

MEANING IN WORK WITHIN THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

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- The mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of one research article.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research article, “Meaning in work within the educational sector” is my original work, has not been submitted for any degree or examination at another institution and that all references used have, to the best of my knowledge, been correctly cited. This mini-dissertation, in the form of a research article, is being submitted for the completion of the degree Industrial Psychology at the North-West University.

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SUMMARY

Title: Meaning in work within the educational sector

Key terms: Meaning in work, meaning in life, meaningfulness, positive psychology, education sector

South African education is faced with a wide array of problems, ranging from a shortage of educators (Xaba, 2011), to poor governance, poor performance, educators experiencing a negative organisational climate, and low morale (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006; Mentz, 2007). Modisaotsile (2012) further found that these educators experience a lack of overall commitment and focus.

As it is known that experiencing more meaning in ones' personal life and working environment leads to both positive health and work outcomes (Day & Rottinghaus, 2003; Harris & Thoresen, 2003; Lent, 2004; Steger, Frazer, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006), this study aims to make a contribution to the South African education sector by addressing means to improving meaning. This research could potentially help the South African education system by identifying factors that increase meaning in work; thus, helping to attract and retain good educators. In addition, the study aims to contribute to the literature by distinguishing meaning from other positive psychology concepts and to provide a clearer overall understanding thereof.

Meaning in work in this study refers to the meaning, significance and/or purpose individuals derive from their work. Meaningful work should be seen as the umbrella term which covers a whole range of constructs including, meaningfulness, and the meaning of work (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2009).

A qualitative design with a phenomenological strategy was used to uncover perceptions from the convenience sample (n=20) of secondary school educators. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with open-ended questions were used to collect the data from participants. Participants were also asked to diarise experiences relating to meaning for the following five working days after the interview, in order to support, strengthen, and validate the interviews' results.

The research findings were that meaning is seen by participants in this study as purpose and significance. Main antecedents were related to the transfer of knowledge and making a positive difference; whereas having positive, trusting relationships with learners, colleagues and parents, as well as feedback which was also important. Mechanisms to create meaning included effort and conscientiousness, as well as preparation as the most prominent mechanisms. Outcomes included happiness and meaningfulness and work engagement.

This research study contributes to existing literature on meaning by giving a clear conceptualisation of the concept. Other contributions include a clear differentiation between meaning and meaningfulness, and that the meaning educators experience in their work might be linked to their specific context and key roles as educators.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This mini-dissertation focuses on the meaning educators experience in their work.

Chapter 1 comprises a problem statement and a literature review based on previous research done on the relevant constructs. The research objectives and significance of the study then follow, and finally the research method and planned division of chapters are given.

1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Background

Frankl (1963) was convinced that it is essential for people to have a clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve with their lives, or in other words, what the true purpose of their existence is (Steger, 2011). Frankl's (1963) idea of purpose or meaning in life does not revolve around the endeavours that occupy peoples' attention at specific moments in time, but is rather focused on understanding what people live their lives for. The importance of the study of meaning has been emphasised in a large number of studies during the past decades, all of which continually report that when people believe that their lives have meaning, they appear to experience wellness in many aspects (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski, 2003). However, although there is an existing body of work with regard to meaning, little research has seemingly been done on *how people specifically find or create meaning in their work*. Although the experience of meaning seems to be based upon subjective judgements (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010), it has become increasingly known that meaning has the possibility to lead people overall towards experiencing more positive work attitudes, less boredom, less workaholism, better psychological adjustment, better work adjustment as well as better overall health and well-being (Bonebright et al., 2000). Meaning has also been found to lead to different important positive work outcomes, such as increased motivation, improved performance, enhanced job satisfaction, and higher engagement levels (Bonebright et al., 2000).

Meaning

Meaning can be found or made, and people are motivated to keep or maintain the meaning which they have obtained (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006). Steger and Kashdan (2013) are convinced that people's motivation for the establishment and stability of meaning is so strong that they report distress when confronted with seemingly meaningless experiences

Despite agreement regarding the importance of meaning, definitions thereof have varied across theoretical and empirical work (Steger, 2012). Meaning has been defined in terms of *purpose*, where it is believed to be motivational and is described as what people are trying to achieve with their lives, or as Frankl (1963) explained, what the overarching purpose of their lives are. Then there are also *significance-centred* definitions which are said to be cognitive and entail that one's life has meaning when it stands for something (Steger, 2012). In other words, meaning is created through people's interpretations of their experiences, and the overall significance thereof gives meaning in terms of the purpose they ascribe to their lives. Multifaceted definitions combine these two approaches with an *affective* dimension, which refers to one's fulfilment in life (Steger, 2012). One such an example is by Steger (2012) citing Reker and Wong (1988), who describe meaning as the ability to recognise purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and achievement of certain goals; and arising from purpose and goal directed-pursuits, the feeling of fulfilment.

Meaningfulness

The terms meaning and meaningfulness are often used interchangeably as they seem similar, and because these two terms are related, there is an overlap in the way in which they have been and are still being used in the literature. Rosso et al. (2010) disagreed with the overlapping use of the terms and paved the way for future researchers by clearly differentiating the two related concepts, giving clear guidelines for future researchers to follow. Often when authors refer to 'meaning' with reference to work, Rosso et al. (2010) believe that they actually imply that the work has significance, or in other words, "that the work has meaning". Rosso et al. (2010) furthermore suggest that in such cases the words 'meaningful' or 'meaningfulness' would be more accurate linguistic options as this would imply "that work is meaningful". 'Meaning' would be set aside for instances when authors would like to refer to the understanding or making sense of what the work signifies (Steger,

2011), as opposed to meaningfulness referring to the amount of significance felt by the individual in that work role.

In summary, this means that ‘meaning’ describes the type of meaning found in work (what the work signifies), whereas ‘meaningfulness’ refers to the amount of significance the work experience holds for an individual (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). In this study the researcher agrees with Rosso et al. (2010) for researchers to follow tradition by using the broad phrase “‘meaning of work’” to indicate both meaning and meaningfulness, while striving to differentiate between the two terms, where appropriate.

Meaning of Work

Following the above argument of differentiating between meaning and meaningfulness, one should further make a distinction between ‘meaning in work’ and ‘the meaning of work’, but firstly the term ‘work’ has to be defined. Work is a perceived role within a social system that involves a sense of obligation and goal-orientated behaviour in order to meet either personal or social needs (Vough, 2001). Work provides people with meaningful experiences and is a way of experiencing a greater sense of meaning in their lives (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Many people appear to approach their work or careers as a valued source of meaning, regardless of the specific occupational title or role (Isaksen, 2000). The way in which people experience their work also seems to influence their overall functioning and life satisfaction (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988). It comes across as though many people believe that work should provide meaning (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Steger, Pickering, Shin and Dik (2009) as well as O’Brian (1992) agree that finding meaning in one’s work is as important as one’s salary or job security.

‘Meaning of work’ is defined as the degree of importance that work has in the life of someone, at any point in time (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). ‘Meaning in work’ could be classified under ‘meaning of work’ and refers to the meaning, significance and/or purpose individuals derive from their work; in other words the inherent meaning they obtain from doing their job (Rosso et al., 2010). Another term which could be grouped with the above mentioned is ‘meaning at work’. For an individual to experience meaning at work, excitement, a challenge, and things which the individual believes are significant or will make a difference, are all necessary (Rosso et al., 2010).

Bellah et al. (1985) classify the subjective experiences of work (meaning of work) in one's life into three meaning orientations. The first is where individuals experience work as a job, the second orientation is where work is viewed as a career, and the third as a calling. People who view their work as a job are merely engaged in work for the material benefits thereof (Bellah et al., 1985; Wrzesniewski & Tosti, 2005). Someone who views his or her work more as a career will aspire to continuously develop and grow as an employee through putting in significant amounts of his or her time and energy (Bellah et al., 1985; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997; Wrzesniewski & Tosti, 2005). Individuals who view work as a calling, work largely because of the fulfilment which they derive from being engaged in their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Experiencing one's work as a calling may promote the experience of meaningful work, according to Wrzesniewski et al. (1997).

For the purpose of this study meaning in work will be defined as the sense made of, and the purpose and significance felt with regard to people's overall work experiences (Steger, 2011). In other words, meaning is created through people's interpretation of their experiences and the overall understanding they have concerning the significance of these experiences. The significance and/or purpose that people ascribe to their everyday work or life experiences, give them meaning.

In spite of all the above being long existing ideas and constructs, a renewed interest in the construct of meaning has emerged in recent years. Steger et al. (2006) claimed that this might be due to the fact that the field of positive psychology is receiving a growing focus. Gable and Haidt (2005) defined positive psychology as the scientific study of the conditions and processes which contribute to people and institutions functioning optimally. Positive psychology emphasises the need to know and understand the factors which elevate human life in order for it not to be merely tolerable, but optimal. Factors which belong to the field of positive psychology include, amongst others, purpose, flourishing, happiness, hope, strengths use (Linley & Harrington, 2006), optimism, resilience, and life satisfaction (Proctor, Linley, & Maltby, 2009). Added to these is the experience of meaning (Steger et al., 2006). A goal of positive psychology is to enable people to be happier by understanding and building meaning into their lives (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004).

Although a lot of research on meaning has been done, including Frankl's classic '*Man's search for meaning*' (1963), and the work by Battista and Almond (1973), Ebersole and De Vogler (1984), Isaksen (2000), Wrzesniewski (2003), and Steger (2012), to name only a few, some of the fundamental issues with regard to this concept are still unanswered. King, Hicks, Krull, and Del Gaiso (2006) mentioned that researchers have only recently begun to establish how people might increase perceptions of meaning in their lives. An important issue in this regard is that it is still unknown as to what people consider when judging whether they are experiencing meaning (Steger et al., 2006). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006) measures the presence of, and the search for meaning, but it is a subjective measure which leaves open the question of what participants are considering when judging whether their lives are meaningful. Battista and Almond (1973) argued for a "relativistic" theory of meaning, where no predetermined constraints are placed on how people define meaning in their lives. However, whether meaning is gained in more or less the same manner by all people, or whether it is a completely relativistic and individualistic experience, as suggested by Battista and Almond (1973), has not been researched. Furthermore, most of the literature that does exist on the meaning phenomenon originated outside of South Africa and is relatively outdated, as one can see from the many older sources referred to hereafter. Some of the themes indicating how people find meaning include work/achievement, intimacy/relationships, religion/spirituality, generosity (Emmons, 2003), pleasure, personal growth (Ebersole & De Vogler, 1984), creative endeavours and elevating experiences or as Frankl (1963) viewed it, the ability to reflect upon dreadful experiences, using them to develop as a person (Frankl, 1963).

In other words, the *sources* that act as causal factors of meaning are relatively unexplored. When we have more knowledge about such factors, it will become easier to identify ways for people to increase their sense of meaning through possible *meaning-making mechanisms*.

Antecedents of Meaning in Work

The possibility of defining antecedents, or sources, which constitute meaning in work would contribute to a more precise measurement of the concept. As the experience of meaning has been linked to many positive work outcomes (Bonebright et al., 2000), it would be a valuable contribution if core aspects that make up meaning could be determined in order to promote or optimise positive outcomes. This might only be possible if one is aware of, and able to

measure specific antecedents of meaning. This is one of the reasons for new research, also to further reflect upon and explore the antecedents identified in different contexts in the past.

There are two methods in research on the sources of meaning which are generally followed. The first is to ask the sample group ‘what gives your life meaning?’ (Ebersole & De Vogler, 1981), and the second method is to provide a list of possible antecedents of meaning which people have to rate in order of importance. A specific ‘composition’ of meaning which has been researched in such a manner is Emmons’ (2003) four-part taxonomy of meaning. This taxonomy comprises work/achievement, intimacy/relationships, religion/spirituality, and generosity. Other specific sources of overall meaning, found by Ebersole and De Vogler (1984), include relationships, religious beliefs, health, pleasure, and personal growth. Frankl (1963) suggested, as mentioned before, that people find meaning by engaging in creative endeavours, through elevating experiences, or through their ability to reflect upon and grow from negative experiences and suffering. For the purpose of this study, the approach that will be followed is an exploratory approach where no guidance or potential sources will be given. However, it would be interesting to note upon completion of the study whether the constructs which have been identified, correspond with possible sources identified in previous research. A basic set of open-ended questions will be asked, for example, “Tell me about the meaning that you find in your work?” and “What specific factors contribute, or could contribute, to your experience of meaning”.

Meaning-making Mechanisms

Humans, in countless small ways, are believed to interpret their circumstances in the light of their lives’ meaning. In other words, people may constantly try to fit their life experiences into a way of making sense of it and finding some form of significance or purpose for their lives through meaning. An example of this might be that when a person undergoes a traumatic, or even just an unpleasant experience, he or she will engage in an effort to find the meaning of such an event. Individuals are known to seek meaning in their lives and are likely to actively, or unknowingly, attempt to make more meaning (Steger, 2012). However, despite this continuous search for meaning, an important question in meaning research still remains as to how people develop this meaning (Steger, 2012).

According to Rosso et al. (2010), the mechanisms for meaning-making which already exist in literature, focus on psychological processes underlying the personal experience as being meaningful. Rosso et al. (2010) propose that the main categories of mechanisms through which work is perceived as meaningful, or by which meaning is acquired, include authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, and cultural and interpersonal sense making. Meaning-making is a great resource to have in times of difficulty and has been linked to decreased psychological harm (Nolen-Hoeksema & Davis, 2002).

Outcomes of Experiencing Meaning in Work

Bonebright et al. (2000) believed that the experience of meaning could be linked to many positive work specific outcomes, including higher work engagement and enjoyment. Organisations could benefit from a workforce experiencing more meaning, as a person experiencing meaning is likely to invest more effort and energy into his or her work (Bonebright et al., 2000). Literature states that people experience less boredom and negative work attitudes when they pursue or find meaning (Isaksen, 2000).

Meaning is not only important with regard to the work environment, but it also contributes to the foundation of overall well-being and personal happiness (Lent, 2004). Lent (2004) believed that more research into meaning could lead to the development of models which could be used by practising psychologists in order to develop interventions with which to increase the overall well-being of their clients. Many counselling psychologists work with clients to increase their well-being (Steger et al., 2006) and would possibly use such models or interventions to increase both meaning and thus well-being. On a personal level, a sense of meaning contributes to a healthy personality (Day & Rottinghaus, 2003) and has been linked to health psychology (Harris & Thoresen, 2003).

On the contrary, a lack of meaning is linked to negative affect, depression, anxiety (Debats, Van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993), a need for therapy (Battista & Almond, 1973), suicidal ideation, and substance abuse (Steger et al., 2006). Because perceived meaning in life is viewed as such an important aspect of one's well-being; it is understandable that the experience of a lack of meaning leads to psychological distress (Steger et al., 2006).

Motivation for This Research

The population group for this study will be secondary school educators in South Africa. This specific sample group has been chosen as there are many indicators that indicate a current crisis in education in South Africa (Modisaotsile, 2012). Well-publicised problems include poor governance, a shortage of educators, under-qualified educators, and poor performance. The aftermath of all the above mentioned contributes heavily to a critical lack of skilled professionals in South Africa (Xaba, 2011).

Looking at the well-being of South African educators, it was found that educators did not experience their work environment as positive; therefore they experienced a negative organisational climate (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006). Mentz (2007) found that overall teacher morale was low, and according to Modisaotsile (2012), the lack of commitment and focus by educators is problematic. It is, therefore, understandable that Jackson and Rothmann (2006) recommended that principals pay more attention to the psychological well-being of educators.

