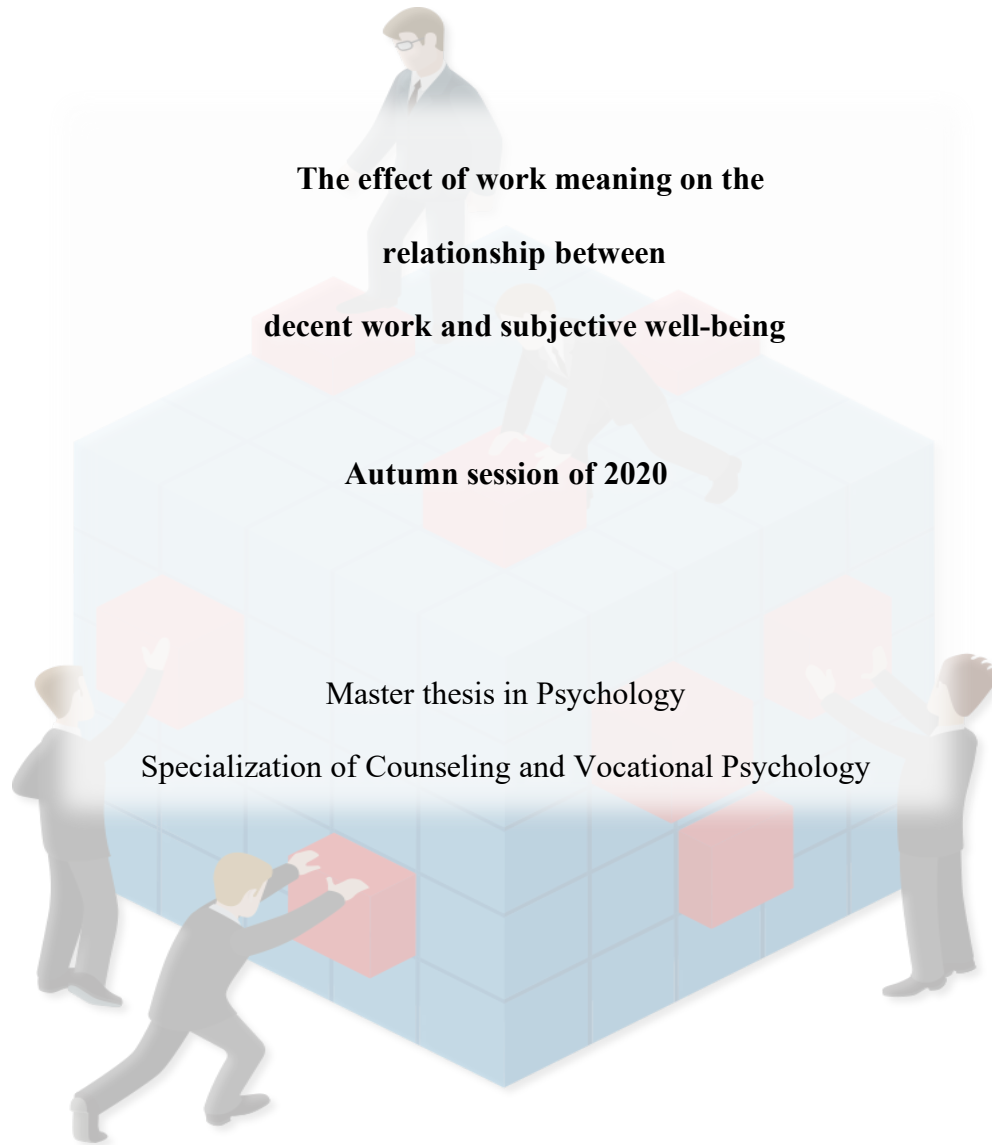




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### Abstract

The present study focuses on the concept of decent work and its link to subjective well-being and aims to clarify the effect work meaning has on this relation. An online questionnaire containing measures of the three study variables as well as measures of job and life satisfaction was completed by a sample of 206 adults ( $M = 29.72$ ,  $SD = 9.24$ ) residing and working in the Netherlands but originating from 61 different countries around the globe. We use Hayes' PROCESS tool to run and analyze mediations (Hayes, 2017). Results indicate work meaning to be a mediator for the relationship between decent work and subjective well-being. We also find work meaning to mediate the relationship between decent work and job satisfaction and decent work and life satisfaction. Decent work is found to predict work meaning and work meaning to predict subjective well-being, job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Results also show significant direct effects of decent work on job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Inferring from our results, we propose that individuals who perceive their work as decent will experience higher subjective well-being, job satisfaction and life satisfaction as they will derive higher levels of work meaning. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

*Keywords:* decent work, work meaning, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, subjective well-being, Psychology of Working Framework, Psychology of Working Theory

## **Introduction**

Since the late 1960s, the concept of quality when referring to working life has undergone a considerable amount of changes. Seeking to define social goals and values, and assess their impact in society, Bauer (1966) is considered the founder of the Social Indicators movement (Land & Michalos, 2017). This perspective represented a shift in the right direction when it comes to measuring the quality of life as it puts human well-being and not financial aspects at its epicenter (Land, 1975). The quality and nature of labor were naturally part of this important piece of research, focusing on the workers' subjective experience of their environment (Davis, 1977). Several attributes and definitions of a 'good job' stemmed from academic research at the time (Land, 1975; Seashore, 1974; Yoshida & Torihara, 1977). However, it was solely the individual evaluations of the workplace that served as an indicator of the work market state.

In the next sections of this paper we will briefly review the historical circumstances that led to the conception of decent work as we know it today. The theoretical frameworks reviewed subsequently, provide us with important insights into decent work as a psychological construct contributing to subjective well-being. With a view to provide a cohering thread, we then review the not so commonly explored relationship between decent work and work meaning, hoping to understand how professionals can better contribute to the well-being of those who work.

### **1.1 The Need for Work Quality**

Starting with the Social Indicators movement which represents a call for action in terms of work quality improvement (Land & Michalos, 2017), various academicians have focused their attention on the subject. Together with the economic and political changes, the theories presented

in the following paragraphs have importantly contributed to shape the concepts of qualitative work and subjective well-being (Shek & Wu, 2017).

Despite including both broader and more specific measures of job satisfaction, an individual assessment of work and of the work environment was criticized for being rather subjective. Moreover, Taylor (1977) has found that measures of job satisfaction are not providing valuable enough information to effectively increase the well-being of the employees through policy changes. In the search for more objective measures of a ‘good job’, various theoretical perspectives have outlined a range of components that should be considered.

As a representative of the neo-Marxist philosophy, Braverman (1974) focused on the distinction between planning and executing work. The division of labor in the capitalist industry was translated into the simplification of tasks in order to enable individual growth and boost the degree of autonomy (Braverman, 1974). Also focusing on the task level, the original version of the Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) aimed to change the workplace for the better. By using both surveys and psychometric methods, the authors have found measures such as the degree of autonomy and variety of tasks, perceiving a task as being challenging and meaningfulness of work to advance productivity among workers (Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

Special attention to improved quality of jobs was also given within the post-Fordist framework (Handel, 2005). As a response to the economic recessions of the 80s and early 90s in the US, post-Fordism proposes a model which focuses on enhancing skill, autonomy and variety at the task level with a view to increase productivity (Jessop, 1996). Numerous authors agree that workers who report a higher degree of job satisfaction deliver more qualitative products for the markets in scope (Cotton, 1993; Jessop, 1996; Godard, 2001; Handel, 2005). Furthermore, in the postindustrial period the raise of data processing renders ideas of Scientific Management (F. W.

Taylor, 1911) unworkable, thereby giving way to new policies of workplace improvement (Handel, 2005). These generally promote a higher degree of participation of the employees in managerial decisions, as well as a broader collaboration between management and personnel which, as explained before, results in more productive businesses (Appelbaum, 2001; Appelbaum & Batt, 1994; Zuboff, 1988).

