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A MEANINGFUL WORKPLACE: FROM THEORY DEVELOPMENT TO APPLICABILITY

by

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PRETORIA

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis which I hereby submit for the degree Philosophiae Doctor (with specialisation in Organizational Behaviour) at the University of Pretoria is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at another University.

Petrus Leonard Steenkamp

_____ _____

Signed **DATE**

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ABSTRACT

"A meaningful workplace: from theory development to applicability"

by

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Employees experience a loss of meaning in the workplace as a result of fragmentation and alienation (Casey, 2002). This seems to be the result of a change in the way in which people view their world and their experiences in the world, including their place of work. The purpose of the study was to investigate the loss of meaning at work. The investigation indicated a variety of factors as described by Terez (2000), Casey (2002), and Chalofsky (2010). The problem is not a singular problem which can be discussed in isolation, but tends towards a problem-complex, which relates to negative work-life-experiences and that result in the alienation of the individual from the self, work, the organization and others at work. The purpose of the study: "A meaningful workplace: From theory development to applicability" is to construe a **meaningful workplace** model through the identification and description of the constitutive dimensions which construe the underlying theoretical base. It was purposefully structured within the Organizational Behaviour domain, to indicate the applicability of the construct and its underlying theoretical base, in management practice in organizational settings. This purpose was pursued along the boundary lines of three objectives: To conceptualize the constitutive elements of the construct: **meaningful workplace;** to expand (develop) the theoretical base of the construct **meaningful workplace** and to present evidence for the existence of the construct based on empirical evidence from the world of work.

The study follows a qualitative research methodology consisting of a constructivist approach, utilizing two data gathering methods, and interpreted from a phenomenological perspective with a consistent focus on the lived experience of people at work. Two data gathering methods were utilised. Firstly a literature review, of formal scholarly publications was undertaken to identify the constitutive dimensions of the construct. The research followed the lead of the Meaning of Work Project Team (1987), Terez (2000), and Chalofsky (2010), and others.

Secondly three empirical data sets were investigated. The first data set consisted of the annual research results of the CRF Institute in relation to the "Best employer to work for". The second data set consisted of information gleaned from verbatim responses in an exit interview report, being made available for the study. The third data set consists of Repertory Grid interview data. Results of the research indicate that the construct **meaningful workplace** is an emerging construct in literature and that the tenets exist as an ideal in the lived experience of employees. The study contributes to the expansion (development) of the underlying theory of a **meaningful workplace** while simultaneously also providing a parallel understanding of human behaviour at work.

Key words: Organizational Behaviour, Meaningful Workplace, Meaning at work, Meaningful work; Postmodernism, Phenomenology, Constructivism, Repertory Grid, Qualitative Research.

OPSOMMING

PROMOTOR: Professor Johan S. Basson

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FAKULTEIT: Economic and Management Sciences

GRAAD: PhD in Organisasiegedrag

Werknemers ervaar ‘n verlies aan sinbelewing in die werkplek as gevolg van fragmentasie en vervreemding (Casey, 2002). Uit die navorsing blyk dit dat ‘n verskeidenheid van faktore soos deur Terez (2000), Casey (2002), en Chalofsky (2010), beskryf word, hiertoe bydra. In hoofsaak blyk dit die gevolg te wees van ‘n verandering in die perspektief en ervarings van mense in die wêreld, wat die wêreld van werk insluit. Die doel van hierdie studie was om ‘n potensiële oplossing vir hierdie problematiek deur die daarstelling van ‘n teoretiese raamwerk vir ‘n prakties implementeerbare model aan te bied. Meer spesifiek: Die doel van studie: **“A meaningful workplace: From theory development to applicability”** was om ‘n **betekenisvolle werkplek** model te konstrueer deur middel van die identifikasie en beskrywing van die konstituerende dimensies wat op ‘n teoretiese vlak daartoe bydra, maar wat tegelykertyd ook in die daaglikse praktyk van organisasies voorkom. Die probleemveld wat aangespreek word is egter nie ‘n enkelvoudige verskynsel wat in isolasie bespreek kan word nie, maar ‘n probleem kompleks, wat verband hou met negatiewe werk-lewe ervarings. Dit is juis hierdie ervarings wat die vervreemding van die individu van sy/haar werk, van die self, van ander in die werkplek en van die organisasie tot gevolg het. Die studie is doelbewus in die Organisasiegedrag domein geposisioneer, om sodoende die toepaslikheid van die die konstruk en die onderliggende teoretiese raamwerk in bestuurspraktyk in organisasieverband aan te dui. Hierdie doel is uitgevoer aan die hand van drie spesifieke doelwitte: Om die konstiturende dimensies van die konstruk **betekenisvolle werkplek** te konseptualiseer; om die teoretiese onderbou van die konstruk **betekenisvolle werkplek** te ontwikkel en/of uit te brei en om bewyse vir

die bestaan van die konstruk, op grond van empiriese data uit die wêreld van werk aan te bied.

Die studie volg ‘n kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodologie vanuit ‘n konstruktiwistiese benadering. Twee datainsamelingstegnieke word gebruik en die resultate word vanuit ‘n fenomenologiese strategie geïnterpreteer, met ‘n konstante fokus op die geleefde ervarings van mense in die werkplek. Eerstens is ‘n literatuurstudie van akademiese publikasies onderneem ten einde die konstituerende dimensies van die konstruk te identifiseer. Hierdie navorsingsdimensie is gebaseer op die “Meaning of Work projekspan,(1987), Terez (2000), Chalosky (2010), en andere. Tweedens is drie empiriese datastelle ondersoek en geanaliseer. Die eerste datastel is afkomstig van die “CRF Institute” wat navorsing doen in verband met die beste werkgewer om voor te werk (“Best employer to work for”). Die tweede datastel bestaan uit verbatim response wat opgeneem is in ‘n uitdienstredingsvraelys, wat op voorwaarde van vertroulikheid beskikbaar gestel is. Die derde datastel bestaan uit response van deelnemers aan “Repertory Grid” onderhoude. Resultate van die navorsing is aanduidend daarvan dat die konstruk **betekenisvolle werkplek** (**meaningful workplace)** as ‘n ontluikende konstruk in die literatuur te vind is en dat elemente daarvan op die konstrukte (as geleefde ervarings) van werknemers opgemerk word. Die studie dra by tot die uitbreiding (ontwikkeling) van die onderliggende teorie van die konstruk **betekenisvolle werkplek (“meaningful workplace”)** terwyl dit gelyktydig ook ‘n paralelle verstaansmoontlikheid ten opsigte van menslike gedrag in die werkplek aanbied.

Sleutelwoorde: “Organizational Behaviour, Meaningful Workplace, Meaning at work, Meaningful work; Postmodernism, Phenomenology, Constructivism, Repertory Grid, Qualitative Research”.

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