The reason for this research is fuelled by the call of Steger et al. (2006) for efforts to identify the important and distinctive antecedents of meaning, in order to confirm that it is vital for better human functioning. These antecedents, together with meaning-making mechanisms, and the outcomes of experiencing meaning, will not only aid in making it possible to distinguish meaning from other variables, but also in developing interventions to increase meaning. Due to the challenging issues educators in South Africa are facing daily, one wonders about the meaning these educators experience in their work. Increasing meaning and finding meaning in work are mutually beneficial to the organisation and the employee; however, it is only possible if the employee is aware of the specific factors that underpin his/her experience of meaning in the work context.

Thus, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe meaning among educators in Mpumalanga through identifying antecedents of meaning and meaningfulness for them, as well as processes or mechanisms through which such antecedents contribute to their finding meaning.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research study will endeavour to ask the following research questions:

- How can meaning be conceptualised according to literature?
- How does a group of South African educators conceptualise the term ‘meaning’?
- What are the specific antecedents of meaning in work for these educators?
- Which processes do educators used in this study utilise in order to perceive meaning in their work?
- What are the personal outcomes if educators experience meaning in their work?
- What are the recommendations to improve meaning in work in education?

1.3. EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 Contribution to Industrial/Organisational Psychology

Only broad definitions of the term ‘meaning’ are currently available, with no exact or concrete causal factors attached to them. This study will help to define meaning more clearly, will aid in distinguishing the concept meaning from other concepts and give a clearer understanding thereof. Another contribution of this study will be to establish the importance of meaning in work for South African educators and the role it plays in their human functioning.

1.3.2 Contribution to the Individual and the Organisation

When the core contributors to meaning in work are known, it will be possible to improve these in order to influence and improve work outcomes such as productivity, motivation, engagement, satisfaction, and well-being. If the main sources which give meaning to work are known, future researchers can develop ways to foster and increase meaning to the mutual benefit of the organisation and the employee.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research will consist of general and specific objectives.

1.4.1 General Objective

The main objective of the study is to explore and describe how selected South African educators perceive, conceptualise and attain meaning in their work, in order to find specific and shared factors from which meaning is constructed in their work. The study further has the objective of identifying what the outcomes are when meaning is experienced.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this research study include the following, namely to:

- Conceptualise and explore meaning according to literature.
- Explore how a group of South African educators conceptualise the term ‘meaning’.
- Determine the specific antecedents of meaning in work for these educators.
- Identify which processes are used by the educators in this study to perceive meaning in their work.
- Identify the personal outcomes for educators if meaning in work is experienced.
- Make recommendations for future to improve meaning in work in education.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a strategic framework for action which helps the researcher link the research question with the execution and implementation of physical research (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Coherence between research questions and the method used is required in order to generate valid and reliable results (Ritchie & Lewis, 2005). The following discussion will examine the most appropriate research approach, strategy and methodology with which to address the current research questions.

1.5.1 Research Approach and Strategy

A qualitative design with a phenomenological approach will be used to uncover the perceptions of the participants regarding meaning. According to Leedy (1997), this approach enables the researcher to understand and experience human behaviour better, to focus on phenomena that occur in their natural settings and in their complexity, and to obtain a deeper understanding of the individual's perspective as he or she experiences, understands or perceives these phenomena.

Qualitative research entails interpretive approaches where the researcher studies phenomena in their natural environment, attempting to make sense of and interpret these phenomena in terms of the meanings individuals attach to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Information will be obtained from a multi-cultural group of participants in a manner which attempts to guard against personal judgements.

1.5.2 Research Method

The research method for this research study consists of a literature review and a qualitative study. The results will be presented in the form of a research article.

1.5.2.1 Phase 1: Literature Review

The literature review will focus on previous research pertaining to the meaning in work, meaning in life, meaningfulness, positive psychology and the presence of these factors within the education environment.

Article databases such as EBSCOHOST, Google Scholar, SABInet Online, SAePublications, Science Direct, Proquest and Jstor were accessed. The following terms were used as search terms: Meaning in work, meaning in life, meaningfulness, positive psychology and the education sector. Due to their relevance to the specific topic at hand, the following journals will be studied: Academy of Management Journal, Australian Psychologist, Human Resource Management Journal, Industrial and Organisational Psychology: Perspectives on Science, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Business and Psychology, Journal of Clinical Interventions, Journal of Industrial Psychology, Journal of Management, Journal of

Managerial Psychology, Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology, Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, Journal of Organisational Behaviour, Journal of Vocational Behaviour, Modern Psychological Studies, Personnel Psychology, Psychology Online Journal, South African Journal of Industrial Psychology. Cross referencing was done when an important source of information was identified whilst studying a specific article citing a reliable source.

1.5.2.2 Phase 2: Empirical Study

The empirical study will consist of the research setting, sampling, procedure, data collection, data analysis, and the ethical considerations of the study.

1.5.3 Research Setting

The setting of the present research study will be in secondary schools of the education sector of South Africa and will be executed voluntarily amongst a group of South African secondary school educators. The educators will stem from different schools in Mpumalanga province, providing different viewpoints on meaning and the experience thereof.

1.5.4 Sampling

In this regard, participant selection will be rather limited as participants will be chosen based on voluntary availability from conveniently selected high schools in Mpumalanga. Although, where possible, some arrangements will be made to set up meetings with educators or principals in order to ensure a purposive and fairly representative sample. Thus, as far as possible, the sample will include participants from different racial groups, gender and age groups in order to obtain their diverse perspectives. A minimum of 20 interviews will be conducted with educators, and thereafter further interviews will be conducted only until the data are saturated. Strydom and Delport (2002) conducted a study and found meaningful results by using a similar sampling method. For the sake of convenience, the interviews will be conducted at the schools at times most suitable for the educators. All interviews will be conducted in either Afrikaans or English, whichever is preferable for the participant.

1.5.5 Research Procedure

Permission will be obtained from the Department of Education and school principals, where after semi-structured interviews will be conducted with educators based upon voluntary availability. Participants will partake based upon their voluntary availability. The study, purpose, interview, diary process and duration thereof, as well as ethical considerations, will be explained to all participants prior to data collection. The participants will also be informed of confidentiality and anonymity and be required to give written informed consent. Upon completion of the interview, the participant will be given a booklet in which he or she will be asked to keep a diary for five days, regarding aspects which add to the experience of his/her work being meaningful. This will be used to support and enrich information gathered from the interviews. These diaries will be collected after a week. Semi-structured interviews and the diaries will be analysed together to answer the research questions.

1.5.6 Data Collection Method

Semi-structured, one-to-one type interviews with open-ended questions will be used to gather the qualitative information. This method allows the researcher to maintain a physical presence in the research setting and, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), is ideal for this type of qualitative research. The participants' own words will be recorded in order to gain insight into how they interpret the term 'meaning' and the contributing factors thereto. Interviews will thus be conducted with an open orientation which ought to allow open, direct, two-way conversations. Questions such as "Which aspects in your work add to you experiencing it as meaningful?" or "Which specific things make your experience of work overall to be meaningful?" will be asked. Interviews will be conducted and analysed until data saturation has been reached, and with the help of the diaries rich information ought to be obtained. The diaries will be given to the participants upon completion of their interviews and they will be given one week to write down meaningful experiences on a daily basis with regard to their work and personal lives.

The participants will be allowed to ask questions during the process and will be allowed to contact the researcher if any other queries or issues occur. During the interview process each participant will be offered a beverage. Upon completion of this study, results will be made

available to the specific schools and participants, and if a participant would be interested, a follow-up interview could be arranged in order to discuss the findings.

1.5.7 Recording of Data

During the interview process field notes will be made, based on observation and process awareness by the researcher. All interviews will be tape recorded with the informed consent of all participants, and thereafter transcribed into a word document. The participants will enter personal notes into their diaries which the researcher will then enter into the same word document as the information obtained during the interviewing process. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) believe that the transcriptions may be corrected and edited as long as the interviews and diary entries convey the true nature of what was said. To ensure that the data are stored safely and confidentially, all documents and recordings will be stored securely and not be accessible to others. Backup copies of electronic files will be made.

1.5.8 Data Analyses

Qualitative content analysis will be utilised to analyse the transcribed interviews of the participants. This has been defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278), and as a “qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). The researcher will write her own understanding of the concepts involved according to literature, where after she will read through all the transcribed interviews and diary entries several times to get an overall understanding of them (Creswell, 2007). Significant statements found in either the interviews or diary entries will be listed, grouped together, and then labelled according to common themes. Thereafter, a structural description will be given describing how participants experience meaning within their specific context and setting. The results will be formulated into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon in this sample.

Consistency checks will be done by having an independent researcher also analysing the data and then comparing it to the findings of the researcher. This process, together with supporting the interviews with findings from the diaries, will help the researcher accomplish validation.

Triangulation will be implemented by supplementing the findings from the interviews with information obtained from the diary inscriptions, field notes and memos. This will offer converging evidence (Suter, 2012), as multiple sources of information will be used. Member checking will be done to verify the accuracy of the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data obtained from participants. Literature control will be done through comparing findings with previous research and in so doing verifying the themes. A critical reader will look at the research findings and advise where applicable.

1.5.9 Ethical Considerations

The entire process will be executed with due consideration of all ethical aspects in qualitative research, such as obtaining participants' informed consent and respecting their right to privacy and anonymity. Effort will be made to conduct the research in the most ethical manner possible. Permission will be obtained from the Department of Education and ethical clearance will be obtained from the Ethical Committee of the North-West University (FH-SB-2012-0046). All participants will give informed consent and will be able to withdraw from the process or withhold any information at any time. Participants' privacy will be respected throughout the study. Upon completion of the research, all findings have to be made readily available to the participating parties. All participants' personal information will be held confidentially and only revealed with their consent.

1.6 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

During qualitative research the researcher becomes immersed in the construct being studied and as 'an active participant' in the specific context thereof (Trochim, 2006). The researcher will in this process act with integrity and in an ethical manner. Throughout the research process she will be considerate, respectful and trustworthy.

The researcher was the primary tool for data collection and analysis, with an experienced researcher assisting with co-coding. This helped to ensure that the findings are valid and trustworthy. The researcher's other main role was to give a wide-ranging account of the research process and a true reflection of the findings, whilst guarding against her own perceptions.

1.7 REQUIREMENTS OF THE RESEARCH

This research will explore and describe participants' experiences with regard to meaning in work, compare and test the findings against other literature, and also maintain a high standard of rigour throughout the process. Rigorous research must be both transparent and explicit, according to Burns (1989), in order to meet the stated objectives of the research. The data collection method (interviews and diaries) will seek to produce information that addresses all the research questions in depth. Other requirements include descriptive clarity, analytic preciseness, theoretical correctness and methodological congruence (Burns, 1989). These are all factors that will be taken into account during the entire research process.

1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION

The chapters in this mini-dissertation will be presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Research article

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This first chapter introduced the background to the problem, providing information and definitions of all the necessary and relevant concepts. This chapter outlined the research objectives and explained why this study would be significant. This chapter will serve as the background for the information and results presented in the rest of this study. The qualitative findings will be discussed in Chapter 2, and the limitations and recommendations will be presented in Chapter 3.

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CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Meaning in work within the Educational Sector

Abstract

In order to identify specific, shared sources of meaning and mechanisms with which individuals attempt to make meaning, the objectives of this study were to explore how individuals in the education environment perceive, conceptualise and attain meaning in their work. A qualitative design with a phenomenological strategy was used with a convenience sample (n=20) of educators. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with open-ended questions were asked to gather data. Participants were asked to diarise related issues for 5 working days following the interview, in order to strengthen and validate the interviews' results. The results showed that the participants conceptualise meaning as purpose and significance, and that the main sources of meaning related to work include the transfer of knowledge and making a positive difference in the learners' lives. Forming relationships based on trust and receiving feedback was also important. The main mechanisms identified were effort and preparation. The experience of meaning leads educators to be happy and experiencing personal satisfaction. Although most of these findings support literature, there are differences in the emphasis placed on some of the findings because of the context of education in South Africa. From the results, recommendations were made to create opportunities for educators to experience more meaning in their work.

Key terms: Meaning in work, meaning in life, meaningfulness, positive psychology, education sector

The research literature pertaining to meaning is fragmented into a whole variety of different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches and is lacking uniformity (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). According to these authors, it is evident that much research has been done on the topic, but with little overarching integration. It is seemingly unclear what has been done, what the set definitions of key concepts are, whether there is a difference between meaning and meaningfulness, when to use which term, what meaning of work, in work and at work implies, and other questions such as these. The fragmented nature of the research on meaning makes it difficult to interpret results accurately and to build on them. Rosso et al. (2010) recognised from this confusion that although the research has contributed knowledge in a diverse set of valuable areas, it has also led to uncertainty about what is essentially known about meaning. International research is abundant, but South African research on the topic of meaning is very limited. The following literature review will aim to substantiate, support, and clarify findings on the uncertainties regarding this field of research, whilst adding weight to the South African need for research about meaning.

Problems educators in South Africa have been facing include a desperate shortage of educators (Xaba, 2011), qualified educators functioning in school environments are experiencing a negative organisational climate (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006), and low morale (Mentz, 2007). Other well publicised issues leading to South African education being in a state of crisis include poor performance and a lack of overall commitment by educators (Modisaotsile, 2012). Experiencing more meaning in one's working environment and personal life has been proven to lead to more positive work, health, and well-being outcomes (Day & Rottinghaus, 2003; Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006). By identifying the factors that increase meaning in work, meaning-making mechanisms, and the outcomes of meaning in work; this study could potentially assist educators in addressing some of the above mentioned issues.

Introduction

In 2000, Seligmann and Csikszentmihalyi believed that the time was right for positive psychology and described the field as a psychology of positive human functioning which builds thriving individuals, families, and communities. Positive psychology is where psychology looks past 'the victim, the underdog, and the remedial' (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.7), and has been described as the scientific study of the conditions

and processes that contribute to flourishing or optimal functioning of people and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Positive psychology is not intended to shy away from psychological illness and the adverse effects thereof on people, but is rather meant to take two components of psychology and join them together to form a complete, balanced scientific entity.

One side focuses on and includes mental illness, what causes it and how to cure or prevent it; while the other side looks at optimal human functioning conditions, the causes thereof and how to achieve or maintain such positive states (positive psychology). Seligman, Parks, and Steen (2004) explained that the goal of positive psychology is to make people happier by understanding and building positive emotions, gratification, and meaning. Flourishing, hope, optimism, happiness, and meaning all form part of positive psychology in their own right (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). Together, with the absence of the negative (pathology) and the presence of the positive a human can live in a state of well-being. Positive psychology is also known as psychofortology or fortology. Strümpfer (1995) introduced the concept of fortology as an antonym for pathology and as an extension of Antonovsky's (1979) 'salutogenesis'.

Well-being

Well-being refers to the optimal psychological functioning of people. Kashdan and Steger (2007) suggested that one of the most important aims of psychology should be to discover mechanisms that enable individuals to achieve high levels of lasting well-being. There are two common traditions when it comes to well-being, namely hedonia and eudaimonia. A major difference between the two could be summarised in a eudaimonian manner where it has been argued that even though people might report feeling happy, it does not mean that they are psychologically well.