According to multiple research evidence, the amount of organizations that have followed and focused on the postindustrialist indicators of a qualitative job as proposed by the post-Fordist framework has significantly increased in the 5 years leading to 1997 (Cappelli & Neumark, 2001; Osterman, 2000) resulting in higher levels of employee satisfaction (Appelbaum, 2001; Freeman & Rogers, 2006) and more prolific businesses (Cotton, 1993; Godard, 2001). However, with only an estimate of 56% of the businesses in the United States of America to adopt the discussed ideology until 1997, researchers have started looking at those who did not successfully do so (Handel, 2005). Limitations have been found at the employee level and enterprise level alike. On the one hand, workers might not have had a very high level of trust towards the management team which could have caused disbelief regarding the usefulness of the practices they would have liked to reinforce (Cotton, 1993; Freeman & Rogers, 2006). Moreover, employees might have also felt that higher involvement from their side, as demanded by the management team, would have had negative consequences on their well-being as a more intense workload would potentially cause higher levels of stress (Barker, 1993; Godard, 2001). On the other hand, the way in which the post-Fordist principles of workplace improvement are implemented has also been found to affect the adoption efficiency (Vallas, 1999). Some companies were simply caught in a bandwagon effect with an insufficient amount of tools or knowledge to cause significant change (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Vallas, 2003). Evidence

thus suggests that even though, in part, there were some advances regarding the quality of work at the time, pressures to reorganize the workplace do not always amount to substantial modifications in policy (Piore & Sabel, 2000).

## **1.2 Conceptualizing Decent Work**

The economic recession in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century heavily influenced labor markets globally thereby causing important transformations regarding numerous aspects of job quality (Blustein, 2013; Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). Working conditions have been visibly impacted by global social and economic events such as globalization and the liberalization of markets (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2013), evoking far-reaching levels of insecurity (Kalleberg, 2009; Piketty, 2014). Instability when referring to jobs is known to affect people negatively by generating high levels of stress, which in turn urge for clear guidelines and policy change (Paul & Moser, 2009; Stiglitz, 2016). Naturally, leaders around the globe, governments and other public institutions have made an effort to provide said guidelines in an attempt to define what qualitative work should look like in the contemporary era (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2008; Standing, 2008). Building on the fact that work is considered by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 to be an indispensable element of human rights (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 1948), the International Labor Organization takes into consideration the voices of public policy to put together a recovering strategy statement (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2008).

The institutional initiative attempts to formulate a broad definition regarding the type of work that should characterize the lucrative activity of all workers or potential workers; hereby comes



to light the concept of decent work (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2013). As the previous director of the ILO Juan Somavia has presented it:

Decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize, and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. (<http://www.ilo.org/>).

The history of the International Labor Organization, as explained by Deranty and MacMillan (2012) brings forward the fact that the constituency of this institution is trilateral including the employer, the unions and also the government. The initial propositions of the International Labor Organization are rooted in the 1919 when the three powers had to agree on a set of norms to organize the labor market in such a way that it fits ideas of social justice and equality (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012). Through ongoing debate and consideration from multiple representatives of the public domain, the International Labor Organization outlines four main objectives in the ILO Decent Work Agenda (Bisom-Rapp, 2011), namely “to meet the universal aspiration for social justice, to reach full employment, to ensure the sustainability of open societies and the global economy, to achieve social cohesion and to combat poverty and rising inequalities” (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2008, p. 6). These are then translated into four attributes of the decent work concept which according to the International Labor Organization (2008) are:

- Promoting employment via sustainable institutional and economic contexts;
- Defining, developing, and enriching social protection for workers, including social security and labor protection, which are constructed in accordance with the cultures of given societies;
- Promoting social dialog via intentional connections among governments, worker organizations, and employers;
- Affirming, advancing, and fulfilling the fundamental rights that define a dignified and just workplace. (p. 8)

The definition of decent work as proposed by the International Labor Organization, as well as their policy change proposals, are not without their harsh critics. Many suspect that multiple actors with vested interests have made the proposals of the International Labor Organization the prize of a political contention (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2013; Deranty & MacMillan, 2013). Di Ruggerio et al. (2015) note that the propositions of the International Labor Organization shift consequent to the 2008-2009 recession, very similarly to the discourse of other public institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the World Bank. Focused on public health, the authors sustain that the rather social character of work that the International Labor Organization has initially proposed, seems to now be influenced by market knowledge and customer needs, gravitating towards a more neoliberal approach. This is seen as a source of concern mainly because several streams of research on neoliberal systems show that this approach promotes the individualization of multiple domains such as health or labor (Rushton & Williams, 2012). Furthermore, a longitudinal study of twenty countries shows that markets under neoliberalism generate the opposite of equality which was initially sought out

through the International Labor Organization's agenda (Piketty, 2014). Similarly, Standing (2008) provides valuable insights when it comes to the International Labor Organization and their approach to designing and interpreting the decent work agenda. As an important partaker of the original version of the institution's study, the economist explains how bureaucratic issues of the organization caused an infusion of doubt regarding the definitions of decent work. This ambiguity has also been mentioned by other authors who looked at the translation of the attributes of decent work as defined by the International Labor Organization into practice and real policy change (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2013; Javillier, 2007; Sen, 2010). The rather puzzling interchange between terms representing work or the quality thereof allows for indicators to be misconstrued, making it so much more difficult for the theory to be operationalized (Sehnbruch, Burchell, Agloni, & Piasna, 2015).

Authors from other areas of interest have also directed their attention towards the concept of decent work as defined by the International Labor Organization. Human rights specialists McNaughton and Frey (2015) explain how from a legal studies viewpoint the aspirations set in order to achieve the decent work goal are not relating to juridical decrees and argue that the shift towards legal structures could make a more impactful change for workers. Other authors, such as Javillier (2007), also agree that the lack of statutory character takes away from the responsibility organizations feel they have in realizing the decent work objectives. MacNaughton and Frey (2015) consider that the best way to achieve this is to look at the decent work agenda through the lens of holistic human rights, more specifically at how people interact in the existing hierarchical systems.

Thus, despite the fact that the emerging critiques regarding the concept of decent work as defined by the International Labor Organization have their source in various domains, they point

in the same direction. It so seems that the values initially attached to this term have become rather ambiguous (Standing, 2008) and that the decent work agenda came to be driven by market forces (Di Ruggerio et al., 2015) rather than guided by social justice (Deranty & MacMillan, 2013). This transition in perspective caused an even higher need for a general agreement regarding decent work and how to achieve it. While perspectives from other domains are of paramount importance in evaluating how the concept of decent work impacts macro-level systems, working people and their subjective experience of decent work are also very important indicators of a successful adoption of the concept (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016). If before a need for objectivity was highlighted when defining quality with reference to work, the International Labor Organization's definition of decent work is considered to be lacking the subjective perspective of workers altogether (Pouyaud, 2016). Seeking to address this, psychologists have looked at individuals and communities in order to understand and remove the potential obstacles that they might perceive when trying to achieve decent work (Blustein, 2013; Carr, MacLachlan, & Furnham, 2012; Hammer & Zimmerman, 2011; MacLachlan, 2014).

### **1.3 A Psychological Perspective of Decent Work**

Preoccupied with advancing the quality of work, specialists from the domain of organizational psychology have developed numerous theories on this subject. Encouraged by scholars such as Guichard (2015) to take into consideration a broader range of problematics and especially ones rooted in politics, vocational psychologists proceed to integrate the concept of decent work within their area of expertise (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016). Despite it not being the first time that social justice concerns are debated in the field of

organizational psychology, the current challenge of unemployment for those less equipped for the newly defined labor market is more complex than any known before (DiFabio, 2014; Guichard, 2015). The connection between decent work and career counseling has been established quite quickly in the literature by authors such as Athanasou (2010) who considers that the globally recognized concept includes elements that promote a counselor's important role in supporting fairness in the labor market. Being specifically interested in advancing the subject in the domain of career counseling, Guichard (2013) formulates some stipulations addressed to all practitioners. According to him, vocational psychologists should work to broaden the existing definition of decent work by analyzing it from a global perspective and by preparing implementation strategies as part of their mission to promote equity and sustainability on the labor market (Guichard, 2013).

