talents, managers should pay attention to keep offering employees pathways to meaningful work. In the light of this study there are several key measures and actions the managers should take into consideration. Firstly, in order to enable employees to realize themselves and their personal values, it is critical that organization and its leaders communicate clearly the organizational mission and values the company represent. The clear communication is important for two reasons. Firstly, if the mission changes without communicating it properly, the employees might consider that the company has breached the psychological contract by secretly changing the mission and hence causing potentially misalignment between personal and organizational values. Secondly, by being aware of the changing mission the employees

can reflect and revise their values and consequently, consciously work or not to work for the company. This conscious decision might increase employees' commitment and hence, benefit the whole business (Erickson, 2011). Closely related to the clear communication of the organizational mission, open communication and dialogue in terms of the changes in the organization and its structure is essential for the retention of employees. As the observation from this study indicate, the employees in the case company did not want to the formation of the more hierarchical organizational structure. However, if this kind of change is necessary, communicating it openly would give employees time to adapt for the change and hence, increasing their commitment, However, this happens at the expense of potentially losing an employee.

Third important practical implication that emerged from this study is that in the eyes of employees' meaningfulness, it is important define and hold on to the predefined recruitment criteria. Holding on the criteria could ensure the compatibility between the new employees, the present employees and organizational mission in terms of values. According to the interviews from this study, the employees would have appreciated the recruitment of a well-matched employee instead of a poor, mismatching recruit, which may result in losing the older employees as a consequence. Lastly, based on this study, the organizational growth is a great opportunity to participate in more meaningful and important projects. Being a bigger and more powerful organization enables offering more unique and more diverse possibilities for employees and therefore satisfying the needs of a bigger group of employees. Which projects to participate in depends on the mission and the vision of the company. Summarizing the key takeaways for the managers, in order to maintain the employees' experiences of meaningful work in times of organizational growth, it is important to communicate the mission and potential changes in the organization clearly, hold on with the recruitment criteria and utilize the growth for doing something generally valuable and meaningful. Doing so the managers mitigate reflecting the concordance of employees' personal and organizational values and enable fulfilling the basic psychological needs. Both are important in making the work more meaningful for the employees.

#### 5.4. Final thoughts and suggestions for future research

Despite its important nature, this particular study could be considered more as a pilot study in this important area. As the role of exploratory case studies, as the one in question, is to focus on exploring new phenomena and patterns, the topic should be studied further. For future research I suggest that longitudinal research design could serve better the purpose of examining the changes that happen over time. As the organizational growth may be a rather deliberate process, longitudinal design might disclose subtle nuances in the experiences of employees. In addition to longitudinal research design, quantitative method could shed some light on the topic by collecting large-scale sample. In this way, statistically significant factors could be identified and classified. Moreover, even though the literature indicates that the sources and pathways to meaningful work are to some extent universal, broadening the research to different industries and businesses might provide novel aspects for the topic.

This study contributed to the emerging topic of meaningful work and opened a novel branch of organizational growth for the topic. As one key driver for many companies is to pursue organizational growth and economic prosperity, it is essential to realize that especially in employee-driven businesses, such as consultancy business, the success is made up of people. Therefore, it is extremely important to identify the factors and implement the measures that engage employees and make them to work more effectively. This study has recognized and acknowledged meaningfulness of work as one such factor that is important to the employees. In the light of this study, fulfilling employees' basic psychological needs and enabling to work according to one's values are critical aspects in making employees work' more meaningful. Furthermore, it is essential to understand that the meaningfulness of work is not a constant factor that, once fulfilled, would not need further attention. Instead, maintaining the work as meaningful in the eyes of employees requires constant actions from the managers.

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