The hedonistic tradition focuses on happiness and is defined as the presence of positive affect with an absence of negative affect (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Eudaimonia places emphasis on living a full and satisfying life through living well and actualising one's potential (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Waterman, 1993). Living a full and satisfying life where one actualises one's potential can be done through, amongst other things, paying attention to the character strengths linked to life satisfaction. Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined character strengths as the psychological processes or mechanisms that define one's virtues (e.g., wisdom, courage, transcendence). Character strengths can be used as indicators of personality

traits, which in turn are most important factors in predicting well-being (Bai, 2011). The character strengths linked to life satisfaction include love, hope, curiosity, and zest; with gratitude and perseverance being amongst the strongest predictors (Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007). Strengths of character the most associated with life satisfaction are also associated with meaning, implying that meaningful character strengths are indeed those that make a full life possible (Peterson et al., 2007). Both concepts clearly add valuable perspectives to our understanding of well-being as described above.

Recent research has found that the presence of meaning in life, and the search for meaning, significantly predict well-being (Doğan, Sapmaz, Dilek Tel, Sapmaz, & Temizel, 2012). Overall, meaning is an important construct in the field of positive psychology as it improves the positive mental health outcomes of people (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992); heals the psyche (Yalom, 1980); promotes better psychological adjustment (Bonebright, Clay & Ankenmann, 2000); allows individuals to experience overall life satisfaction and fulfilment; and aids in building more positive emotions (Locke & Latham, 2002; Seligman, 2002).

Meaning

The concept of meaning most likely originated with Victor Frankl. While spending nearly four years in Auschwitz and other concentration camps, he formulated his theory on existential psychology, also known as logotherapy. In the concentration camps Frankl discovered that all but one thing can be taken away from a person 'but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way' (Frankl, 1963, p. 74). A victim could either choose to lose all hope and give in to despair, or choose to find meaning in why he must suffer. He supposed that every individual has an instinctive inclination to search for the meaning of his existence and experiences and to discover the meaning in suffering (Frankl, 1963). Logotherapy (Frankl, 1963) emphasises man's will to meaning, and that a person should become fully aware of, and take ownership of all his responsibilities. He viewed meaning in life as constantly being a part of every individual's life, but constantly changing as people change. Will to meaning was described by Frankl (1963) as man's attitude towards life, which enables him to discover a satisfying reason to live. According to Frankl (1963), when a person is hindered from connecting with his will to meaning, it might lead to frustration and even mental breakdown.

Since Frankl's contributions, the concept of meaning has been greatly explored, but definitions of meaning have varied widely across theoretical and empirical work. Meaning has been defined in terms of purpose and significance, as well as through multi-faceted definitions combining the two dimensions. Purpose-driven definitions seem to indicate that meaning is motivational and is described as what people are trying to achieve with their lives or what the overarching purpose of their lives is (Frankl, 1963). It was argued by Frankl (1963) that humans are characterised by a will to have meaning. His theory of meaning revolved around the idea that each person has a unique purpose for his or her life and that meaning thus follows from a person's pursuit to fulfil his or her highest aim in life. Prat and Ashforth (2003) formed the idea that meaning is the output of having made sense of something. Steger, Frazer et al., (2006) supplemented this theory of meaning by saying that meaning is about understanding or perceiving purpose in the past, present and future of one's life.

Significance-centred definitions describe that one's life has meaning when it stands for something (Steger, 2012). Steger, Frazier et al. (2006) define meaning in life as the sense made of and significance felt regarding the nature of one's overall existence. In other words, meaning is created through people's interpretations of their experiences; and the overall significance of these experiences give meaning in terms of the purpose that it ascribes to their lives (Steger, 2012).

Multi-faceted definitions of meaning often combine these two approaches with an affective dimension, which refers to people's fulfilment in life (Steger, 2012). One such an example is Reker and Wong (1988) who defined meaning in terms of the ability to recognise order, reason or purpose in one's existence, along with the pursuit and achievement of certain goals; and the feelings of fulfilment arising from such purpose and pursuits. Another example is when Steger (2011) took aspects from a Frankl-inspired, purpose-driven approach and combined it with more significance-centred definitions. He noted that it seems sensible to define meaning in life as the extent to which people understand, make sense of, or see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose, mission, or over-arching aim in life (Steger, 2011).

Researchers have made many attempts to measure meaning in life and meaning in work. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) by Steger et al. (2006) is a 10-item

psychometric tool which measures the presence of meaning in life, and the search for meaning in life. This measure helps people understand their own perceptions about their lives and the meaning, happiness and fulfilment they derive from them. The Work as Meaning Inventory (WAMI) measures the degree to which individuals feel that their work is meaningful. The WAMI assesses three central components of meaningful work, namely the degree to which people find their work to have significance and purpose, the contribution work makes to finding broader meaning in life, and the desire and means for one's work to make a positive contribution to the greater good (Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012).

Battista and Almond (1973) argued for a theory of meaning where no predetermined constraints are placed on how people define it. However, it is actually not known whether meaning is gained in more or less the same manner by all people, or whether it really is a completely relativistic and individualistic experience. Whether meaning is a subjective matter differing in nature and definition from person to person or not, purpose and significance appear to be central factors in most psychological definitions thereof. It seems as though, in short, meaning is mostly described as making sense of, perceiving significance in, and understanding the purpose for one's life and actions. This study thus aims to explore what people understand with the term 'meaning', and then continues towards understanding where it comes from, how it can be obtained and what the outcomes are of experiencing meaning.

Meaningfulness

The fact that work has a particular meaning does not necessarily suggest that the work is meaningful (Rosso et al., 2010). Although researchers often use the terms interchangeably, it is very important to distinguish between the terms 'meaning' and 'meaningfulness' (Rosso et al., 2010). Because these two terms are related, there is an overlap in the way in which they have been and are used in literature. Rosso et al. (2010) believe that often when authors refer to 'meaning' with reference to work as mentioned above, they actually intend to imply that the work has significance or meaning. These authors suggest that in such cases the word 'meaningful' would be more accurate as it implies that "the work is meaningful". Many authors use, and have used, these words interchangeably. 'Meaning' should be set aside for instances when authors would like to refer to what the work signifies, as opposed to meaningfulness referring to the amount of significance felt or experienced by the individual in that work role. Meaningfulness has been described by Kahn (1990) as 'a feeling that one is receiving a return on investment of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive, or

emotional energy' (pp. 703-704). This means that 'meaning' describes the type of meaning stemming from work or what the work signifies, whereas 'meaningfulness' is the amount of significance employees attach to their work (Rosso et al., 2010). Where necessary, the two related terms will be differentiated and the broader term 'meaning in work' will be used to encompass both meaning and meaningfulness, as this study aims to research both.

Meaningful work could be seen as the umbrella term which covers a whole range of constructs including, in terms of work, meaning and meaningfulness (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2009). Meaningful work refers to the amount of significance people perceive their work to have (Rosso et al., 2010). Other researchers argue that, as with the broader psychological term of meaning in life, work has meaning or is meaningful not only when it is significant, but also when it is viewed as having a specific purpose (Steger et al., 2009). Meaningful work seems to consist of, but is not limited to, skill variety, opportunity to complete an entire task, significance to other people, engagement, a sense of calling, challenges, work role identity, work centrality, work values, intrinsic work orientation, spirituality, good pay, and reputation (Steger et al., 2012).

Meaning of Work

Meaning of work literature has undergone considerable growth and development, but without securely establishing a consistent identity, explained Rosso et al. (2010). 'Meaning of work' could partially be explained as the degree of importance that the individual feels his work has in his life (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). It could also be described as the general beliefs, values, and attitudes individuals have about their work (Brief & Nord, 1990; Roberson, 1990; Rosso et al., 2010; Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999), as well as the employees' understanding of what they do, and the significance thereof (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). 'Meaning in work' could be categorised under 'meaning of work' and refers to the meaning, significance and purpose individuals derive from their work (Rosso et al., 2010), or in other words, the inherent meaning they obtain from doing their work.

Bellah et al. (1985) classify the importance of the experience of work to an individual into three meaning orientations: a job, a career or a calling. Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997) found that individuals in the same job, with more or less the same levels in education, time invested and pay, all differ as to their experience of meaning. Hence,

Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) proved that individuals in the same occupation, in the same organisation, and even receiving the same remuneration, perceive work differently. Rosso et al. (2010) stated that meaning in work is a subjective matter, in other words, that each individual will find and be able to make meaning in a different, individualised manner. Meaning in work is often noticeable in professions where individuals interact with different people, since the need for human interactions and socialisation contributes to the experience of meaning (Bellah et al., 1985). Van Zyl, Deacon, and Rothman (2010) said that it is not the design of a particular occupation which determines the individual's orientation towards it, but rather the perceptions pertaining to the experience of the work that provide context and create a sense of purpose (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Those individuals who view work as a calling engage in work activities because of the fulfilment which they derive from their work engagement (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Calling is closely related to the term 'meaningful work' (Steger et al., 2009), but the concepts are theoretically different, because work can be perceived as meaningful due to certain job characteristics that are independent of whether or not the work is perceived as one's calling in life (Hirschi, 2012).

The idea of work being a calling has both historical and religious roots (Steger et al., 2009). Recently a distinction has been made between older conceptualisations of calling and modern conceptualisations. Limited and especially older conceptualisations of calling emphasise a godly inspiration to do morally responsible work, duty or fulfil one's destiny (Weber, 1958). From these conceptualisations of meaning, calling is a place in the world of work for which one was created, designed, or destined to fill by means of God-given talents and skills (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dik & Duffy, 2009); whereas modern conceptualisations describe calling as an inner drive to do fulfilling and self-actualising work (Hall & Chandler, 2005). A calling is typically viewed as a job that provides personal meaning/purpose and that is used to serve others (Dik & Duffy, 2009). Experiencing work as a calling can promote the experience of work being meaningful as well (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Perceiving one's work to be meaningful or purposeful, and to serve a higher purpose are central characteristics of work that is a calling (Dik & Duffy, 2009). As meaningful work and calling are closely related, it is not surprising that people who feel their work is a calling report greater work satisfaction and spend more optional, unpaid hours at work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Meaningful work, as experienced by employees, contributes to their motivation and satisfaction at work (Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997). A lack of

meaningfulness in work might be a cause of disengagement (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). Individuals who experience less meaning in work have further been found to also be less interested in their daily work tasks (Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997). As meaningfulness relates to a sense of purpose (Spreitzer, 1995), and significance (Rosso et al., 2010), it is understandably expected that individuals with a calling-orientation will perhaps experience more meaning in their work than those with job or career orientations (Van Zyl et al., 2010).

Meaning in work researchers have examined the topic from a wide array of angles, but they all clearly focus on the same key issues, namely where the meaning in work comes from (the sources of meaning), how work becomes meaningful (the mechanisms by which meaning is made), and what the outcomes are of experiencing meaning (Rosso et al., 2010).

Antecedents of Meaning in Work

It is believed that each person derives meaning from different sources (Frankl, 1963). Rosso et al. (2010) explained that the meaning of an individuals' work could for instance simply be that it is a means of living. Research has shown that work is frequently an important source of meaning in life as a whole (Steger et al., 2009). Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, and Dunn (2013) explain that in the human quest for meaning, work plays an exceptionally central role. A wide variety of factors that influences one's perception of meaning and meaningfulness has been considered in research. One way of describing these different factors is that they are all potential antecedents or sources of meaning or meaningfulness in work. Four main sources of meaning or meaningfulness in work have been identified by Rosso et al. (2010): the self, other persons, the work context, and one's spiritual life. Emmons (2003) believe that people find meaning through work/achievement, intimacy/relationships, religion/spirituality and generosity. Pleasure, personal growth (Ebersole & De Vogler, 1984), creative endeavours, and the ability to think about and grow from bad experiences (Frankl, 1963) have also in the past been described as factors which give individuals meaning. Steger et al. (2009) suggested that meaningful work may help people deepen their understanding of themselves and the world around them, facilitating personal growth. This statement again supports the concept of the broader impact of people's work on their lives.

Frankl (1963) discussed three broad approaches towards finding meaning. The first is through experiential values, the second through creative endeavours, and the third through

attitudinal values. A very important example of experiential values is love, more specifically, the love we feel towards something or someone we value. Creative values through which meaning could be found include involvement in creative projects such as art, music, writing or invention activities. Frankl's most famous example of attitudinal values is obtaining meaning from suffering. Other attitudinal values include compassion, trust, bravery, and so on.

Research on sources of meaning has mostly followed either one of two methods. The first method entails asking the sample group 'what gives your life meaning?' (Ebersole & De Vogler, 1981). The second method provides a list of potential sources of meaning and then the people have to rate them in order of importance in their own life experiences. For the purpose of this study, the approach that will be followed is an exploratory approach, where no guidance or potential sources will be given to the participants. However, upon completion of the study one will be able to see whether the identified constructs correspond with possible sources which have been identified in the past. A basic set of open-ended questions will be asked, for example, "Tell me about the meaning that you find in your work?" and "What specific factors contribute, or could contribute to your experience of meaning?"

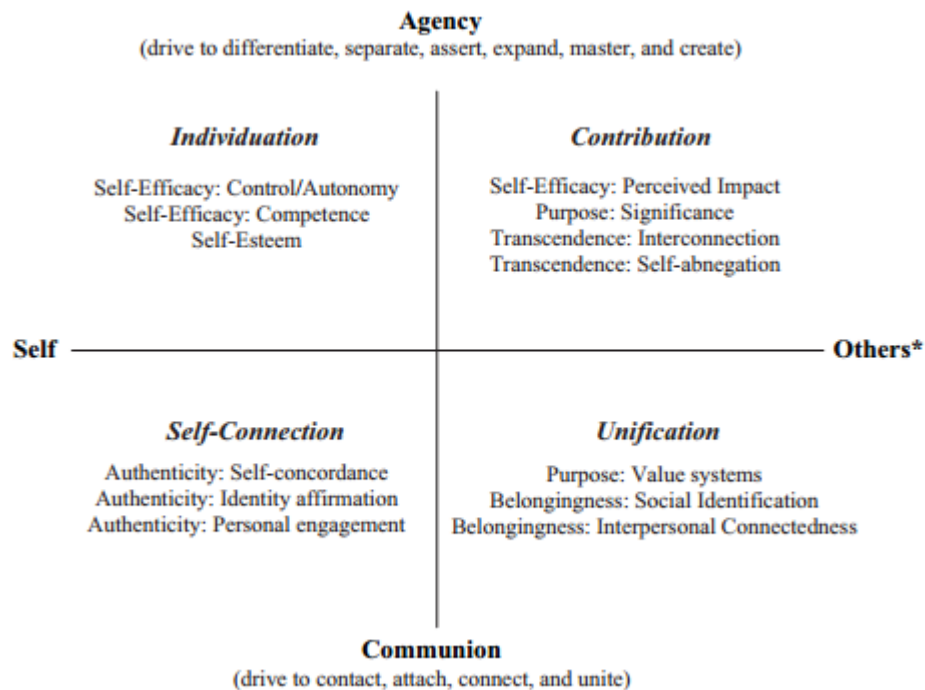
The experience of meaning has been linked to many positive work outcomes (Bonebright et al., 2000) and it would, therefore, be a sound contribution if the common sources or core aspects that make up meaning could be determined, in order to promote the many positive outcomes.

Meaning-making Mechanisms

Meaning can be found or made (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006) and a question in meaning research revolves around how people make or develop meaning over a period of time (Steger, 2012). People are known to seek meaning and are likely to actively, or even unknowingly, construct meaning (Steger, 2012). According to Rosso et al. (2010), the mechanisms for meaning-making that already exist in literature focus on the psychological processes that are essential to the person experiencing things as being meaningful. The main categories of mechanisms through which work is perceived as meaningful, or by which meaning is made or acquired, include authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, and cultural interpersonal sense-making (Rosso et al., 2010). Meaning can be made in one's personal life and work and is believed to be a powerful resource in times of

difficulty, as it has been linked to decreased psychological harm (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema & Davis, 2002; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998).