Getting closer to the definition of decent work as formulated by the International Labor Organization, Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna and Agloni (2013) approach decent work from the perspective of three employment characteristics: satisfaction, intrinsic quality, and desirability. Job satisfaction, as defined within their study, measures the congruence between the subjective view of the employee with regards to the quality of their work and their initial expectations (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna and Agloni (2013). The amount of effort the organizations make to contribute to the employee's well-being through providing satisfactory compensation, health and education schemes as well as fair wages and advancement possibilities determines, in this study, the intrinsic quality of the job. Lastly, the authors describe desirability of the job as being determined by certain characteristics that are objectively considered to improve the quality levels of a given employment. Results show a positive relationship between the three proposed measures and subjective well-being (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2013).

Similarly, one of the already existing influential theories of organizational psychology can easily be linked with aspects of decent work. The idea of person-environment fit is notable to many and it focuses not only on a full understanding regarding the idea of finding a good fit, but also on anticipating one (Dawis, 2005; Schleicher et al., 2011). According to the comprehensive review by Lent and Brown (2013) of the current psychological research regarding the relationship between work and subjective well-being, important effort has been dedicated to establishing the predictors of a good fit. Authors looked at how individual abilities, interests, values and attitudes fit with their employment overall (Dawis, 2005; Holland, 1997; Schleicher et al., 2011) and certain studies have determined an important correlation with attributes of subjective well-being (Lent & Brown, 2013; Nauta, 2013). Apart from creating higher levels of job satisfaction, researchers of the subject have found that a good person-environment fit can make workers more likely to experience generalized satisfaction, also within other domains of their lives (Lent & Brown, 2013; Swanson, 2012).

Furthermore, Swanson (2012) has found that not only does the existence of qualitative work have a positive effect on psychological health, but the absence of any lucrative activity for six months or more heavily impacts mental health in a negative manner. The author also went on to describe how jobs could become more qualitative in order to promote facets of subjective well-being. Among others, Swanson (2012) suggests that a fair work-life balance is an important dimension to focus on, aspect which have also been mentioned by the director of the International Labor Organization Juan Somavia in 1999 during his initial presentation of the concept of decent work.

Guichard and DiFabio (2015) look at the concept of decent work as the possibility of individuals to access jobs that enable self-development and growth in order to enhance their

subjective well-being. Other authors have found similar results: Ferrari (2009), among other subjects such as poverty, focuses her study on the quality and quantity of jobs as well as jobs considered to be decent work. Her findings indicate that there is a strong positive relationship between perceiving one's job as decent and the level of subjective well-being. This relationship is supported by numerous academicians who generally conclude that the possibility of accessing work which is decent is a key factor in the health and well-being of workers (Guichard, 2013; Paul & Moser, 2009; Swanson, 2012; Wanberg, 2012). Also discussing the well-being of workers within the link between organizational psychology and poverty are authors such as Berry and colleagues (Berry et al., 2013). They approach the link between decent work and well-being from a humanitarian perspective and believe decent work should inhibit marginalization by, among others, diminishing work related stress and overload as well as valuing individual competencies and achievements (DiFabio & Maree, 2016).

In order to avoid any confusion between the terms 'well-being' and 'subjective well-being' we draw from the literature to define. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Corporate (OECD), subjective well-being is inclusive of three elements, namely life evaluation, affect and eudaimonia. Life evaluation is an assessment of one's life or a certain aspect of it, affect is a hedonic dimension measured by one's feelings at a certain point in time, and eudaimonia represents the realization of one's full potential and optimal functioning (OECD, 2013). In the context of decent work, all three elements are present: people evaluate their position in the professional world not only guided by indices of hedonic well-being achieved through decent work (i.e. fair income, work safety, family security) but also by indices of eudaimonic well-being such as the possibility to successfully develop and express oneself in the world of work (DiFabio & Maree, 2016). It can be inferred that subjective well-being will be

higher if one has access to decent work as the subjective evaluation of the aforementioned measures will be positive.

So a much-needed psychological perspective of decent work surfaces in the labor world. This perspective adds several elements concerning the individual and the communities to the original definition of decent work as formulated by the ILO. They include fairness, equity and sustainability in the professional world (Athanasou, 2010; Guichard, 2013), freedom of choice (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna and Agloni, 2013), realizing one's potential and professional preferences (Schleicher et al., 2011), equal opportunities for self-development and growth (Guichard and DiFabio, 2015), and combating marginalization and other work-related stress (Berry et al., 2013; DiFabio & Maree, 2016).

Considering the extensive research of vocational psychology and the findings as described above, it becomes more and more apparent to us that the fight for decent work is a fight for volition, security, fulfillment and equal opportunities for progress, ensuring that all who work or want to work maximize their subjective well-being.

#### **1.4 Decent Work vs. Precarious work**

This interpretation has also come in extremely handy to the social sciences experts who have raised serious concerns regarding the ever-growing levels of precarious employment (Evans & Gibb, 2009; Merolli, 2012). Defined along measures of job insecurity, protection, vulnerability and income (Benach et al., 2014), precarious work appears as a reaction to changes in the labor market as governed by neoliberal ideologies (Merolli, 2012). Enforcing deregulation, meant to ensure efficient responses of markets to the radical changes caused by globalization, resulted in prioritizing the employers over the basic needs and rights of the employees (Evans &



Gibb, 2009). Working activities seen as secure are now no more (Quinlan, 2012), thereby instigating fear for the future and high levels of stress for the workers (Lipscomb et al., 2006). The fact that accessing decent work impacts subjective well-being positively, is even more important as precarious work does quite the opposite (Artazcoz et al., 2005). Several studies have linked experiencing precarious work with remarkably low levels of mental health (Malenfant et al., 2007), as workers experiencing job insecurity were shown to have higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol, higher morbidity (Benach & Muntaner, 2007), as well as higher chances of depression and generalized anxiety symptoms (Benach et al., 2012, 2014). Conversely to the population taking part in Swanson's study (2012) mentioned previously, individuals performing precarious work are still employed. Their work, however, is not characterized by the mainstream attributes of work but is one that does not support employees in forming an identity and does not inspire them determination (Benach et al., 2014). Failing to fulfill needs associated with and dependent on accessing decent work is, however, also characteristic of the precariat. Critical of the ILO's agenda on decent work, Standing (2012) makes a distinction between precarious workers and the precariat. The author defines precariat as an inceptive class stemming from neoliberal practices, whereby its members do not only have precarious jobs or are unemployed, but are also characterized by a lack of professional identity, sense of belonging, stability in life, and by a narrower scope of human and state rights (Standing, 2012). According to numerous studies, it is the lack of security, social support, resources, autonomy, and other measures of psychological stress that are highly detrimental to the precarious workers' mental health (Blustein et al., 2013; Flum, 2015; Swanson, 2012). People in the precariat, however, are overburdened both at work and outside of it which leads to added negative feelings such as alienation, anxiety, anomie and anger (Standing, 2014).

Following the arguments presented above, it becomes more and more clear that vocational psychologists should prepare to address the quality of work rather than the obtainment thereof, by incorporating the notion of decent work into the scope of counseling sessions (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016). According to Standing (2012) the precariat is characterized by a wide demographic variety, but a large portion of this emerging class is represented by the educated youth and the migrant population. Counseling sessions would benefit from professionals taking into account this affirmation and embedding it in their practice especially when faced with members of either of these two populations.

### **1.5 Career Counseling and Decent Work**

Given that for an increasing number of scholars the role of a career counselor, as aforementioned, is to ensure and promote ideas of social justice in the labor-market, academicians have further expanded on the how through theoretical viewpoints. Referred to as an instrument to achieving socialization and individualization (Curie, 2000), the counselor should support their client in grasping the fact that in order for work to be decent, it should be a produce of both the society and a person's individual story (Pouyaud, 2016). It so becomes clear that the strategic stance of a vocational professional should not be solely focused on the client, but also on their interaction within a collective. The subjective well-being of the individual is dependent on the well-being of a given society and vice-versa (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006).