Recently Rosso et al. (2010) reviewed the four main sources of meaningful work (the self, others, the context, and the spiritual life) and mechanisms through which work becomes meaningful (authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, and cultural/interpersonal sense-making). They then offered an integrative, theoretical framework. This research offers one of the first theoretical frameworks of meaningful work, according to Steger, Dik, and Duffy (2012). Rosso et al. (2010) sought to bring clarity to the diverse existing literature through uncovering and organising the central sources of the meaning of work, as well as the mechanisms which drive people's perceptions of meaningfulness. The framework displays the main pathways through which meaningful work is made or maintained, and Rosso et al. (2010) stated that it could act as a foundation towards understanding the fundamental activities or experiences required to experience meaningful work. The framework shows that on one side humans are driven to pursue 'agency' which means to separate, assert, expand, master and create, while on the other side pursuing communion which is described as being driven to contact, attach, connect, and unite (Rosso et al., 2010). This distinction is relevant for understanding the different ways in which people approach their work and may have a profound influence on the experience of meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010).



*Others = other individuals, groups, collectives, organisations, and higher powers

Figure 1: Four major pathways to meaningful work: A theoretical framework (Rosso et al., 2010)

As the current research project will aim to study which specific factors in work give people meaning and which mechanisms can be used to make meaning, it will grant the opportunity to see how the findings correlate with the above mentioned overarching factors and the framework provided by Rosso et al. (2010). In the next part of the literature review, the importance of experiencing meaning and thus, indirectly, meaning-making will be discussed.

Outcomes of Experiencing Meaning in Work

Steger (2012) stated that there are only a few other promising avenues of research that can achieve a wide array of valued outcomes such as research in creating meaning in work. For this study, the importance of meaning will be categorised into three significant themes, all pertaining to the outcomes of experiencing meaning in work, namely the importance of meaning on well-being, on a personal level, and at work.

During the past decades, many studies have continually reported that when people believe their lives to have meaning, they appear to experience better overall well-being and

health (Bonebright et al., 2000; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Sense of coherence (SOC) is a personality construct developed by Antonovsky (1979) and is what protects people's health against the potential harm of stressors. The construct has three interrelated factors: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness, which together improve overall life satisfaction and predict health, especially mental health (Eriksson & Lindström, 2006). People with a strong SOC perceive the things they experience in life as meaningful and the challenges worthy of commitment (Eriksson & Lindström, 2006).

Chamberlain and Zika (1988) found that meaning is positively related to the major dimensions of well-being, namely life satisfaction and positive affect. In more recent research, the presence of meaning in life and the search for meaning have again been proven to significantly predict subjective well-being (Doğan, Sapmaz, Dilek, Tel, Sapmaz, & Temizel, 2012). Not only when people believe their personal lives have meaning do they report greater well-being, but also when they feel they do meaningful work (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007). Both meaning and happiness seem to contribute to well-being (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012). The two constructs are viewed as two different concepts (Jayawickreme et al., 2012), where meaning can be explained as a critical element in one's experience of happiness (Peterson et al., 2007; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The attainment of meaning builds happiness and is healing to the psyche (Peterson et al., 2007; Yalom, 1980). The experience of meaning has for a long time been consistently related to positive mental health outcomes; the opposite applies to cases of meaninglessness which have been associated with pathological outcomes (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). The effects of meaning on personal levels of affect and cognition were determined by Reker and Wong (1988). They found that the realisation of meaning is always accompanied by the person experiencing satisfaction and fulfilment. Moreover, they proved that meaning cognitively adds value by providing a means for interpreting life experiences, and by guiding one's behaviour on a motivational level. Meaning is positively related to life satisfaction (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992), and it has been acknowledged that pursuing meaningful goals is a strong pathway to more positive emotions and to more life satisfaction (Locke & Latham, 2002; Seligman, 2002a, 2002b). A lack of meaning is linked to negative affect, depression, anxiety (Debats, van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993), a need for therapy (Battista & Almond, 1973), suicidal ideation, and substance abuse (Steger et al., 2006).

Meaning adds to the experience of work engagement which could be described as being a 'positive work-related state of fulfilment, characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). Work engagement is further described as a state of work-related well-being (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008) that indicate employees' individual performance (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2002). People experiencing meaning in their work are likely to invest more effort and energy into their work activities, and have higher enjoyment levels than those experiencing less meaning (Bonebright et al., 2000). When employees are engaged in their work, they contribute to organisational success by showing higher levels of motivation and commitment (Burke, Koyuncu & Fiksenbaum, 2006). Other important positive work outcomes include increased motivation, improved performance, and enhanced job satisfaction (Bonebright et al., 2000).

People with a sense of calling in their careers experience a deep sense of meaning, dedication, and personal involvement in their work (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010). People who feel that they do meaningful work place value their work more; viewing their work as more central and important in their lives as a whole (Arnold, Turner et al., 2007; Harpaz & Fu, 2002), reporting greater job satisfaction (Kamdron, 2005). Employees who feel that there is a higher purpose in their work report greater work unit cohesion, satisfaction, effort, and performance (Sparks & Schenk, 2001). Literature states that employees who do not experience meaningful work report higher levels of boredom, negative work attitudes, and frustration (Isaksen, 2000)

Summary

Meaning is invaluable as it potentially leads to people experiencing better overall well-being and health, as well as various positive personal outcomes including happiness and better psychological adjustment (Bonebright et al., 2000), and more positive work attitudes leading to higher engagement levels. From the above summarised advantages or positive outcomes of having meaning or meaningfulness in one's life and work, it is clearly evident that meaning is an important construct to study, understand, and take into account personally and in one's work.

Following tradition, the term 'meaning' in work in this study refers to the meaning, significance and/or purpose individuals derive from their work. In other words, not what the

work means to them (the meaning of their work), but rather the inherent meaning they obtain from doing their job. The research will look at factors which contribute to meaning in individuals' work, in order to identify what gives meaning or what the work signifies, not what the significance of the work is as meaning of work supposes (e.g., a means of living). The measure in which this meaning, significance and/or purpose is experienced, leads to the work being viewed as meaningful. Also following tradition, the broad phrase "meaningful work" will be used as the umbrella term to encompass both meaning and meaningfulness (Steger et al., 2009), while striving to differentiate where appropriate.

Research has identified a wide range of factors which might influence one's perceptions of meaning and meaningfulness (Ebersole & De Vogler, 1984; Emmons, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010). These factors can be described as potential sources through which meaningful work could be found. The other way of obtaining meaning is to actively, or even unknowingly, attempt to make more meaning (Steger, 2012). Meaning-making mechanisms that have been identified and researched internationally focus on the psychological processes that are essential to the person experiencing things as being meaningful (Rosso et al., 2010). When an individual has found or made meaning, there are numerous positive well-being, personal, and work outcomes.

Steger (2012) stated that recent theory focuses on how meaning develops, rather than how meaning is lost or blatantly fails to develop. This research heeds the concern raised by Steger (2012), by giving participants the opportunity to tell the researcher which specific factors gave them meaning as well as what prevented them from experiencing meaning, but only the sources of meaning will be reported as that is the focus of this study.

The following research questions emerged from the description of the research problem as given above:

- How can meaning be conceptualised according to literature?
- How does a group of South African educators conceptualise the term 'meaning'?
- What are the specific antecedents of meaning in work for these educators?
- Which processes do these educators utilise in order to perceive meaning in their work?

- What are the personal outcomes if educators experience meaning in their work?
- What are the recommendations to improve meaning in work in education?

Research design

A research design is a strategic framework for action which helps the researcher link the research questions with the execution and implementation of physical research (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Coherence between research questions and the methodology used is required in order to generate valid and reliable data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2005). The following discussion will examine the most appropriate research approach, strategy, and methodology in which the research questions will be addressed. Mouton and Marais (1988) explained that the reason for a research design is to provide the researcher with guidelines pertaining to the research and to prevent or minimise errors which might become apparent during the course of the research.

Research Approach and Strategy

A qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach was used to discover participants' perceptions regarding meaning. According to Leedy (1997), this enables the researcher to understand and experience human behaviour better, to focus on phenomena that occur in their natural setting and complexity, and to obtain a deeper understanding of the influence of these experiences on the individual's perspective. Phenomenology offered the researcher the opportunity to surpass past knowledge and experiences in order to comprehend the phenomenon of meaning at a deeper level (Merleau-Ponty, 1956).

A qualitative design offers the researcher an insider's view and is guided by a will to understand a complex phenomenon through considering multiple possibilities of reality as experienced by the participants themselves (Suter, 2012). Qualitative research entails interpretive approaches where the researcher attempts to make sense of and interpret these phenomena in terms of the meanings individuals attach to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher went into the field without any preconceived ideas of what she would like to confirm, but rather approached it as an exploratory investigation. Bracketing is a process where the researcher attempts to set aside his/her own perceptions and experiences to stay as true as possible to how participants experience and describe the phenomenon (Colaizzi,

1978). For this reason, the researcher researched available literature and summarised her understanding of meaning in the literature review, and thereafter (specifically during the interview and data analysis process) she tried to bracket those experiences. In a further attempt to support effective bracketing, none of the participants were personally familiar with the researcher.

Research Method

The research method for this research study comprised a literature review and an empirical study. This section will discuss the different methodological elements of this research study.

Research Setting

The setting of the current research study was secondary schools under the auspices of the education sector of South Africa and was executed amongst Mpumalanga high school educators. The educators stemmed from different schools in the Mpumalanga province in order to extract different viewpoints on meaning and the experience thereof. Their participation in this study was voluntary.

Sampling

A convenience sample from high schools in Mpumalanga was used. Participants were chosen based on voluntary availability and where possible, arrangements were made in order to ensure a representative sample. Thus, the sample, as far as possible, included different race, gender and age participants in order to obtain diverse perspectives as seen in Table 1. After twenty interviews had been conducted, the researcher concluded that themes were recurring and data saturation was reached, as additional data would merely have served to confirm the already acquired data. Strydom and Delport (2002) conducted a study and found meaningful results by using a similar sampling method. For the sake of convenience, the interviews were conducted with the educators at times most convenient to them. All interviews were conducted in either Afrikaans or English, whichever was preferred by the participant.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Research Participants

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Gender
01	27	White	Female
02	54	White	Female
03	24	White	Female
04	47	White	Male
05	27	White	Male
06	49	White	Female
07	23	African	Female
08	24	White	Female
09	45	White	Female
10	47	African	Male
11	45	African	Male
12	41	African	Male
13	57	White	Male
14	41	African	Male
15	47	Indian	Male
16	33	African	Male
17	25	White	Female
18	27	White	Female
19	39	Indian	Female
20	34	African	Male
TOTAL	20-29: 7	African: 7	Female: 10
(N = 20)	30-39: 3	White: 11	Male: 10
	40-49: 8	Indian: 2	
	50-59: 2		

Research Procedure

Permission was obtained from the Department of Education and school principals to conduct the interviews where after interviews were conducted with randomly selected high school educators based upon voluntary availability. The study, purpose, interview, diary process and duration thereof were explained to all participants prior to data collection. The participants were informed verbally of confidentiality and anonymity, and that interviews would be audio recorded. All participants were required to give written informed consent by completing the consent form (see Appendix A). Upon completion of the interview, the participant was given a booklet in which he or she was asked to keep diary for 5 working days regarding aspects which add to the experience of his/her work as being meaningful. This was done in an attempt to support, validate and enrich the findings obtained from the interviews. Written consent was also given by signing a consent form upon return of the diary to the researcher, stating that she may use the information given therein. One-to-one interviews and the diaries produced quality data which align well with the current study's goal of developing a rich description by conceptualising meaning within a South African education context and to identify contributing factors of meaning in work.

Data Collection Method

In order to explore how participants conceptualise meaning, what the sources of meaning are, how individuals make meaning in their work, and what the outcomes of experiencing meaning is, semi-structured, one-to-one type interviews with open-ended questions were used (see Appendix B). This method allowed the researcher to maintain a physical presence in the research setting and, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), is ideal for this type of qualitative research. Interviews were transcribed verbatim so that insight could be developed on how participants interpret the term 'meaning' and contributing factors thereto. Interviews were thus conducted with an open orientation which allowed open, direct, two-way conversations. Questions such as "Which specific factors give you meaning in your work?" or "Which specific things make your experience of work overall to be meaningful?" were asked. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. The diaries were given to the participants upon completion of their interviews and they were given one week to diarise meaningful experiences on a daily basis with regard to their work and personal lives.

The participants were allowed to ask questions during the process and to contact the researcher if any other queries or issues occurred. During the interview process, each participant was offered a beverage. Upon completion of this study, the results were made available to the specific schools and participants, and if a participant were to be interested, a follow-up interview could be arranged in order to discuss the findings.

Recording of Data

During the interview process field notes or reflections were recorded in the researcher's journal. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their process and record this in a personal diary, which the researcher then later analysed. Participants gave written consent that information obtained from both the interviews and diaries may be used for research purposes. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) believed that this means that the transcriptions may be corrected and edited as long as the interview and diary entries convey the true nature of what was said. To ensure that the data were stored safely and confidentially, all documents, recordings and the like were stored securely, not being accessible to others. Backup copies were made of electronic files.

Data Analyses

A qualitative content analysis and data representation structure was followed. Based on the research at hand, this proved to be a very practical and useful approach. The researcher first conducted a full literature review and then wrote a description of her own understanding of meaning, according to literature. During the data collection, data analysis was already taking place as on-going findings affected what data were collected and how, as explained by Suter (2012). Willig (2008) explained that all interviews should be transcribed and initial main thoughts written down separately during the interview process and data analysis. The researcher read through all the transcribed interviews and diary entries several times to get an overall understanding of them (Creswell, 2007). One important data analysis strategy which was used was making field notes or memos throughout the interview process. Memos support all activities of qualitative data analysis suggests Miles and Huberman (1994); guiding the researcher from data reduction (extracting the essence), data display (organising for meaning), and drawing conclusions (explaining the findings) (Suter, 2012).

During this qualitative content analysis procedure all text was coded and then the significant statements found in either the interviews or diary entries was listed (each

statement was treated as having equal value and the list was expanded, until there were no new or overlapping statements), grouped together, and then labelled according to common themes (e.g., good colleague relationships, acknowledgement) by the researcher. Trustworthiness was ensured by means of comparing the findings of the researcher with those of an experienced independent researcher, analysing the raw data by creating categories via themes and identifying patterns in a similar manner as the researcher.

Triangulation was implemented by referring to the initial main thoughts (field notes and memo's) throughout the data analysis to make sure that they were consistent with what was being extracted and how it was interpreted. Validity was thus increased through supplementing the analysis of the transcribed interviews with field notes, memos and diaries authored by the respondents themselves. The purpose of analysing multiple sources of data is affirmation and converging evidence (Suter, 2012)..

In order to verify the themes, literature control was done by comparing findings with previous research. The literature control was integrated into the findings to ensure flow and easier reading. All relationships between major themes and labels were explored and a final summary of findings was given. Member checking was done to verify the accurateness of the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data obtained from participants. The participants involved in the member checking agreed with the main themes identified. A critical reader looked at the research findings and advised where applicable.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards are there to ascertain that legal requirements are met, provide guidelines on the expected and acceptable behaviour from the researcher, and to indicate what the consequences of any unprofessional or neglectful behaviour might be (Cummings & Worley, 2005). Ethics revolve around the fair treatment of the research participants as well as their protection. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that these ideas are manifested in ethical dimensions such as the researcher's obligations to society, colleagues, the participants, the ethics committee, and the institutional review boards.

The entire process was executed with due consideration for all ethical aspects in qualitative research, during which participants' written informed consent had to be obtained and their right to privacy and anonymity respected. Permission was obtained from the

Department of Education and ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the North-West University (FH-SB-2012-0046). All participants gave informed consent and were allowed to withdraw from the process or if they wanted to withhold any information. Participants' privacy was respected throughout the study. Upon completion of the research, all findings were readily available to all participating parties. All participants' personal information was held confidentially and only revealed with their consent.

The purpose and structure of the research were discussed with all participants and they were afforded the opportunity to ask questions in order to ensure trust and mutual understanding of roles. The participants were informed that participation in the project is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any given time if they wished to do so. It was also highlighted that there were no evident risks involved with participating in this study. The researcher provided each participant with a printed consent form that stated that the information obtained during the research process would be used for education purposes only and that it would be confidential. The researcher also verbalised that she would be available following the research for feedback or questions.

Role of the Researcher

During qualitative research the researcher becomes immersed in the construct they are studying, and in the specific context thereof, as 'an active participant' (Trochim, 2006). Throughout this process the researcher aimed to act with integrity and in an ethical manner, whilst also being considerate, respectful and trustworthy.

Requirements of the Research

This research aimed to explore and describe participants' experiences regarding meaning in work; compare and test the findings against previous research; and to maintain a high standard of rigour throughout. Different requirements and standards for qualitative research were considered, including descriptive clarity, analytic preciseness, theoretical correctness, and methodological comparison (Burns, 1989). These factors were taken into account during the entire research process.

Rigour was considered to meet the stated objectives of the research. The data collection method (interviews and diaries) produced information that addressed all the

research questions with enough detail. This research attempted to clearly describe to readers what was done and how, with theory imbedded throughout the process.

Findings and discussion

The main purpose of this study was to explore and describe how selected South African educators perceive and conceptualise the term ‘meaning’, which factors give them meaning in work, which mechanisms they use to make meaning, and what the outcomes of experiencing meaning in work are. Themes from interviews were identified from the data where after similar themes were grouped together and certain categories formed. The interviews produced most of the valuable information, with the diaries and field notes supporting the themes identified from the interviews.

Table 2

Major Findings

Research Questions	Findings
How can meaning be conceptualised according to literature?	It seems as though in short meaning is mostly described as making sense of, perceiving significance in, understanding the purpose for one's life and actions and having a mission/goal/aim in life
How do South African educators conceptualise the term 'meaning'?	Participants mainly conceptualised meaning as a sense of purpose and significance, with a positive contribution/influence/impact
What are the specific antecedents of meaning in work for educators?	Transfer of knowledge Making a positive difference Positive relationships Tangible results Feedback Trust
Which processes do educators utilise in order to make meaning in their work?	Effort/conscientiousness in work Preparation
What are the personal outcomes if individuals experience meaning in their work?	Happiness Intrapersonal satisfaction Experiencing meaningfulness Motivation Work enjoyment

Conceptualisation of Meaning

Participants' conceptualisation of meaning was mainly divided into purpose and significance-centred approaches (no notable differences were found in the way meaning was conceptualised based on the biographical differences of participants). A quarter of the participants (25%) viewed meaning as having a **sense of purpose** e.g., *"Purpose. To me it is about finding meaning in your life... the deeper insight into why you are really here."* (Participant 5) and *"...to me another word, in a word could be purpose. Just in a word: purpose"* (Participant 16). This is in line with the purpose-driven definitions inspired by Frankl (1963) which specify that meaning is motivational and is described as what people are aspiring to achieve in their lives or what the overarching purpose of their lives are. Steger et al., (2006) supplemented this theory of meaning by saying that meaning is about understanding or perceiving purpose in the past, present and future of one's life.

The other approach given by another quarter of participants (25%) was **significance-centred** and is where participants described that meaning is when one has a positive impact or influence on, or contribute to something larger than oneself. *"Anything that has an impact on... a positive impact on things or on someone"* (Participant 10); and Participant 14 saying *"The value and importance of something. The benefit of something you do to others"*.

In the theoretical framework presented by Rosso et al. (2010), one finds 'contribution' which is described as the perceived impact and significance of things. It is understandable that when one has a positive impact as described above, one could feel as if these actions are significant and hold value (either for oneself or others); and therefore the researcher believes that to a certain extent this can be categorised with the significance-centred approaches to meaning. Steger et al. (2006) define meaning in life as the sense made of and significance felt with regard to the nature of one's existence. In other words, meaning is created through people's interpretations of their experiences, and the overall significance or impact of these experiences give meaning to their lives (Steger, 2012).

Therefore, it may be concluded that possibly the most holistic definition to support the participants' conceptualisation of meaning in this study might be that of Steger (2011), who described meaning as the extent to which people understand and see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose,

mission, or over-arching aim in life. This definition combines the two main themes in the definitions of meaning, namely purpose and significance.

Antecedents of Meaning in Work

The factors which influenced the participants' perceptions of meaning in work can be described as potential antecedents or sources of meaning in work. The most common antecedents of meaning that came forth from this research were (in order of importance): transfer of knowledge, making a positive difference, positive relationships, tangible results, feedback and trust.

Transfer of knowledge was mentioned by more than three quarters (80%) of the participants, as they indicated that they find meaning in their work when they share their knowledge with, or transfer their knowledge to, the learners, e.g., “...to unlock or to open up the knowledge for the learners...” (Participant 2); “*The benefits that the students acquire during the learning. That means to which level are we taking the students?... That is the meaning*” (Participant 14); and Participant 8 explaining that “...when they finally understand something”, it gives meaning. Since a large part of an educator's job function may be seen as educating and transferring knowledge, it is understandable that they experience meaning when they feel they are fulfilling their roles as teachers. The function of an educator, however, reaches beyond only transferring ‘textbook’ knowledge. Cortese (2003) stated education should envision contributing to a sustainable human future and that “education institutions bear a profound, moral responsibility to increase the awareness, knowledge, skills, and values needed to create a just and sustainable future” (Cortese, 2003, p. 17). Participant 17 described that she wants to transfer academic knowledge, but that she also wants to give learners another form of knowledge through “... preparing the children for what awaits on the outside, getting them ready for life”. Their role might, thus, be seen as helping to form the child holistically - academically and otherwise.

Making a positive difference or having a positive influence on others was indicated by three quarters (75%) of participants as giving them a sense of meaning, e.g., “...If you can just spread a little light, that's a big thing to me...” (Participant 5); “*Being able to impart something into other people's lives, making a difference, contributing to their future*” (Participant 7). Making a positive difference could also be seen as making a contribution to a person's life. Half of the participants explained as follows: “...not just a thank you for that,

meaning that you have made a difference. Meaning would be where you can see that they have changed personally” (Participant 5). The vision of educators to develop learners as a whole also entails making a difference in their lives or contributing something positive to another’s future. This could link to experiencing work as a calling, as employees in helping professions tend to experience their work as a calling more often than others not in helping professions (Van Zyl, Deacon, & Rothmann, 2010). Participant 11 summarised this when he stated his work has meaning: “...*through education, definitely. It is the meaning of me being here, it is a calling to me*”.

Every learner is unique; each one has a different personality, abilities, styles of learning and way of relating to others. Every learner develops a different relationship with his/her teachers, which ultimately assists in the professional working relationship between the learner and the teacher (Pianta, 2000). Three quarters (75%) of the participants in this study referred to **positive relationships** and interaction with the learners as an important factor contributing to their meaning in work, e.g., “...*so, obviously to me it is amazing to work with the learners day to day... it fulfils me as a human being to have that interaction with them*” (Participant 1); and “*They understand me and they understand my work. That shows that now I have a meaning to them*” (Participant 10). Because educators are able to influence the learners through their relationships with them, participants mentioned that teachers should furthermore act as role-models (Participants 3, 17, and 18). Positive relationships also extended to collegial support and good relations. Half of the participants (50%) indicated that they attain meaning when they experience good support and relations with colleagues, e.g., “*Look, let me tell you... team work is utterly important in education. Utterly important. Your colleagues can really add to you and fulfil you in a sense of adding meaning in work*” (Participant 5); and “...*I definitely think through the relationships in your work*” (Participant 6).

More than half (65%) of the participants indicated **tangible results** as prominent, e.g., “...*if my kids are passing my subject, if my kids are...you know they all are participating in class... and my results. If my results they are good and my learners pass my tests and exams...*” (Participant 10); and Participant 11 saying “*I feel great if I see someone from my class being in the top position, driving the best car, living in certain areas, Bankenveld, something like that and that I say at least I’ve done something*”. If you consider the main purpose of schooling, namely to get learners to matriculate, and the current worrying state of

education in South Africa (Xaba, 2011), it makes sense that the learners' results are of high priority to educators. They might experience meaning when their learners achieve good results, as this is an indication of their fulfilling their roles as educators (e.g., through successfully transferring knowledge) and making a positive difference in people's lives (e.g., through helping them attain a good education).

Feedback, as indicated by more than half of the participants (60%) seems to create much of the meaning in the work of educators. Feedback in this research study refers specifically to receiving both appreciation and recognition: *"Like I said earlier, the feedback you get from others and they say thank you and all"* (Participant 4). The participants indicated that appreciation is important: *"Appreciation for the things you do. The children that say thank you..."* (Participant 6); *"Today I found meaning in my work when a child told me that he loved and appreciated me...."* (Participant 7). Recognition was described by Participant 1 as *"obviously being a main factor",... "I think the more recognition you receive for the effort you put in, the more effort you will want to put in"*. Participant 6 said: *"I mean if a learner comes to you after 10 years and tells you that he remembers this and that of you..."* Participants indicated that in their line of work finding meaning through remuneration is not an option as it does not pay much. They indicated that they rather work for things such as positive feedback, than for the money: *"Appreciation is just one of the big factors that contribute... I mean, in education gaining meaning from your salary is out of the question..."*, and *'Money is the last thing I work for...'* (Participant 5). Perhaps due to results being so important in this line of work (as discussed under 'tangible results'), and the fact that there are so many poor performing educators lacking motivation and commitment (Xaba, 2011), receiving feedback in the form of appreciation and recognition for hard work is meaning-related.

Trust was mentioned by more than half (55%) of the participants as giving meaning in work. Trust in the sense that educators feel that learners are comfortable and feel safe to open up and share problems with them in order for them to be able to render assistance, e.g., *"... when you see they trust you and are opening up to you... I am not just a teacher, they share their problems with me..."* and *"The psychology that I took at University helps me a lot to be able to help them with deeper things... I see more than others, I can spot a problem or when a student isn't feeling well"* (Participant 3); and *"Trust, a relationship of trust. I had a learner last year who stayed over at my house. I would never in my life thought I would do*

that, but I did” and “she could come to me with all her problems...” (Participant 6). Trust could thus be seen as a trait of positive relationships and may lead to acts of selflessness and caring as described in the above mentioned quote. Altruism can be described as acts of selflessness, compassion, empathy, helping, and supporting others (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005). Of these factors making up altruism were individually mentioned by participants; hand in hand with having a trusting relationship. The researcher is thus convinced that trusting relationships most likely lead to acts of altruism. Through the learners trusting the educator and opening up to them, the educator has the opportunity to help them, as described by Participant 7: “I am there for them, whatever they need me for; with educational stuff or personal stuff by helping in any way that I can...”.

The above themes resonate with the work done by Frankl (1963) and Emmons (2003). Frankl (1963) discussed three broad approaches towards finding meaning; the first is through experiential values, the second through creative values and the third through attitudinal values. Emmons (2003) believed that people find meaning through work/achievement, intimacy/relationships, religion/spirituality, and generosity. The themes relating to sources of meaning that emerged from this qualitative exploration will be discussed below in line with the work of Frankl and Emmons.

The transfer of knowledge is connected to ***feedback and tangible results*** as these two antecedents indicate how well the educator is performing this teaching task. ***Making a positive difference*** could further be linked to meaning through work/achievement for educators, since being committed to work in the sense of not only adding to a learner’s knowledge, but also forming them as a person, could be personally rewarding. Attitudinal values are evident in this source of meaning and can be described in terms of having, for example, compassion (Frankl, 1963). When educators deeply care for the development of the learner beyond academics, and want to make a positive difference in their lives, one might consider that educators are exhibiting Frankl’s (1963) attitudinal values, and find meaning therein.

Most of the participants indicated that having ***positive relationships*** at work (either with the learners or colleagues) was an important factor providing them with meaning in work. With this the involvement or good relationships with the parents were also mentioned. Positive relationships link with Emmons’ (2003) intimacy or relationships (a desire for close,

reciprocal relationships). **Trust**, as identified by this study, could also be grouped here, as it describes a characteristic of a positive relationship and many participants explained that having open and trusting relationships, reaching beyond school-related matters give them meaning in their work, for example: *“I am there for them, whatever they need me for with educational stuff or personal stuff, by helping any way that I can”* (Participant 7). Positive relationships and trust relate well with experiential values as described by Frankl (1963). A good example that Frankl (1963) gave of experiential values was the love individuals feel towards something or someone they value. Trust might furthermore lead one to being selfless, generous or kind (acts of altruism). Having open and trusting relationships with an altruistic attitude also support Frankl’s (1963) attitudinal value and Emmons’ (2003) ‘generosity’ (kindness/selflessness) as sources of meaning in work.

Tangible results could be related to work/achievement (Emmons, 2003) as sources of meaning, as individuals indicated that they obtain meaning when seeing the good outcomes of their labour (e.g., students’ results). It might also be due to an experiential value (Frankl, 1963) as educators often indicated caring about the learners and hence wanting them to succeed. A good example of this was communicated by Participant 19 who stated that when his class had a 100% pass rate with an average of 70%, *“...then I had the meaning in why I was a teacher... That was the best year of my career!”*

Feedback emerged as another strong theme indicating meaning and could be connected to transfer of knowledge and making a positive difference as all of these themes provide the educator with information to evaluate his/her efforts/effectiveness. When educators are putting effort into their work, in order to transfer their skills and knowledge to learners as best they can so as to make a positive difference, it is understandably rewarding to receive good feedback. Participant 1 indicated that such feedback makes her want to put even more effort into the work, implying that she derives meaning from her acknowledged efforts.

Many of these findings on the sources of meaning endorse previous findings, but also add new dimensions to the literature. The importance of developing a learner as a whole is seen in the combination of transferring knowledge and making a positive difference. Linked with this was feedback, both tangible and intangible. Educators can experience more meaning in their work if they receive more concrete and regular feedback (appreciation and/or recognition). The media, for instance, portrays educators in a very negative light, and having

it give more positive attention to this profession would already make a difference (e.g., articles in newspapers on educators' achievements or notes of appreciation).

The last important antecedent was relationships. However, this study went further through discovering that the quality of these relationships may largely be influenced by the amount of trust inherent to it. Educators form trusting relationships with learners through which the learners then feel safe to confide in them, ask for help and seek guidance. The teacher becomes significant to the child in the place of the parents whilst at school and has the opportunity to make a difference through this relationship. These trusting relationships become the vehicle for making a positive difference and altruism.

It is important to note that these findings are specific to the context of education. The sources of meaning that this research identified also tend to overlap and it was not always very clear whether it was purely a source of meaning or whether it could also be seen as a mechanism towards making meaning. In the next section, the meaning-making mechanisms will be discussed in a similar manner as was done in this section with the antecedents to meaning.

In summary it could be recommended that through interacting with the learners frequently, the educator can teach or form learners holistically by means of transferring knowledge academically and otherwise. By interacting with the learners, positive relationships can form which with the overall transfer of knowledge can give meaning to an educator. Such interactions could moreover breed trust, which in turn opens the floor for educators to act altruistic when required, also providing a sense of meaning. One could also argue that through adding meaning to somebody else's life, or meaning something to somebody, you are making a positive difference and thus building more meaning into your own. Schools and educators can try to create and foster a culture where appreciation and recognition is given, especially when learners performed well.