The subjective interpretation of one's ability to adjust to their environment is here the key to acquiring decent work (Pouyaud, 2016). The relationship between the vocational psychologist and their client could be described in terms of the "Adjust-Challenge Dilemma" (Prilleltensky &

Stead, 2011). By addressing the relationship of the individual with the environment - adaptive or conflictual - the counselor does not only play an important role in ensuring the well-being of their client but also of the society (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2011). The counselor may support their client in creating a subjective view and interpretation of work enabling them to better adjust to their environment by addressing aspects of self-efficacy (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). The career counselor, being interested in the well-being of their clients but also that of the society, should strive to create a space that encourages the consultant to not only find their individuality with respects to work, but also to manifest it to others (Curie, 2000).

A very influential theory of vocational psychology that proves to be of great help for career counselors in the current context, is the Life Design Framework which gracefully combines aspects of self and career construction theories (Rossier, Maggiori, & Zimmermann, 2015). Promoting both reflexivity and career design (Maree & Twigge, 2016), life design interventions focus on adaptability, narratability, intentionality and, action orientation in order to prepare individuals for managing their career and their work environments (Campbell & Ungar, 2004). Documenting and advancing autobiographical stories, consultants do not only understand themselves in the work context, but also prepare for the various events and transitions to come, thereby supporting stability in their career (Maree & Twigge, 2016). Life design counseling contributes to subjective well-being in a positive manner as it provides the consultants with a better understanding of their identity and it promotes adaptability in the work domain (Maree & Twigge, 2016). When referring back to Poyaud (2016), we can conclude that it is the individual's perception of being able to adapt to one's environment, as well as adjusting the self to said environment that importantly influences the subjective perspective of work as being more or less decent.

Given the rather unstable character of the labor market as governed by globalization trends and radical transformations (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016), individuals need to regularly adapt to their environments in order to keep up with the changes and preserve their subjective well-being (Rossier, Maggiori, & Zimmermann, 2015). Developing on the concept of career adaptability as first mentioned by Super and Knasel (1981), Savickas (1997) considers that in order to appropriately adapt to their careers, individuals need to be able to adjust not only to their existing work aspects, but also to the potential modifications of the work and of the work environment. This concept has been found to have a positive relationship with various beneficial outcomes related to the work domain among which some key examples for the current research are job stability and job satisfaction (Maggiori et al., 2013). Linking back to a subject already approached above, career adaptability is also considered to serve as an important resource for individuals experiencing unfavorable circumstances or situations in their jobs, such as precarious workers (Rossier, Maggiori, & Zimmermann, 2015). Vocational psychologists have found that there are specific interventions through which career adaptability can be isolated and improved (Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2012). Rossier (in press) gives some very valuable examples of exercises such as training decision making in order to develop the consultant's control over their career, encourage seeking information in order to stimulate curiosity, engage in role play in order to boost self-esteem and career confidence, as well as orientation exercises such as the career time perspective (Savickas, 1991) in order to support consideration towards the subject of work and career.

Assuming that work represents an important life domain for individuals, vocational psychologists will support their consultants in finding their individuality through self-construction (Guichard, 2005, 2009). The self-construction model describes the self as ever-

changing depending on aspects such as societal context (Guichard, 2009). As the labor market is a highly dynamic system, self-construction is an appropriate tool for making sense of one's position relative to their environment (Guichard, 2005). According to Guichard (2009), if work is an important element of the self-construction process, then it becomes a paramount component of one's subjective identity system, composed of multiple subjective identity forms (SIFs). SIF is a "set of ways of being, acting and interacting in relation to a certain view of oneself in a given context" (Guichard, 2009, p. 253) and the different SIFs, such as working, familial or social ones, influence each other as part of a changing system. The perceived ability of adjustment inside subjective identity systems between various SIFs could then be influencing the perception of one's job as being decent or not (Pouyaud, 2016). If decent work supports the interplay of the different SIFs, in-decent work does the opposite, thereby becoming an obstacle for the emergence of the self (Guichard, 2009) and hindering higher levels of subjective well-being.

While appreciating and acknowledging the efforts of the numerous scholars in the organizational psychology domain, the rich and invaluable body of literature has been criticized for its rather limited scope (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). As the career development movement has advanced, it is believed that the focus has shifted onto the more privileged, thereby ignoring individuals for whom work is only but a way of surviving (Blustein, 2006). Authors in the field consider that there is a lack of data in regard to those who do not belong to the ever so broad middle class, those for whom the concepts of privilege and choice are not familiar when referring to work and career (Brown, 2002). The scope of career counseling as a field is considered by some authors to hardly include the low-class population, the impoverished and marginalized (Richardson, 1993). As briefly discussed above, the free markets characteristic to neoliberalism are associated negatively with key aspects of social justice such as equity,

equality and inclusion (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015; Piketty, 2014) and with higher levels of precarious work. These aspects further intensify marginalization for the groups already at risk (Blustein, 2001). As concluded by several researchers, securing decent work helps mitigate poverty and social marginalization attributes (Ali, 2013; Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016; Flores, 2013) but quality work is unequally distributed among groups based on gender, race or class (Lipscomb, Loomis, McDonald, Argue, & Wing, 2006). Theories of career development have been the scope of criticism for representatives of various important schools of thought who considered them to be based “mostly on men who are typically from middle-class, European American backgrounds” ((Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008, p. 296; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Fassinger, 2005; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005). While the feminist perspective believes that women are not accounted for in the existing career development theories (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987), vocational rehabilitation supporters consider disability at work to be an unexplored relationship (Szymanski & Parker, 2003), and researchers of culture consider certain groups of people to have been neglected because of racism and social oppression considerations (Blustein, 2006). Seeing their role in fulfilling the ambitious mission of decent work, career professionals should be accounting for the work experiences of all people, taking into account that for some, jobs that are in line with their values and interests are simply not accessible (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). As the body of critiques was growing, scholars of career development have taken into account the limitations of the existing theories and worked to broaden their scope.

## 1.6 The Psychology of Working Framework

Some of the most notable theories addressing the criticism presented above were developed as part of the psychology of working movement (Blustein, 2006). Considering that the shortcomings highlighted previously would be detrimental to the role of the career counselor to do a service to society, their client and the field, Blustein (2006) developed the Psychology of Working Framework (PWF). This body of work is a meta-perspective which puts work back on the list of human rights as contributing greatly to the individuals' well-being, health and mental health (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016). The PWF takes into account not only previous theories of career choice and development but also considerations of their limitations when putting emphasis on the role sociocultural dimensions play in the career field (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Closely following matters of social justice and pluralism, which were important themes in the vocational psychology field, the PWF seeks to explore the relationship between social class, social injustice, free will and career development (Ali, 2013; Blustein et al., 2002; Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015; Flores et al., 2011). The authors summarize the main suppositions of the PWF as follows:

- Work is an essential aspect of life and an essential component of mental health.
- No one epistemology should be privileged over another on the explication of the psychological nature of working.
- The psychological study of working should be inclusive, embracing everyone who works and who wants to work around the globe.
- In many cases and situations, work and nonwork experiences are closely intertwined.

- Work includes efforts within the marketplace as well as caregiving work, which is often not sanctioned socially and economically.
- Working has the potential to fulfill three fundamental human needs – the need for survival and power; the need for social connection; and the need for self-determination.
- To more fully understand the psychological nature of working, careful considerations are needed of relevant social, economic, political, and historical forces, which shape, constrain, and facilitate many aspects of contemporary working. (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016, p.128)

One of the main propositions of PWF is that it is the dynamic relationship between psychological, environmental and economic aspects that makes decent work more or less achievable (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). From this, Blustein and colleagues (2008) propose that well-being through decent work is achieved by satisfying three basic needs, namely survival, social connection and self-determination needs.

The first basic need integrated in the PWF is the need for survival and power (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). As inspired by Maslow (1968), work should provide individuals with the gratification of their basic needs such as food, shelter and safety. Referring to the definition of decent work, certain elements fit into this concept, such as favorable remuneration, safety at work, health benefits, and security (Anker, Chernyshev, Egger, Mehran, & Ritter, 2003). Support is generated also by other streams of research, such as Diener and colleagues who have found that individuals reporting the lowest levels of subjective well-being are mainly residents of countries qualified as poor where income is especially low (Diener, 2000; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2015). Allan et al. (2014) also found social class to positively correlate with



work meaning. With the fulfillment of these basic needs through work, individuals acquire more power and can proceed to prioritize their own ambitions (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). Duffy and colleagues explain that low levels of financial capital can act as barriers for free will and thereby, in this context, decrease work fulfillment (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013). This statement is backed up by the fact that individuals with a higher income have been shown to be more prone to find and go after their 'calling' (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013) which in turn increases not only work fulfillment but also life satisfaction (Twenge & King, 2005). Work fulfillment is an important outcome in the context of decent work as it has been found to positively impact subjective well-being (Feldt, Kinnunen, & Mauno, 2000). As such, survival and power needs can be fulfilled through decent work which in turn will predict work fulfillment and increase levels of subjective well-being (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). The PWF importantly notes that career counselors should take into account the fact that characteristics such as race, immigration or social status, and gender can hinder access to education and training, and thereby to decent work when designing individual interventions (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). The authors also give solutions in the form of recommendations for policy, including governmentally imposed minimum wages and benefits which would make jobs to be considered more decent (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008).

Other than satisfying survival needs, work can also help fulfill social connection needs which are essential to humans in multiple ways (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). Work can first enable individuals to directly form interpersonal relationships with their colleagues, managers, or clients (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). These social connections, if positive, are proven to be beneficial for dealing with work related hardships as well as contributing to self-construction and the expression thereof (Blustein, 1994; Schein, 1990)

resulting in higher levels of well-being (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Moreover, positive relations at work have an important impact on work fulfillment (Harris, Winskowski, & Engdahl, 2007) and on overall satisfaction with life (Wright, Burt, & Strongman, 2006).

Secondly, work can help satisfy the need for social connections indirectly through highlighting the link between those who work and the society they are part of (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Researchers back this argument and explain that helping others is natural for most people, so getting a good grasp of the ways in which we help others through our work will boost our levels of performance, meaningfulness and ultimately job satisfaction (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2014; Grant, 2007; Grant & Berry, 2011). This can be even more useful in the case of individuals who feel marginalized, as understanding how one contributes to the broader social space through their work can improve their relationship with the cultural context (Blustein, 2011) and boost work fulfillment (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Following the PWF, decent work can help fulfill social connection needs which will in turn positively contribute to work fulfillment and subjective well-being (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Within this context, counselors should not fear to explore the power relationships between vulnerable workers (ILO, 2014) and their direct work superiors (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016).

As their third proposition of needs that should be satisfied through work, the PWF introduces the need for self-determination (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). Taking inspiration from Ryan and Deci (2002), the authors of the PWF define self-determination as the “experience of being engaged in activities that are intrinsically or extrinsically motivating in a meaningful and self-regulated fashion” (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016, p. 139).

Blustein and colleagues (2008) use the Self Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 1985) as

a beneficial psychological approach to existing issues related to work and it being more or less decent. The SDT proposes that while tasks that are intrinsically motivating are strongly positively related to subjective well-being, people will have to, in the course of their lives, also engage in tasks that are extrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As the main tenet of the PWF is the fact that not all people are fortunate enough to find or to have access to jobs that suit their interests, values and objectives (Richardson, 1993), the SDT comes in handy to explain how management teams and governments could transform the work environment in a way to increase employees' well-being and work meaning by encouraging self-determination (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). From the SDT, Blustein (2006) has summarized that, in the case of decent work, autonomy, relatedness and competence are key predictors of self-determination and according to some, essential components of decent work (Deranty & McMillan, 2012). Within the PWF, however, he goes on to add the compatibility of personal values with those of the business (value congruence), and the level of access to the opportunity structure, or access to resources to boost success at work, as important variables for increasing self-determination at work (Blustein, 2006). When referring to decent work and how it leads to the fulfillment of self-determination needs, Blustein and colleagues (2016) suggest that governments as well as organizations should advance the individuals' free choice when referring to work by widening access to, in a fair and equitable manner, education, vocational guidance and targeted trainings (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016). Gratification of self-determination needs has been previously shown to bolster work satisfaction (Andreassen, Hetland, & Pallesen, 2010), benefit adjustment to the work environment (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004), increase subjective well-being (Deci et al., 2001), and predict work fulfillment (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016).

The PWF proposes that securing decent work can serve as great support in the gratification of survival and power needs, social connection needs and self-determination needs (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). It is through the fulfillment of these needs that levels of work fulfillment and well-being are increased (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). In order to avoid any confusion regarding terminology, work fulfillment is to be understood as “work that is personally satisfying and meaningful” (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016, p. 138). Need satisfaction has been the subject of various studies which have found that need fulfillment positively relates to general levels of well-being, to decreased levels of anxiety, to greater levels of self-esteem, to higher self-reported life satisfaction, and to lower self-reported measures of exhaustion (Deci et al., 2001; Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008). Furthermore, Duffy and his colleagues have found decent work to directly positively influence physical health and indirectly positively influence mental health through need satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2019). The PWF is recognized by scholars as a great contribution to the career field, especially for conceptualizing the link between diverse subjective experiences with work and macro-level factors (i.e. social, political, economic, global) to the benefit of workers’ well-being and mental health (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008; Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016; Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016; Kenny, Blustein, Liang, Klein, & Etchie, 2019; Pouyaud, 2016).

### **1.7 The Psychology of Working Theory**

In order to better understand the current position of organizations and governments on the road to achieving the decent work goal, but also with a view to offer better and more specific tools to further the journey, Duffy and his colleagues take what is commonly considered “the

next logical step in advancing the PWF” (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016, p. 130) and develop the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT; Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). This empirically testable model draws from the propositions of the PWF in an attempt to further specify, but also to bring new insights to the already known facets of decent work (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016).

The PWT draws from the ILO definition to conceptualize decent work and claims that it exists when “physically and interpersonally safe working conditions, hours that allow for free time and adequate rest, organizational values that complement family and social values, adequate compensation, and access to adequate healthcare” (Duffy et al., 2017, p. 206) all exist (Duffy et al., 2017). All elements related to decent work as presented in the PWT feed into a model to include all people who work or want to work, irrespective of their sociocultural or economic status (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Following from PWF, the PWT brings to the forefront the subjective work experiences and needs of those who, due to a number of reasons, do not have the same level of access to the opportunity structure of the labor markets as the majority (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Hoping to help advance access to decent work around the globe, the authors outline in their theory multiple elements related to decent work such as predictor variables, variables that act as moderators and mediators for the relationship between decent work and its predictors, as well as the outcomes of decent work, and particularly of need satisfaction through decent work (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). For the purpose of this research, we will discuss in the following paragraphs some of the novel elements brought by the PWT while also occasionally pointing to the outcomes of need satisfaction through decent work—work fulfillment and well-being.

Duffy and his colleagues (2016) choose to focus on two predictors of decent work that they choose to formulate negatively given the scope of the population at the center of their theory – marginalization and economic constraints (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). As briefly discussed above, marginalization generally refers to the “peripheralization of individuals and groups from a dominant, central majority” (Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994, p. 23). The PWT, although acknowledges various types of marginalization, focuses mainly on the socio-cultural forms, as they are clear obstacles on the way to decent work and to work fulfillment (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Apart from the ethnic and gender-based types of discrimination which are known to be negatively associated with securing decent work, the PWT also takes into account other marginalized groups. Among them, the individuals whose disability – be it mental or physical – negatively impacts their experiences at work (Horton & Tucker, 2013), those who are marginalized for being part of sexual minorities thereby experiencing low levels of job satisfaction and of mental health (Velez & Moradi, 2012), and those belonging to immigrant groups who are not only given roles with low levels of decision latitude (Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010), but are also less likely to be selected for the job altogether based on their status (Hosoda, Nguyen, & Stone-Romero, 2012) whereby forcing them to choose less meaningful jobs (Binggeli, Dietz, & Krings, 2013).