Meaning-making Mechanisms

The participants in this study seem to make meaning mainly through effort/conscientiousness in their work and through preparation (goal setting, attaining knowledge/skills). Other themes that were less prominent include building relationships, spirituality, and altruism.

Effort/conscientiousness was indicated by at least half (55%) of the participants in responses such as *“I think one of the big things I do is to deal with things immediately. When I get something to do, I do it as soon as I can”* (Participant 4); and *“Because I am trying to be more, uhmm, what do you call... mmm... don’t know I lost that word now, more dedication to my work, do you understand? Because when we do something, it is not possible for somebody to do it 100% to satisfaction, but I am trying to be 100%, to be perfect”*. Participant 15 also indicated that when you are a *‘lazy person, just sitting around’*, you will not find meaning in your work. Effort/conscientiousness can be described, for the purpose of this research study, as trying to work harder, do better and helping more. This conscientious attitude seems to be strongly associated to the antecedent of meaning of tangible results, as participants described that when the learners are performing well, it motivates them to want to put more effort into what they do.

Preparation was indicated by half of the participants (50%) as an important meaning-making mechanism, as this brings about good grades which give them a sense of meaning in their work. This includes planning, goal setting and attaining the necessary knowledge or skills, e.g., *“In my work, there should be preparation, otherwise without any preparation then there is no meaning”* (Participant 14); and *“I prepare, always prepare my work. I’m always on time with the syllabus... If you don’t prepare you won’t enjoy your work, definitely”* (Participant 10). Another participant described this behaviour by saying *“I come to work with a mission every day. Actually, I have already decided the previous day what I am going to be doing this period or that period...”* (Participant 8).

Goal setting and actively chasing their goals and dreams were described as being important aspects of life as it creates purpose. This was described well by Participant 5 who said that *“in order to reach ones goals you have to go out and make the change; you have to work for it”*. Many participants further explained that they need to have more knowledge, because their knowledge should not be limited to the curriculum. They need to obtain some extra outside knowledge on current practical information, trends in the business world, legislation, and the know-how to deal with certain things. Participant 2 pointed out that *“I look for information at home, read or get extra exam papers and other books to read so that I know more”*. Preparation seems to guide the educators’ behaviours and empowers them to confidently fulfil their role. *“Knowledge is power. The more you know, the more you can apply, the more meaning you can get from it”* (Participant 5). In summary, preparing

(through planning lessons, setting goals, obtaining extra knowledge or helpful skills) leads educators toward transferring knowledge better and thus also obtaining tangible results (antecedent of meaning).

Less prominent, yet still important mechanisms that were identified were building relationships, spirituality, and altruism. Having positive and trusting relationships emerged in this study as an important antecedent of meaning, however, it is important to realise that such relationships do not always form naturally - the educator has to build relationships with the learners. **Building relationships** was described very well by Participant 12 who said that he speaks to the learners on a personal level, he sits around with them quite a lot and tries to get to know and understand them. Actively building relationships with the learners, in turn leads to him never experiencing problems with them. On this point he explained that *“Whenever they do something that is a negative, I’m able to challenge them. I know what they want, because I speak to them”*. Building relationships, as described by many of the educators, can be done through actively listening to the learners, fostering clear two-way communication and gaining their trust (through, for example, being willing to walk the extra mile for them, fairness, and treating things shared in confidence with discretion). On the contrary, when learners are rude, difficult and disrespect authority, a good relationship cannot be formed and many participants mentioned that in such cases the meaning in their work actually decreases. Thus, building conducive relationships through interaction with learners seem to be both a source of meaning and a dynamic process through which meaning can be built.

Participants identified **practising spirituality** by saying *“...to make me feel meaningful or make meaning in work... It starts with my faith. It is a very personal thing. When I go to work I’ll pray...”* (Participant 5); and *“...the only thing that still keeps me in education is the fact that I am still allowed to pray with the learners”* (Participant 9). Participant 5 specified that the meaning he derives in his work is strongly related to bringing the learners closer to the Christian values, furthermore, explaining that educators are in a very privileged role to influence young people on a daily basis. Spirituality was guided by the conviction premise that it has to be actively practised: *“...you cannot just sit and say Lord... okaaay, I’ll be fine I’m praying... No. You have to work hard to achieve that. So, without God, I believe there’s nothing”* (Participant 12).

Altruism, through gaining others' trust, helping, showing compassion, and contributing to the greater cause, was explained well by Participants 7 and 12: *"I am there for them, whatever they need me for with educational stuff or personal stuff, by helping any way that I can"*. Having a helping, altruistic attitude reaching beyond the school context makes a big difference in the learners' lives, *"Not necessarily here at school, but even outside if you meet them, you speak to them to understand where they come from. Sometimes I go to their houses, because where they come from determines their behaviour and also determines who they will be in the future. I am able to sharpen them, based on that"*.

Adopting an altruistic attitude (mechanism) could be related to both trust and making a positive difference (antecedents). Many of the factors making up altruism were mentioned by participants, going hand in hand with having trusting relationships. The researcher is convinced that trusting relationships (antecedent), may lead to acts of altruism (mechanism). Through the learners trusting the educators and opening up to them, the educators have the opportunity to help them, as described well by Participant 7 above.

Some of the meaning-making mechanisms found in literature include authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, and cultural/interpersonal sense-making (Rosso et al., 2010). Rosso et al. (2010) mentioned that the mechanisms for meaning-making which already exist focus on the psychological processes underlying any experience as being meaningful. The authors categorised these mechanisms into a theoretical framework consisting of individuation, contribution, self-connection and unification. This framework summarises the four major pathways to meaningful experiencing as understood by Rosso et al. (2010). This study's meaning-making mechanisms compare well with some of the above mentioned mechanism and the researcher integrated the mechanisms into this study's findings. The main meaning-making mechanisms identified in this study and discussed hereafter include effort/conscientiousness and preparation.

Authenticity refers to the alignment of one's true self with one's behaviour (Rosso et al., 2010). With regard to meaning research, it has been found that work experiences promoting the true or authentic self provide meaning, because individuals can act in consistence with their values, beliefs and identities whilst at work (Shamir, 1991). Authenticity is categorised under self-connection (Rosso et. al, 2010) explaining that it is a process enhancing the self.

Effort/conscientiousness and planning, as identified in this research, relate well with authenticity, in that an important manifestation of authenticity can be found in the experience of self-concordance, which is described as the extent to which people feel they are behaving consistent with, or in concordance to, their interests and values (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). In other words, if a participant valued hard work, commitment, and is interested in teaching others, for instance, he/she might experience authenticity in a role where he/she can exert effort, plan and set goals in order to optimally transfer knowledge. One good example of a participant trying to live out personal values at work, and supporting why effort/conscientiousness could be ascribed to meaning-making, or as a mechanism thereof linked to authenticity, was Participant 15, saying: “...when we do something, it is not possible for somebody to do it 100% to satisfaction, but I am trying to be 100%, to be perfect...I am trying to be more dedicated”. Participant 2 stated that she will prepare by working through old exam papers and reading a wide variety of literature, in order to be able to transfer what she knows to the learners as best she can. This participant might be driven by a love of teaching and when she performs this part of her work optimally through being conscientious, putting in effort and planning, she might experience a sense of authenticity. Effort/conscientiousness could form a part of the self-connection quadrant of the theoretical framework for meaningfulness given by Rosso et al. (2010), as it is a mechanism of meaning that leads to feelings that one is behaving consistent with what is important to oneself, thus to authenticity.

Preparation, as mentioned above, was an important mechanism identified by the participants in this study through which they create meaning. It could furthermore be possible that when one is properly prepared, one's self-esteem (evaluation of one's own self-worth) and self-efficacy (belief in one's own ability) are enhanced. Participant 3 explained that when she is prepared, her sense of self is strengthened: “... gives me more self-confidence...I feel good about myself. Yes, I think self-confidence and self-assurance”. Preparation thus relates to self-esteem and self-efficacy, both being categorised under individuation by Rosso et al. (2010). Preparation is what will set you apart from others and is also, like self-connection, focused on the self, rather than others.

Another mechanism identified was attaining knowledge/skills in order to know what you are talking about as participants described it, which also links with preparation.

Participant 2 said that when she is properly prepared and has attained extra knowledge and skills, she feels empowered and experiences more self-confidence, because she can transfer the knowledge adequately. Rosso et al. (2010) describe self-efficacy as a mechanism of meaning as it provides individuals with a sense of personal control or autonomy in the workplace, and creates the belief that one has the ability and the competence to produce the desired outcome. Self-efficacy and self-esteem both fall in the quadrant ‘individuation’.

Finally, Emmons (2003) describes the attainment of goals as ‘a major benchmark for the experience of well-being’ (p. 106). Planning (specifically goal-setting) adds to the experience of meaning and meaning has been proved to contribute to greater well-being (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012). Preparation (planning) thus additionally seems to contribute and relate to a sense of purpose, direction and meaningfulness in work (*“proper planning makes work meaningful”*, Participant 14). Preparation, as linked to purpose, can be categorised under unification or contribution, which is focused more on others than the self and on mastering of challenges. Spirituality could be categorised under contribution as well, as it relates well with transcendence and a sense of interconnectedness (Rosso et al., 2010).

Often during the analysis process, the researcher and co-researcher deemed what the responses to the questions pertaining to specific sources of meaning are and how educators make meaning, as interlinked, or even in some cases the same. It was difficult, in some instances, to clearly indicate whether something was merely an antecedent or also a mechanism. An example of this might be that spirituality can be seen as a source of meaning, but that it also contributes to the development of meaning. Frankl (1963) explained that there is meaning in suffering and that spirituality (transcendence) is used to overcome difficulties. Altruism as mentioned earlier is another mechanism which might possibly be viewed as an antecedent by some. Altruism might contribute towards making a positive difference and create trust, but it could also independently lead to more meaning in work. Trust (antecedent) could also be seen as a mechanism to build positive relationships (antecedent), which lead to meaning in work. What’s more, *positive relationships* are also not a clear cut antecedent as the *building of relationships* is clearly a mechanism. Relationships connect with a sense of *unification* as it offers belongingness, through social identification and interpersonal connectedness.

In summary, it might therefore be recommended that in order for individuals to experience activities as being meaningful or to build meaning, educators should invest effort in their daily tasks, act conscientious, prepare well, build relationships, practise spirituality, and adopt an altruistic attitude. This could possibly then lead to a sense of individuation, contribution, self-connection and unification (Rosso, et al., 2010), all powerful pathways (mechanisms) towards experiencing meaning.

Outcomes of Experiencing Meaning in Work

The outcomes of experiencing meaning in work that were identified by participants in this study were happiness, intrapersonal satisfaction, experiencing meaningfulness, motivation, and work enjoyment.

More than half (60%) of participants clearly stated that having meaning in work makes them **happy** or provides an overall sense of feeling good, e.g., *“Of course it makes you happy, and you’re not just happy whilst you’re at work, when you go home, you’re also happy...”* (Participant 1) and *“I think personally you are happy...”* (Participant 6). The terms happiness and well-being are both used to describe positive psychology features and are characterised by positive feelings (e.g., joy) and positive activities (e.g., engagement) (Seligman, 2002). Wallis (2005) wrote that most people find happiness in family connections and friendships, which would be related to this study’s antecedent (or mechanism), namely positive relationships. Happiness would form part of the hedonic understanding of well-being and was also experienced through contributing to the lives of others (Wallis, 2005), which is similar to the *antecedent* making a positive difference.

Meaning in work provides **intrapersonal satisfaction** to just less than half (40%) of the participants, e.g., *“It gives me self-confidence. I feel good about myself...”* (Participant 3); and *“I enjoy seeing somebody reach a goal he wanted to, it is good to see when a learner took his life from a negative to a positive and to know that it is because of little meaning I could give him... that is my reaction”* (Participant 5). Intrapersonal satisfaction for teachers in this study can be explained or interpreted from two sides: On the one hand, participants indicated intrapersonal experiences contributing to their intrapersonal contentment or satisfaction, including pride, self-confidence and self-efficacy. From the eudaimonic approach, meaning relates to living well and actualising your potential (Deci & Ryan, 2008). On the other hand, participants explained that when they do their work well, they have a clear

conscience or they indicated thankfulness to God as He provides them with the knowledge and skills they need. Both these meaning-related forms of awareness build coherent sense of self that underpins their confidence in what they do and their competence to do it – leading to positive outcomes.

When they experience meaning in their work, described as understanding and making sense of what work signifies (Steger, 2011), 35% of the participants feel a large amount of significance in their work role. This indicates that when meaning in work is experienced, it leads to participants **feeling meaningful** in their roles as educators. In other words, when they feel that what they do has meaning, they feel meaningful as educators. Participant 14 described this well by stating that when he sees he is effectively transferring knowledge to the learners, it gives him meaning because *“it makes you feel meaningful...”* Participant 10 described that her sense of meaningfulness as an educator stems from the knowledge that she knows *“...they understand me and they understand my work. That shows that now, I have a meaning to them”*.

From the results it further became evident that a group of the participants (35%) seem to be **motivated** and willing to invest effort and energy into their work (work engagement) if they experience meaning in work, e.g., *“It inspires you to do more and to go further and to actually put in a greater effort...”* (Participant 1); and *“I’m also motivated to try more, to do better, to help more...”* (Participant 7). Work engagement offers mutually beneficial outcomes to both the employee and the employer, as it can be described as a ‘positive work-related state of fulfilment, characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption’ (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). This means that employees with high engagement levels are likely to work harder than those with lower engagement levels, whilst enjoying it.

Participants indicated that having meaning in work leads to higher **work enjoyment** (35%). This refers to an individual feeling a sense of pleasure or gratification whilst doing the work. In this sense, participants described that experiencing meaning in work *“...makes me want to come to work every day. That is the big thing.”* (Participant 4); and *“... you enjoy your work and you are happy...”* (Participant 13).

Well-being has been approached from two sides in literature, one being the hedonic tradition, mostly focusing on **happiness** (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Peterson et al., (2007) proved that meaning builds happiness as participants in this study described that the experience of meaning in work gives an overall sense of feeling good and of happiness. The hedonic tradition with its focus on happiness is defined as the presence of positive affect with an absence of negative affect (Deci & Ryan, 2008), and relates to the current findings. Literature emphasises that it largely contributes to people being successful across different life-domains (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), and higher well-being (Jayawickreme et al., 2012). Eudaimonia differs from hedonia as can be explained by the fact that even though people might report feeling happy, it does not mean that they are psychologically well.

In this study findings indicated that participants see meaning as leading to higher levels of **intrapersonal** and eudaimonic experiences. Previous research has found that meaning is related to life satisfaction (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). This could, in turn, contribute to better well-being and overall health (Eriksson & Lindström, 2006). Meaningfulness was identified as an outcome of meaning in work. This means that educators experience a great amount of significance in their work roles when they can make sense of and understand what their purpose for being in the role is, or what their work signifies overall (meaning in work) (Rosso et al., 2010). They explained that countless times in previous literature the terms meaning and meaningfulness have been used incorrectly, which might have caused a bit of a linguistic confusion for readers and researchers alike. This study clearly defined the two interrelated terms and distinguished where possible and necessary.