The second variable argued to impact access to decent work is economic constraints. This contextual predictor has been proven to affect individuals ever since childhood and throughout their adult life, as financial resources or the lack thereof represent an important obstacle in securing decent work and experiencing fulfillment at work (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Low levels of income as well as the social class of parents have been found in the family economic stress models to be detrimental to the relationship between parents and their children

in terms of warmth, quality and well-being of both parties involved (Conger et al., 1992; Furstenberg, Sameroff, Elder, Eccles, & Cook, 1999; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002). This is important here as longitudinal research shows that the quality of the conversations parents have with their children is positively related to academic success and rigor (Hart & Risley, 1995), which in turn bring an important contribution to the entirety of the career development process and to securing meaningful and decent work later on (Chaves et al., 2004; Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010). Social class is not only an important predictor of the differences between high and low economic resources, but also social and cultural ones (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). It supports access to decent work by equipping individuals since their teenage years with higher levels of occupational awareness (Aronson, 2008), and with an achievement mindset that can also lead to a better individual understanding of the person-environment fit (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016).

The two contextual factors described represent real barriers in securing decent work, however, the PWT presents an individual oriented model which also takes into account the impact the two factors have at the psychological level (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). At the perception level, contextual constraints can give shape to the way in which individuals position themselves in the professional world (Duffy et al., 2012). Contextual constraints also hinder securing decent work indirectly by impinging on the subjective perception of free will, also known as work volition (Duffy et al., 2012), and the perception of control regarding one's career, also known as career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The PWT proposes both variables as being mediators for the relationship between marginalization and economic constraints as predictors, and accessing decent work as the outcome (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015).

Found to be correlated with the subjective perception of career constraints and income (Duffy et al., 2015), work volition is associated with numerous positive outcomes at work such as job and life satisfaction, person-environment fit, work fulfillment and, more importantly for the purpose of this study, work meaning (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015; Duffy et al., 2012). Additional support also comes from findings pointing out that higher levels of work volition are linked to a higher probability of exercising a meaningful job, and to a higher probability of securing decent work (Duffy et al., 2015). Since both economic constraints and marginalizing events predict lower levels of work volition, the PWT proposes work volition as a mediator between the two contextual variables and securing decent work (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015).

Career adaptability is defined as “a psychological construct that denotes an individual’s readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks of vocational development” (Savickas, 2002, p. 156). Savickas and Porfeli (2012) distinguish four different components of career adaptability also known as the 4Cs: one should have control over their life, should be concerned about their professional future, and curious about themselves as professionals as well as being confident in themselves to perform tasks and surmount difficulties. Feelings corresponding to these subcomponents are positively correlated to work fulfillment (Coetzee & Stols, 2015), stronger vocational identity and career maturity (Duffy, Douglass, & Autin, 2015), and a more positive attitude towards one’s professional life ((Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015), thereby allowing the authors of PWT to research and confirm a positive relationship between career adaptability and decent work ((Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015). On the other hand, economic constraints and experiences of marginalization correlate negatively with career adaptability (Barto, Lambert, & Brott, 2015) which has been found within the PWT to serve as a partial



explanation of the relationship between the two predictors and engaging in decent work (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015).

Before going into the detail of the variables the PWT proposes to be moderators of the relationship between marginalization, economic constraints and securing decent work, it is important to mention that these are mainly psychological in nature, meaning that they can be worked on during career counseling sessions to support adjustment, and not that those who feel characterized by these moderators will more effortlessly access decent work despite socio-cultural and contextual barriers (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). We will continue to discuss about proactive personality, critical consciousness, and social support as understood from the PWT (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016).

Proactive personality is understood here as the “disposition toward taking personal initiative to influence one’s environment” (Li, Lang, & Crant, 2010, p. 395). This variable is linked to the professional domain in multiple ways and has been the focus of various research which has recognized proactive personality to positively influence job satisfaction, networking behaviors, performance, job motivation and success, wages and promotions, as well as subjective well-being (Fuller & Marler, 2009). As far as the relationship between the previously mentioned predictors and securing decent work, individuals with a proactive personality are believed to more readily transform their environment (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). This may be specifically useful for those who are on the receiving end of the effects of marginalization and of economic constraints, as the trait proactive personality may act as a buffer of those effects on work volition, career adaptability and on securing decent work (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016).

The second moderator variable is critical consciousness, previously named as much as the ‘antidote to oppression’ (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999). The link of this variable to the relationship between marginalization, economic constraints and decent work has been primarily studied among groups of diverse students or adolescents (Baker & Brookins, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014). The numerous studies have established a moderation relationship between critical consciousness and mental health issues as a result of social oppression (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999), as well as academic success levels as influenced by marginalization (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Critical consciousness might ameliorate the effects of contextual factors on work volition and career adaptability through granting greater subjective awareness and control (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Critical consciousness is also found to boost self-determination, which, as presented by the PWF, is a need satisfied through decent work (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008), to advance academic achievement among discriminated students (Luginbuhl, McWhirter, & Mc Whirter, 2014), and to link to securing jobs with higher income and responsibility (Diemer, 2009).

Thirdly, the PWT proposes social support to moderate the relationship between marginalization and economic constraints and access to decent work. Understood as the subjective perception of having support from either friends, co-workers, one’s community or family when faced with challenges, be them social or financial, social support is a factor whose contribution to professional success is well-known (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). When in the present context of securing decent work despite economic constraints and marginalization, social support is positively impacting feelings of self-efficacy (Wright, Perrone-McGovern, Boo, & White, 2014), career outcomes in a sample of adolescents facing social oppression based on their ethnicity (Navarro, Flores, Lee, & Gonzalez, 2014) or sexual orientation (Fisher, Gushue, &

Cerrone, 2011), work volition and career adaptability (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Social support negatively related to the influence of obstacles on one's career development (Raque-Bogdan, Klingaman, Marin, & Lucas, 2013). Social support has been found to buffer the effects of low social class and economic resources on performance when in school (Malecki & Demaray, 2006), as well as effects of economic constraints and social injustice on the subjective well-being of individuals (Åslund, Larm, Starrin, Nilsson, 2014; Graham & Barnow, 2013).

Apart from the three psychological variables that act as moderators for the relationship of economic constraints and marginalization with securing decent work, the authors of the PWT do bring forward their awareness of the impact macro-level factors have on the degree of access to decent work in a given society (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). They propose that a robust economic climate will also be able to moderate the relationship we are describing in this paragraph, despite this variable being less manageable than the other three (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016).

### **1.8 Decent Work and Work Meaning**

As the PWT was emerging, a stream of criticism is noted. Various academicians consider that the theory overlooks dimensions related to the meaning of work and meaning construction at work (Deranty & MacMillan, 2012; Ribeiro, Silva, & Figueiredo, 2016). Willing to address the recognized oversights, as well as to advance the field of decent work, Duffy and his colleagues (2017) attempt at the development of a Decent Work Scale (Duffy et al., 2017). For the purpose of the current study, we will continue to briefly present their findings while focusing on the relationship between variables decent work as defined in the PWT, and work meaning.

The five conditions of decent work as cited above were measured through self-reported measure questionnaires in samples of working adults (Duffy et al., 2017). These revealed a 5-factor model assessing safe work conditions, healthcare access, adequate wages, value convergence and free time and rest which have been found to positively predict work meaning (Duffy et al., 2017). Furthermore, in the previous section we have mentioned how predictors of decent work can represent real barriers in experiencing work meaning. Moreover, mediators of the relationship between contextual factors and accessing decent work also have implications for work meaning. Very importantly, the three needs satisfied through decent work are equally associated with ideas of engaging in meaningful work, and so is work fulfillment as an outcome of need gratification through decent work. All of the above allow us to reach the conclusion that having access to decent work will increase the level of perceiving one's job as meaningful.

In order to make sure that this newly discovered relationship continues to apply to all groups of people regardless of their socio-cultural or economic differences, authors such as Allan and his colleagues, have tested the predictive power of decent work for meaningful work among a sample of individuals belonging to sexual minorities (Allan, Tebbe, Bouchard, & Duffy, 2018). They have found a positive relationship between the two variables, further validating the idea that securing decent work predicts higher levels of perceiving one's job as meaningful (Allan, Tebbe, Bouchard, & Duffy, 2018).

At this point, we consider important to briefly underline the theoretical differences between meaning of and in work. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) help clarify the differences between the two terms by defining the meaning of work as both the kind of significance workers understand of their job and the meaning they attribute to their work, also referred to as the meaningfulness of one's work. Significance when referring to work is an

important dimension of meaning of work and is characterized by full devotion and creative expression of the self (Bujold, Fournier, & Lachance, 2013). As an important author in the domain of work meaning, Morin and her colleagues (Morin, Tonelli, & Pliopas, 2007) delineate six features of significant work, namely usefulness of work, level of satisfaction yielded when work is performed autonomously, moral acceptability of work, social acknowledgment of work, guarantee of security and survival through work, and possibility to create satisfying social connections through work. We recognize analogous ideas of significance within the functions of decent work as described by the PWF/PWT (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008; Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). To be more specific, decent work should aid in the satisfaction of three needs: need of survival and power, social connections and self-determination through, among others, autonomy, growth opportunities and access to resources (Blustein, 2006). Meaning in work is used preponderantly to describe the way in which work is significant for an individual and to what degree, and it depends on the meaning of work (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). This difference is important for career counselors as they should take a person-centered approach while seeking to understand what job characteristics corresponding to decent work will satisfy the needs of each individual in order to increase their subjective well-being (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016).

The subjective perception of work as being meaningful will be supported, according to the Life Design paradigm, by the practitioner's understanding that career paths are unique and that they depend on the relationship each individual has with work as a domain (Massoudi et al., 2018; Savickas et al., 2009; Steger, 2014). The concept of meaningful work has been extensively studied in the past ten years, and multiple authors have worked on developing various measuring scales (Ward & King, 2017). Through research, authors have found meaningful work to

positively predict higher work motivation and engagement (Geldenhuys et al., 2014; Steger, Littman-Ovadia, Miller, Menger, & Rothmann, 2013), work commitment and job satisfaction (Fairlie, 2011; Steger et al., 2012). What is more interesting for us, is that meaningful work has also been found to negatively relate to mental health issues such as depressive symptoms, burnout, and exhaustion (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Steger et al., 2012) and positively relate to subjective well-being (Ward & King, 2017).

Inferring from both studies of decent work and studies of work meaning, we find more interesting parallels especially when focusing on need satisfaction through decent work and its outcomes. Various elements of work and working life can be a source of meaning for individuals (Ward & King, 2017). However, certain ones that we will briefly present next are also components found in the definition and impacts of decent work as proposed by the PWT. Social relationships, proposed by the PWT as one of the human needs to be satisfied through decent work and to positively contribute to subjective well-being (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016), are also promoting work meaning and contributing to well-being when positive social interactions exist in the workplace (Hicks & King, 2009). Ward and King (2017) go even further and note that work meaning derived from social interactions is hindered when individuals experience social oppression and marginalization, thereby also being detrimental to subjective well-being (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014). In their study on work and meaning, the two authors touch on propositions of the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2002) to describe how the gratification of competence, relatedness and autonomy needs leads to increased work meaning (Ward & King, 2017). As discussed previously, the PWF/PWT draw from the SDT to develop the concept of self-determination needs which are fulfilled through decent work, and lead to increased subjective well-being (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008; Duffy, Blustein,

Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Work meaning is also influenced to an extent by financial resources, in the sense that economic constraints can be detrimental to work meaning and meaning in general (Ward & King, 2016). As reviewed above, economic constraints are one of the main predictors of access to decent work, as proposed by the PWT (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). At the same time, adequate compensation is one of the main components of decent work as a theoretical concept (Duffy et al., 2017).

### **1.9 The Present Study**

After reviewing various theoretical frameworks on the subject of decent work, we are able to conclude that there is a clear positive relationship between accessing decent work and subjective well-being. Furthermore, by having a better understanding of the three needs satisfied through decent work and the positive outcomes associated with them, we have been able to conclude a link between accessing decent work and work meaning. From the literature review on work and meaning, we have also found an already studied positive relationship between work meaning and subjective well-being. Given these findings, we hypothesize that there is a relationship between the three variables that would make for an interesting subject of research. We find the relationship to have been marginally explored and draw on assumptions of the PWT and the Life Design paradigm to hypothesize that perceiving one's job as meaningful will act as a mediator for the already established relationship between accessing decent work and subjective well-being.

## Method

### 2.1 Participants

The population sample taking part in this study was of 206 adults living in the Netherlands and working in a multinational corporation specialized in athletic fashion products. Their ages varied between 18 and 53 years old ( $M = 29.72$ ,  $SD = 9.24$ ). Participants self-identified as male ( $n = 89$ , 43.2%) or female ( $n = 117$ , 56.8%). They also identified as being part of 61 different countries of affiliation from all five continents with 13,1% Dutch ( $n = 27$ ). Regarding employment status, the majority reported to be employed full-time ( $n = 168$ , 81.6%). The rest of the participants were either in part-time employment ( $n = 14$ , 6.7%), self-employed full-time ( $n = 14$ , 6.7%) or part-time ( $n = 10$ , 4.9%). Achieved education levels varied from high school graduate ( $n = 15$ , 7.3%), some Bachelor's credit ( $n = 22$ , 10.7%), Bachelor's Degree ( $n = 99$ , 48.1%), some Master's credit ( $n = 9$ , 4.4%), Master's Degree ( $n = 60$ , 29.1%) to Doctorate Degree ( $n = 1$ , 0.5%). Participants' self-reported social class level was upper class ( $n = 2$ , 1%), upper-middle class ( $n = 27$ , 13.1%), middle class ( $n = 108$ , 52.4%), working class ( $n = 66$ , 32%), and lower class ( $n = 3$ , 1.5%). All participants were randomly selected and naïve to the purpose of the research. None of them was paid for their participation. We consider important to specify that it is our assumption that an important percentage of the participant sample is hired by the same employer in the Netherlands. As results are anonymous and we did not ask for the employer's name, we do not know the exact percentage. The database of the employer in question did, however, serve as one of the main sources of the mailing list. The company we refer to is an American multinational corporation that specializes in athletic footwear and accessories based in the capital city of the Netherlands, fact that could imply that most of the participants are privileged workers in terms of choice, job stability and level of income. The pool



of employees is very diverse in terms of age and nationality and we do assume that our sample is a good reflection of the general population.

## 2.2 Materials

**2.2.1 Social status.** As previously discussed, we follow from the PWT (Duffy et al., 2016) and believe social class to be an operationalization of economic constraints. We propose the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000) with the help of which participants indicated their perceived social class in the Netherlands.

Participants viewed a picture of a ladder with the following instructions:

Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in the Netherlands. At the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off, those who have the most money, most education, and the best jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off, those who have least money, least education, and worst jobs or no job. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom.

Participants were then asked to indicate in the form of a number from 1 (bottom rung) to 10 (top rung) where they believe they are positioned relative to the people in the Netherlands. The chosen measure has been found in several studies to have consistent validity, test-retest reliability and consistent predictive validity (Operario, Adler, & Williams, 2004; Operario et al., 2004). Moreover, the scores on this measure have been previously found as positively and

significantly correlated with level of education, income, and level of employment (Adler et al., 2008) which are all measures in the scope of the current study.

**2.2.2 Job satisfaction.** We follow from Judge and colleagues (1998) and measure job satisfaction with a 5-item scale. It includes positive items such as “I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job” and negatively framed items such as “I consider my job rather unpleasant” measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability index of the scale is  $\alpha = .88$  as found in the Judge et al.’s study (1998).