The findings point out that meaning adds to the experience of higher motivation, which is aligned with **work engagement** (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Problems in education include that the qualified educators who are functioning in school environments are experiencing a negative organisational climate (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006), low morale (Mentz, 2007), poor performance and a lack of overall commitment (Modisaotsile, 2012). Experiencing more meaning in one's working environment and personal life has been proven to lead to more positive work, health, and well-being outcomes (Day & Rottinghaus, 2003; Steger et al., 2006), and to higher motivation. Attention should be given to helping educators experience more meaning in their work.

Work enjoyment could also be placed within the eudaimonic tradition and together with intrinsic motivation these form two of the three (the third being absorption) central pillars in the experience of flow. Flow is the peak experience of work-related well-being and is described as wanting to do the activity without any other incentive than the activity per se (Fagerlind, Gustavsson, Johansson, & Ekberg, 2013). Work enjoyment could also be linked to work engagement, as work engagement describes a positive work-related state of fulfilment.

Optimal psychological functioning, or well-being, entails *happiness, satisfaction* and actualising one's potential (*motivation, engagement and flow*) (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The outcomes of meaning in work also integratively correlate with eudaimonia, as it places a large emphasis on living a full and deeply satisfying life through living well and actualising one's potential (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Waterman, 1993), and hedonia, where happiness is the main focus point (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Both meaning and happiness have been proved to contribute to well-being (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012), and therefore, the findings of this study indicate that the outcomes of experiencing meaning are understandable and fit in with existing literature on the outcomes of meaning well.

Although other less prominent outcomes were also identified, it became clear that in this context it is possible to cultivate and harvest happiness, intrapersonal satisfaction, meaningfulness, motivation, and work enjoyment through planting the necessary antecedents and to learn how to use the meaning-making mechanisms. Although these are three different categories of meaning in work and the terms and findings correlate quite a lot, each also in its own right add a specific dimension to meaning, as each represents a different phase or process. Heine, Proulx, and Vohs (2006) state that meaning can be either found or made. The antecedents are viewed as the most natural sources of meaning through which meaning can sometimes simply be found, without having to actively try to obtain meaning. The mechanisms identified would then be where meaning is actively made. The last category which this study focused on heavily was the outcomes of obtaining this sense of meaning.

The figure below was developed upon completion of the discussion of the findings, in order to provide a glance view of the main findings of this study. In order to understand why certain links have been made, refer to the findings and discussion above. Figure 2 summarises the mechanisms, sources (antecedents) and the outcomes of experiencing meaning in work,

with the relationships between each. The figure indicates that certain mechanisms lead to specific sources of meaning, and that possible relationships exist amongst these and other sources of meaning. The outcomes of having meaning in work were found to be a result of a combination of using the mechanisms and/or obtaining sources of meaning in work. Certain outcomes respectively further lead to other sources of meaning, which would in turn again lead to more meaning outcomes. Dashed lines thus indicate where the outcome of one process might lead to other factors in the previous process of the figure. The figure presented thus offers a visual representation of the most prominent findings of this research study and the possible relationships between them.

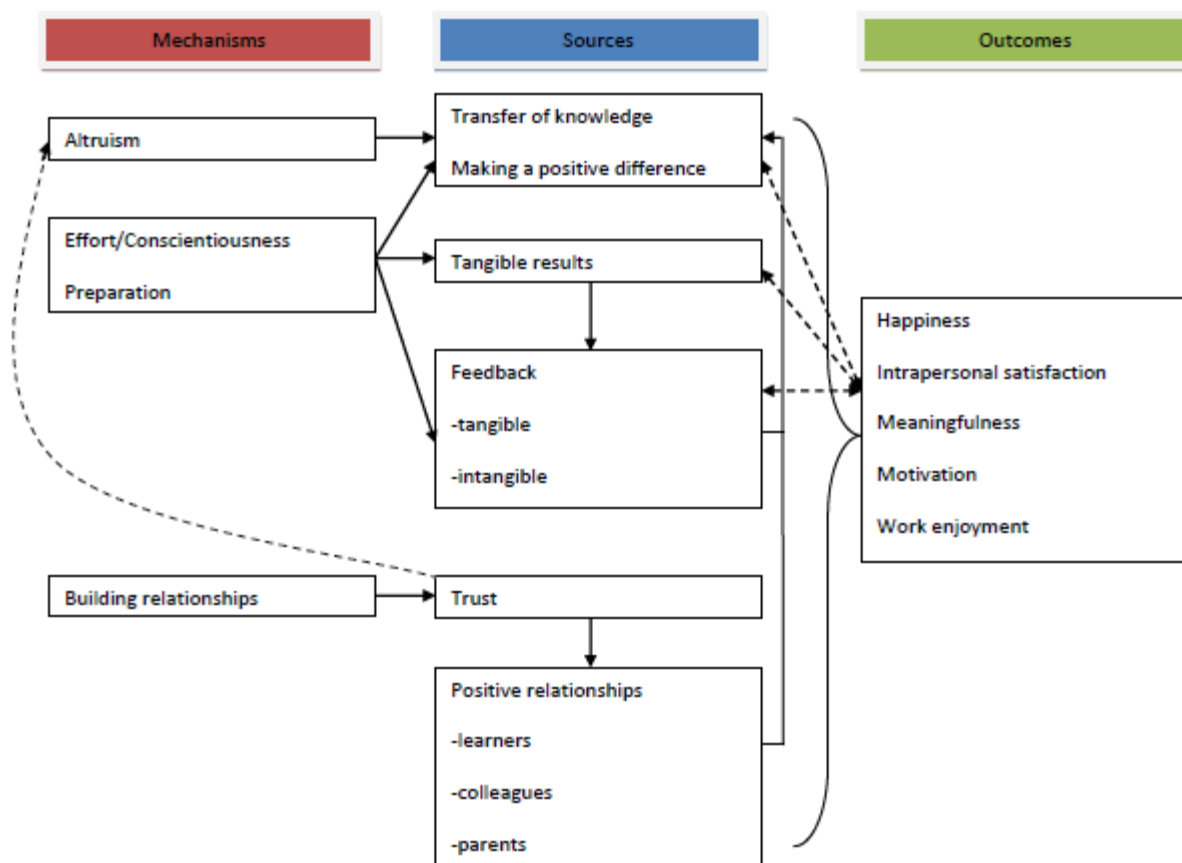


Figure 2. Visual summary of findings

Conclusion

The purpose of the current research study was to explore and describe how individuals in the educational environment approach meaning in their work. The aim was to identify a clear conceptualisation of meaning and to explore the main antecedents, meaning-making mechanisms and outcomes of experiencing meaning in work. The major findings were extracted and discussed in the previous section with quotations from the participants supporting each finding. Existing literature on meaning was explored and compared to the findings in order to determine how well this study relates to other research, but also to make it clear what sets this research apart through highlighting the contribution of this research study.

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was followed during which the 20 participants were interviewed and given diaries to keep record of, and explain their conceptualisation and experiences of meaning in work. The interviews produced most of the valuable information, with the diaries supporting these findings..

Participants' conceptualisation of meaning was mainly divided into purpose and significance-centred approaches. The main antecedents of meaning in work for educators can be linked to their key role as educators, which could be described as to be part of preparing learners for the world, including transfer of knowledge and making a positive contribution to their future through a strong, trusting relationship. The emphasis on trust was viewed as an important building block for a positive relationship, but it also often provides the opportunity for altruism which could be seen as an antecedent on its own, or as a mechanism towards making a positive difference. The need for feedback relates to the transfer of knowledge, making a positive difference, and tangible results as all of these are in their own right indicators of how well educators are performing. This study specifically made a valuable contribution through identifying that feedback has two possible dimensions. Feedback can either be given or received in a tangible form, such as test results or recognition in the form of awards; or in a more intangible manner through things such as appreciation, gratitude and other subjective forms.

The main meaning-making mechanisms identified in the study were effort/conscientiousness, preparation and building relationships. It became evident that the

sources of meaning and the meaning-making mechanisms are rather interlinked and that there was a lot of overlap between them. A good example of this is positive relationships, viewed as both an antecedent of meaning, but also as a pathway towards making meaning. The study also attempted to integrate the meaning-making mechanisms into a comprehensive framework already existing in literature (Rosso et al., 2010), to help form a holistic picture of research rather than every researcher creating his/her own framework, which can lead to confusion and repetition in research.

The specific sources and antecedents indicated in this study specify outcomes that might help in alleviating some of the most prominent issues in education in Mpumalanga, and perhaps in South Africa overall. Problems education is facing include a negative organisational climate (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006), low morale (Mentz, 2007), and a lack of commitment (Modisaotsile, 2012). These can be addressed through for example increasing meaning by developing positive relationships, trust, making a positive difference and receiving more feedback, followed by outcomes such as happiness, meaningfulness and engagement.

This study thus holds contributions to literature, organisations and the individual. Literature can incorporate some of these prominent findings to add to the existing field of knowledge and to broaden the understanding of meaning. Organisations, in this case schools and individual educators, can focus on incorporating more of the identified sources or antecedents of meaning into their practice in order to be able to reap the benefits of experiencing meaning in work.

This study thus supported previous research on the antecedents, meaning-making mechanisms and outcomes of meaning in work, but focused it on the education sector in Mpumalanga. Investigating how the current research aligned and differed from previous research proved to be valuable as this confirmed previous findings, but also contributed depth and further understanding to it. An example of this may be that research has identified self-esteem and self-efficacy as meaning-making mechanisms, and this study identified that proper preparations add to the experience of higher self-assurance, self-esteem and self-efficacy. This research also tried to fit its unique findings into research already done, as to form a holistic and integrative picture for the reader of what has been found in meaning

research. This strengthens meaning research as a whole, rather than each researcher doing his/her own things and, in so doing, cause confusion in research.

The findings (both the unique contributions and the findings endorsing previous literature) again prove that meaning is invaluable as it leads to so many different aspects of overall personal and work-related well-being.

This discussion thus concluded that meaning in work plays a crucial role in the overall functioning at work and in the personal lives of the participants involved in this study. The discussion challenged the reader to think in a more abstract manner about the findings when taking into account the specific context as well as what has been found in previous research. In conclusion, the research article captured the perceptions and experiences of 20 educators with regard to meaning in work; explored, discussed, compared and integrated the findings with previous research and finally also emphasised the relevance and importance of experiencing meaning in work.

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CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the current research study was to explore and describe the understanding, perceptions and experiences of meaning in work amongst a sample of educators. The conclusions of this study are aligned to the research purpose, questions and their findings, and therefore specifically address: how educators conceptualise the term ‘meaning’, the antecedents of meaning in work, the meaning-making processes that are used to make meaning in work, and the personal outcomes if meaning in work is experienced.

The following section describes all the major findings and the conclusions drawn. Thereafter, the acknowledged limitations of the research, recommendations, and a reflection of the researcher’s overall experience whilst conducting the research study are given.

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

3.1.1 Conceptualisation of Meaning from Literature

The concept of meaning has been explored greatly, but definitions of meaning have varied widely across theoretical works. It has mainly been defined in terms of purpose, significance, and through multi-faceted definitions combining the two.

Firstly, definitions inspired by purpose indicate that meaning is motivational and is described as what people are trying to do or achieve with their lives or what the overarching purpose of their lives is (Frankl, 1963). Steger, Frazer, Oishi, and Kaler (2006) supplemented Frankl’s (1963) theory by saying that meaning is about understanding or perceiving purpose in the past, present and future of one’s life. Secondly, significance centred definitions indicate that meaning is created through people’s interpretations of their experiences, and that the overall significance of these experiences gives meaning in terms of the purpose that it adds to their lives (Steger, 2012). In other words, significance-driven definitions advocate that one’s life has meaning when it stands for something (Steger, 2012). Thirdly, and the most comprehensive way of describing meaning, is multifaceted definitions where the two approaches mentioned above are combined with an affective dimension. For the purpose of

this study meaning is defined as the extent to which people understand, make sense of, or see significance in their lives; accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose, mission, or over-arching aim in life (Steger, 2011).

The fact that work has a particular meaning does not necessarily imply that work is meaningful, according to Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010). Meaningfulness implies that the work has meaning and describes the amount of significance one attaches to one's work; whereas meaning should be set aside for instances when one would like to refer to the type of meaning made in work or what the work signifies (Rosso et al., 2010). It is important to distinguish between the two terms, although they are closely related. Where necessary, the researcher attempted to do so, but, because this research wanted to address both meaning and meaningfulness, the term 'meaning' in work was also referred to a lot. Meaning in work refers to the meaning, importance, significance and/or purpose individuals derive from their work (Rosso et al., 2010) and thus entails both meaning and meaningfulness aspects.

3.1.2 Conceptualisation of Meaning According to Participants

The first finding in this study revealed that participants mainly understand and describe meaning as being purpose- and significance-driven, including having a sense of purpose, a reason for being, and a positive impact or influence on someone or something through one's actions. Participants stated that there has to be meaning (significance) in what one does, either for one's own or others' benefit.

Steger (2011) believed it to be sensible to define meaning as the extent to which people understand, see significance in their lives, and the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose or overarching aim in life. As one of the big challenges in meaning research is that there is not one standard definition of meaning, this research contributes to supporting the conceptualisation of meaning, according to Steger's (2011) comprehensive definition thereof.

3.1.2 Antecedents of Meaning in Work

With regard to the antecedents of meaning in work, the major findings indicated that the transfer of knowledge, making a positive difference, having positive relationships, tangible

results, receiving feedback and trust lead to meaning in work. There was an extensive focus on obtaining meaning in work from being in the classroom, and the ability to teach the learners new things by transferring knowledge to them. Furthermore, being able to have a positive impact on the learners through this transfer of knowledge, or through acts of kindness, selflessness and overall altruism, also added to meaning. Having positive and trusting relationships with the learners (and co-workers) was identified by most participants as a very important source of meaning in work. Another noteworthy finding was that these educators acknowledged that seeing tangible results (e.g. good grades, old learners doing well after school), and receiving feedback (appreciation, recognition, gratitude) add a lot of meaning in their line of work.

The identified antecedents relate well with the sources of meaning identified by both Frankl (1963) and Emmons (2003). The transfer of knowledge relates to work/achievement (Emmons, 2003); when you believe your work has a purpose/significance, you might gain meaning from transferring knowledge to the learners. This will ultimately add significance to the work and hence raise achievement levels. The transfer of knowledge, however, does not refer to only work-related expectations (which in this case would be academic achievement), but also to transferring knowledge which fall outside the academic curriculum (sharing wisdoms about life and love). This positive difference one could make could also, to a certain extent, be linked with work/achievement.

Positive relationships link strongly with Emmons' (2003) intimacy/relationships. At the same time, the finding is also different from other research as it elaborated on the antecedent of relationships and identified that an important condition for positive relationships is trust. It was found that having open and trusting relationships, and reaching beyond academic matters give educators meaning in their work. Frankl (1963) explained experiential values as the love individuals feel towards someone they value; therefore, positive relationships also relate well with experiential values. If the trusting relationship leads to altruistic attitudes, it thus also supports Frankl's (1963) attitudinal value and Emmons' (2003) 'generosity' (kindness/selflessness).

A valuable contribution was specifically made through identifying that feedback has two possible dimensions. Feedback can either be given or received in a tangible form via things

such as good grades or awards, or alternatively in a more intangible manner through more subjective forms of feedback, such as acknowledgement, appreciation and/or gratitude.

3.1.3 Meaning-making Mechanisms

Putting effort into work or behaving in a conscientiousness manner, and preparing properly were identified as the main meaning-making mechanisms and might be ascribed to the fact that there was such a large focus on the transfer of knowledge. Many participants indicated that when they do the above-mentioned things, they feel as if there is meaning in what they do. The researcher was able to successfully integrate the mechanisms identified with the theoretical framework on the four major pathways to making meaning, according to Rosso et al., (2010), as these findings correlate well with some of their identified meaning-making mechanisms (authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem and purpose).

Effort/conscientiousness and preparation could be seen as another form of authenticity and could form part of the self-connection quadrant of the theoretical framework provided by Rosso et al. (2010), as it is a mechanism that leads to one feeling one's behaviour is consistent with one's values. If, for instance, one values hard work and commitment, one might experience authenticity in a role where one can put in effort, plan, set and reach goals. One's self-esteem and self-efficacy increase when one is properly prepared. Both of these factors are categorised under individuation and therefore preparation might be a subsection of this quadrant in the framework (Rosso et al., 2010).

Another less prominent meaning-making mechanism identified was the attainment of knowledge/skills, which the researcher also believes relate with preparation. Preparation additionally seems to contribute to a sense of purpose, direction and meaningfulness in work. Therefore, preparation, as linked to purpose, can be categorised under *unification* or *contribution*, which is focused more on others than the self and on mastering something. Finally, relationship building and spirituality were also identified as other less significant mechanisms and could be categorised with *contribution*, as they relate well with transcendence and a feeling of interconnectedness (Rosso et al., 2010).

The questions pertaining to the specific factors giving meaning and the meaning-making mechanisms were often answered by very similar responses. The researcher found that there

is a sense of interconnectedness between the antecedents and the meaning-making mechanisms. In some instances, something might be a mechanism contributing to an antecedent, and other times that same or a very similar thing might independently be an antecedent. Both the less prominent meaning-making mechanisms mentioned above were identified as being antecedents as well. As an example, spirituality can be seen as a direct source of meaning, but also as a mechanism, for the active exercising of faith contributes to the development of meaning. Another example might be that altruism might contribute to making a positive difference and trust (mechanism), but it could also independently lead to more meaning in work (antecedent).

3.1.4 Outcomes of Experiencing Meaning in Work

The main outcomes of experiencing meaning in work as identified in this study include happiness, intrapersonal satisfaction, experiencing meaningfulness, motivation, and work enjoyment. The first three benefit the individual on a personal level, as explained in the literature review. Motivation and work enjoyment both benefit the organisation. All of the outcomes could be seen as contributors to well-being. All the outcomes of meaning in work connect with eudaimonia, as it emphasises living a full and satisfying life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Both meaning and happiness largely contribute to well-being (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012); and, therefore, these results are perfectly supportive of previous research. Although meaning independently contributes to well-being, it also contributes largely to happiness (Seligman, 2007), which then also contributes to well-being.

An important finding was that intrapersonal satisfaction could be divided into experiences of intrapersonal (pride, self-confidence, self-efficacy) and eudaimonian (living well and actualising one's potential) satisfaction. This finding relates to and builds on research done by Reker and Wong (1988), who found that the realisation of meaning is always accompanied by the person feeling satisfaction and fulfilment.

When more meaning in work is experienced, participants indicated that they feel more meaningful in their roles as educators. Rosso et al. (2010) highlighted that countless times in previous literature, the terms meaning and meaningfulness have been incorrectly used which might have caused confusion. This study attempted to contribute by clearly defining the two interrelated terms and distinguishing between them where possible and necessary. This

specific finding is interesting and valuable as the two related terms are clearly different if the one can lead to the other.

Meaning was reported to lead to higher levels of motivation, thus, strongly relating to work engagement. Work engagement is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). Motivation and work enjoyment (another outcome that was identified) largely contribute to the experience of flow. Flow is described as the ultimate experience of work-related well-being where an individual ‘gets lost in his work’ due to enjoyment (Fagerlind, Gustavsson, Johansson, & Ekberg, 2013).

Well-being consists of happiness, satisfaction, and actualising one’s potential (experiencing meaningfulness, motivation and enjoyment) (Deci & Ryan, 2008). By paying more attention to helping educators experience more meaning in their work, one can increase overall well-being and help resolve or address many of the well-publicised difficulties in South African education, including low morale, motivation and commitment. (Jackson & Rothmann, 2006; Mentz, 2007; Modisaotsile, 2012).

This research study’s outcomes of experiencing meaning correlate highly with Bonebright et al. (2000) who found that experiencing meaning leads to different positive work outcomes, including higher motivation, performance, job satisfaction, and engagement levels. Some of this research’s findings on the outcomes of meaning indicate new, or little explored avenues of meaning, but most of the outcomes support previous research as indicated above. This could be because researchers such as Bonebright et al. (2000) and Steger et al. (2006) have for a long time been exploring and proving that meaning leads to many positive outcomes, whilst less attention was given to identifying the sources of meaning. As the researcher prepared the literature review, it was evident that there are more studies available on the outcomes of meaning and that the sources of meaning have begun to be researched only more recently.

A final conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that meaning in work is of great importance and that it plays an important role in the overall functioning at work and in the personal lives of the participants involved in this study. This conclusion is supported by Participant 16 who said, *“When I experience meaning... generally I think I’m more productive, more positive...”;* Participant 5 stating *“There is a lot of meaning that you can get*

in your work, money definitely is not a part of it - that is the last reason why I work... ”; and Participant 11, who said that “Everyone has a meaning of being whatever he or she is; you can never be a puppet. You have to have meaning”.

3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

Locke (2001) suggests that qualitative studies limit the generalisation of the findings because they are limited to their specific settings. The tendency of qualitative research to be context bound has been acknowledged by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) as well, who advised that each reader should decide for him/herself about the usefulness of the study in other settings. The findings were compared to previous research which has been done in other contexts and similarities were found, indicating that it might be possible to generalise it.

Another limitation of this research study was that the research sample was slightly restricted, as participants were chosen based on voluntary availability from conveniently selected high schools in Mpumalanga. Although, where possible, some arrangements were made to set up meetings with educators in order to ensure a rather representative sample, the study did not include all the language and racial groups in South Africa. The researcher included, as far as possible, participants from different races, genders and ages in order to obtain diverse perspectives.

Interviewing relies on the premise that the respondents will be willing to give truthful and comprehensive answers (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Schaw, 1995). Wimmer and Dominick (1997) explained that participants may be dishonest during the research interview due to awkwardness, lack of knowledge about the relevant topic, nervousness, or other possible psychological reasons. Participants may also choose to provide overly elaborate answers (Wimmer & Dominick 1997) which could mislead or confuse the researcher. Due to these factors in qualitative research, the validity and reliability of the interview data may be influenced (Breakwell et al., 1995). During the interview process, the researcher reassured the participants when they seemed unsure or uncomfortable. The researcher further made a conscious effort to keep the participants focused on the applicable topic, although this was not always possible (perhaps also because this might have been a relatively abstract concept to individuals who were not familiar with it). The researcher actively tried to guide the participants back to the topic through clarification or paraphrasing. The researcher also

attempted to guard against her own personal biases during the research process to keep the findings as valid as possible.

The researcher acknowledged all of these limitations and made a conscious attempt to account for them where possible.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.3.1 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of this study, various recommendations can be made for future research on the topic of meaning. These recommendations will be discussed hereafter.

There is a large gap in South African literature on meaning, compared to a multitude of available international literature. Through having a clearer understanding of how meaning is obtained or made in this context, future South African researchers can develop ways in which educators can foster and increase meaning in work to the mutual benefit of the organisation and the employee. Kashdan and Steger (2007) suggested that one of the most important aims of psychology ought to be discovering mechanisms that enable individuals to achieve higher levels of lasting well-being. Because meaning contributes greatly to an individual's well-being, developing and understanding methods to make or increase meaning could have a substantial overall positive impact for all individuals involved, perhaps even in different contexts.

It is advisable for future researchers on meaning to conduct their research in view of the guidelines provided by Rosso et al., 2010. This study took stock of most of the research which has been done on this topic in the past, summarising the findings in a straightforward and informative manner. By following the advice of Rosso et al., researchers on this topic would know, for example, when and how to refer to meaning, meaningfulness or meaning in work, making it easier for other researchers to understand what is meant.

Another interesting alley that could be further explored is whether meaning is gained in more or less the same manner by all people, or whether it really is a completely relativistic and individualistic experience differing from person to person and/or context to context, as

advocated by Battista and Almond (1973). Research on meaning might also benefit from studies focusing on the stability of meaning over time. This could be valuable in order to determine whether meaning remains constant over a certain period or whether it changes as time passes.

Along with the previous recommendation, this study stumbled across the question of whether the antecedents of meaning and perhaps even the meaning-making mechanism are context specific. Transfer of knowledge and making a positive difference seem to be specific to the context of education, as a major function of a teacher is ultimately to transfer knowledge (academic and personal), and this is ultimately what sparked this question. It would be valuable if researchers look into whether the type of meaning made is dependent on the context in which the person functions.

Research on the absence of meaning could be a valuable avenue towards exploring meaning. When asked what the outcomes of experiencing meaning are, a few participants mentioned outcomes relating to the absence of meaning in their work, including that they would be unhappy and that schools would face higher absenteeism levels with personnel investing less effort.

3.3.2 Recommendations for the Educational Sector

Both the management and educators themselves in this sector could benefit from seeking ways in which to incorporate some of the significant findings of this study into their work. However big or small the intervention is, involvement of educators in tasks they feel provide them with meaning is crucial. This might be achieved by different efforts or interventions led by personnel or management. Examples of practical ways by which to enhance meaning at schools include developing personal development plans with the staff and thereby identifying their needs and desires. If a teacher, for example, wishes to spend a lot of time interacting with the learners, building relationships, and transferring knowledge according to personal preferences, ensure that the teacher has enough classes and is not placed in more administrative roles, such as the position of deputy head; where time in class with the learners is then limited. Other examples include creating opportunities for, or being open to educators exercising altruism at work, offering different training opportunities for all levels of

educators, fostering a more appreciative culture in the working environment, or placing articles in local newspapers to honour educators for their work.

3.4 RESEARCHER PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

As this research study draws to an end, I would like to share some key thoughts that have developed throughout the research period. There is a vast amount of literature available on meaning, with many variations of the same key terms. My observation and findings conclude that meaning and meaningfulness have been researched from a perplexing array of angles internationally with little research available in South Africa at this stage. Although there is a vast amount of literature readily available, I often felt that there are few clear-cut definitions or findings as the terms ‘meaning’ and ‘meaningfulness’ have often been used in a confusing and interchangeable manner. The terms seem to pose a linguistic difficulty as they are so closely related and therefore, many researchers might have confused the terms in their research. This was a big challenge during the literature review phase, as I struggled to differentiate between the two mentioned terms until I discovered the study done by Rosso et al. (2010). Their study provided a theoretical integration and review of the literature on meaning that was available at that time. To me this represented a very necessary type of stocktaking in the meaning research and I thus viewed it as an important source to use going forward. Here I found a clear distinction between the two terms and that is what guided me in my research towards understanding the difference. In conclusion, I feel that it is necessary for researchers on the same topic to not only use, but also integrate the literature available in order not to repeat or re-invent the wheel.

This research supports international findings and will hopefully be used to broaden and guide South African studies on meaning, as I feel that insightful and valuable findings and connections were obtained from it. I thoroughly enjoyed becoming a part of the participants’ environment and viewing their perceptions on this topic. Each participant held his/her own views, yet, when coding and interpreting the data, I realised it was far more interlinked than I had anticipated. Upon completion of this research, I am of the opinion that meaning is a subjective matter that can be personalised, but that it has certain similarities across gender, age, race and ethnicity boundaries. Through my interviews with participants I further realised that the experience of meaning is an abstract, yet important, part of most of their lives, with or without their being aware of it. People either seemed to have meaning, or were searching

for it and all indicated meaning as a very positive and desirable thing to have. This to me irrevocably proves that Victor Frankl's (1963) opinion that all men have a 'will to meaning' is indeed true.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research

Meaning in work within the educational sector

Name of Researcher: Mandi Broodryk

Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important for you to read the following explanation thereof. This statement describes the purpose, relevance, rationale, benefits, discomforts and precautions of the study. Your participation premises will also be discussed herein.

Purpose of the study

The study will aim to explore and better understand meaning in the educational work environment of South Africa. It will be done by Mandi Broodryk, a Masters student at the Potchefstroom campus of the North-West University. Meaning has been proven to contribute to many a positive outcome, and therefore, in order to be able to hopefully contribute to educators experiencing more meaning in their work, this research study will explore how educators conceptualise the term ‘meaning’, try to determine the antecedents of meaning in work for educators, to identify which processes are used by educators to make meaning in their work and to identify the personal outcomes if meaning in work is experienced.

Participation in the study

Participation is absolutely voluntary and if you choose to participate it will involve a short face to face interview with the researcher, Mandi Broodryk, and a diary in which it will be required of you to keep book of certain events pertaining to meaning in your work. You may decide to leave participation of the study at any given time. The information gathered from the interview and the diary will strictly be used for educational purposes and confidentiality and ethical principles will strictly be adhered to. Interviews will be recorder for the sole purpose of transcribing the interviews in order to get the information given correct and precise.

Risks and Discomforts

No intentional risks or discomforts are anticipated as a result of your participation. It will take 20 minutes of your time (during work hours) to conduct the interview and thereafter you will be handed a diary in which you may keep track of daily happenings on your own time. After 5 working days the diary will be collected from you at the workplace.

Benefits

When meaning in work is better understood and the core contributors/sources of meaning in work are known, it will be possible to improve these factors in order to influence and improve work outcomes such as productivity, motivation, engagement, satisfaction and well-being. If the main source which educators feel give meaning to their work are known, future researchers in organisations and schools can develop ways in which they can foster and

increase meaning in work for the mutual benefit of the organisation and the employee. The study will also further aid in distinguishing the concept of meaning from other concepts and help give a clearer definition and understanding thereof. Another contribution of this study will be to confirm the importance of meaning in work for South African educators and the role it plays in their overall functioning.

Confidentiality

As mentioned above all information gathered during this process will be kept confidential. Information obtained will only be used for research purposes and feedback on the results of the study will be given to the Headmaster at the involved schools. Specific feedback or a follow-up interview may also be requested from the researcher if you would like to do so. The research results will be presented in the form of a mini-dissertation that will be submitted to the North-West University for examination.

Withdrawal without Prejudice

Participation in this research study is voluntary and refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty. Each participant is free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any given time during the research process.

Costs or Payments involved

There will be no costs involved in taking part in this research study nor will any participant receive any payment for participation.

Questions

Participants may contact Prof. Ian Rothmann (ian@ianrothmann.com, Dr. Elmari Deacon (elmari.deacon@nwu.ac.za) or myself, Mandi Broodryk (broodrykmandi@gmail.com) if you have any questions concerning this research or would like to gather information pertaining to it. If you as participant would like a short report on final findings of this study, it may be requested from the researcher.

Agreement

By signing this agreement you hereby give informed consent of all the above mentioned and is willing to participate in this research study.

Signature of Participant _____ **Date**_____

Participant Name _____

Signature of Researcher _____ **Date**_____

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research

Meaning in work within the educational sector

Name of the researcher

Mandi Broodryk

- I confirm that I have read, understand and will comply with the information given in the Informed consent form, for the above mentioned study.
- I understand that the data gathered for this study will be accessible to other professionals at the North-West University and that the results will be published.
- I will personally conduct the interviews with the participants and will be available for questions, feedback or guidance during and after the process.

Researcher: M. Broodryk

Date: 2012-11-22

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-structured, open-ended questions asked during the interview process:

- **How would you conceptualise the term ‘meaning’? Or in other words, what do you understand by the term ‘meaning’?**
- **Tell me about the meaning you experience in your work?**
- **Which specific factors give you meaning in your work?**
- **Which processes do you follow to make meaning in your work?**
- **What are the personal outcomes when you experience meaning in work?**