**2.2.3 Decent work.** The Decent Work Scale (DWS; Duffy et al., 2017) was used to ascertain each of the participant’s opinion regarding the five 3-item constituents of decent work. These include organizational values that complement family and social values (sample items include “The values of my organization match my family values”), access to healthcare (sample items include “I get good healthcare benefits from my country/government”), hours that allow for free time and rest (sample items include “I do not have enough time for non-work activities”), physically and interpersonally safe working conditions (sample items include “I feel physically safe interacting with people at work”), and adequate compensation (sample items include “I am rewarded adequately for my work”). The self-report questionnaire contains a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores represent higher levels of perceived decent work. Duffy et al. (2017) reported internal consistency reliability of the five 3-item subscales : Complementary Values  $\alpha = .95$ , Access to Healthcare  $\alpha = .97$ , Free Time and Rest  $\alpha = .87$ , Safe Working Conditions  $\alpha = .79$ , Adequate compensation  $\alpha = .87$ , and the Total Scale  $\alpha = .86$ .

**2.2.4 Meaning of work.** The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012) was used to measure the degree to which participants perceived their work as

meaningful. This inventory is a 10-item self-reporting questionnaire measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale has been found to positively correlate, among others, to job satisfaction (Steger et al., 2012), which we also assess in the current study. Steger and colleagues (2012) found the WAMI to have very high internal consistency  $\alpha = .93$  and all three factors – positive meaning, meaning making through work, greater good motivation – to load onto the Meaningful Work factor. Sample items for each factor are, in order, “I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful”, “My work helps me better understand myself” and “The work I do serves a greater purpose”. Higher scores represent higher levels of meaningful work.

**2.2.5 Satisfaction with life.** The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998) was used to assess the participants’ satisfaction with their life in the general sense. The scale includes 5 items measured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All items are positively framed and include examples such as “In most ways my life is close to my ideal” and “So far I have gotten the important things I want in life”. A higher score would describe an individual extremely satisfied with life. Subsequent assessments of the psychometric indices of the scale show a high internal consistency with  $\alpha$  ranging from .79 to .89 (Adler & Fagley, 2005; Pavot & Diener, 1993).

## 2.3 Procedure

An initial risk assessment was performed by the University of Lausanne board that has confirmed that the current study does not impose a high risk. Next, participants were recruited via email and online via LinkedIn. The content of the email and LinkedIn post contained a short paragraph from the research disclaimer and the link to the survey. It has been specified that the

study is intended for an adult population currently in employment and that there is no remuneration associated with completing the survey. The survey has been designed using the Google Forms platform (Appendix 1). The initial sample of 209 participants was scanned based on the aforementioned criteria. Participants who were not over eighteen years old and unemployed were removed from the dataset. The final sample consisted of 206 participants all of whom had no missing data. After analyzing, we did not find any duplicate responses.

## Results

### 3.1 Preliminary Analysis

All variables were inspected for normality, outliers and homogeneity of variance. Decent Work, Work Meaning and Satisfaction with Life all had absolute values of skewness and kurtosis under 1 and included no extreme scores. Job Satisfaction had kurtosis under 1 but was negatively skewed (-1.13), thereby indicating a build-up of higher scores. Job Satisfaction also presented several extreme scores over 3 standard deviations from the mean. Six outliers were removed, resulting in an improvement to the non-normality of this scale (skew = -.91 and kurtosis = .21). Given that the current sample is considered to be rather large (Field, 2013), we chose to ensure of the normality of the distribution by analyzing the skewness and kurtosis scores in conjunction with histograms and Q-Q plots. All three elements led us to conclude a normal distribution of the data. When testing for homogeneity of variance, we have guided our decision from Levene's test and the variance ratio. Levene's test showed variances that are not significantly different for Decent Work ( $F(1, 198) = 2.25, ns$ ), Work Meaning ( $F(1, 198) = 0.15, ns$ ), Job Satisfaction ( $F(1, 198) = 0.05, ns$ ), and Life Satisfaction ( $F(1, 198) = 0.01, ns$ ). Together with the comparison between Hartley's critical values (Pearson & Hartley, 1954) and our variance ratio, we have concluded that the homogeneity of variance assumption is tenable.

We consider important to mention at this point some of the first steps we have taken towards the mediation analyses. Needless to mention, the hypothesis tested is one proposing that the relationship between decent work and subjective well-being is one mediated by work meaning. According to theory, subjective well-being is conceptualized to compose itself out of two elements, namely the affective and the cognitive one (Diener, 1984). The SWLS used for the purpose of this study is proven to assess the affective component (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) while job satisfaction, assessed through the Job Satisfaction Scale (Judge et al., 1998), is the most studied positive form of work-related subjective well-being (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2010). We consider interesting computing a new variable which we named Subjective Well-Being. It represents the arithmetical mean scores of Job Satisfaction and Satisfaction with Life variables. Conceptually speaking, however, we do also choose to test Job Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction separately within models of mediation. Subjective Well-Being presented absolute values of skewness and kurtosis under 1. Histograms and Q-Q plots did not raise any issues. Levene's test was non-significant ( $F(1, 198) = 0.001, ns$ ), thereby allowing us to confirm homogeneity of variance.

### 3.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics reveal reasonably high mean scores for our main variables: Job Satisfaction ( $M = 5.73, SD = 1.15$ ), Decent Work ( $M = 5.28, SD = 0.87$ ), Work Meaning ( $M = 5.39, SD = 1.25$ ), Life Satisfaction ( $M = 5.19, SD = 1.47$ ), and for the variable we have created and named Subjective Well-being ( $M = 5.46, SD = 1.23$ ).

The correlations shown in Table 1 show that age highly positively correlated with income and also with seniority. Somewhat surprisingly, the level of education negatively correlated to

the same two former variables, although the correlation is rather weak. Income positively correlated with social status, seniority and also with work meaning. Seniority was found to be significantly and positively correlated to work meaning. Our main variables work meaning, decent work, job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being were all strongly positively and significantly intercorrelated.

Table 1  
*Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Age	-										
2.Gender	-.11	-									
3.Education	-.05	.01	-								
4.Seniority	.76**	-.05	-.24**	-							
5.Income	.62**	-.11	-.19**	.63**	-						
6.Social Status	.05	.01	-.06	-.01	.19**	-					
7.Job Satisfaction	.02	-.09	.01	.04	.08	.04	-				
8.Decent Work	.04	-.02	-.09	.09	.09	.11	.59**	-			
9.Work Meaning	.09	-.05	-.07	.17*	.14*	.02	.64**	.55**	-		
10.Life Satisfaction	.03	-.05	-.10	.06	.12	.09	.77**	.64**	.78**	-	
11. Subjective Well-being	.03	-.07	-.05	.06	.11	.08	.93**	.66**	.76**	.96**	-
M	29.72	-	-	-	-	6.1	5.73	5.28	5.39	5.19	5.46
SD	9.24	-	-	-	-	1.35	1.15	0.87	1.25	1.47	1.23

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

### 3.3 Regressions

Before conducting the mediation analysis, we wanted to make sure that extending the model of subjective well-being by adding Work Meaning is advisable. We have decided then to conduct two multiple regression whereby our dependent variable is in turn Job Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction and our predictors are at one time Decent Work, and at a second time both Decent Work and Work Meaning. We see value in this analysis, as it will tell us more about our model's generalization powers, as well as reveal whether the necessary regression assumptions are met when referring to our sample.

In the first model of the first multiple regression we consider Decent Work as a predictor, hypothesizing that it would impact our outcome, namely Job Satisfaction. An  $R^2$  of .35 reveals that Decent Work explains 35% of the variation in Job Satisfaction. Moreover, the value of the adjusted  $R^2$  ( $=.35$ ) is the same as the one of  $R^2$  which indicates that this model generalizes very well to the population. The overall model was found to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction,  $F(1,198) = 110.24, p < .001$ . Decent Work as a predictor made a significant contribution to the model with  $t(198) = 10.50, p < .001$  and has a positive relation to the predictor as can be seen in Table 2.

In the second model of the first multiple regression, we consider both Decent Work and Work Meaning as predictors of Job Satisfaction. An  $R^2$  of .49 reveals that adding Work Meaning accounts for an additional 13.7% of the variance in Job Satisfaction. The value of the adjusted  $R^2$  remains very close to the one of  $R^2$  assuring us that the model has very good cross-validity. Our initial model significantly predicted job satisfaction and our second model also did so with  $F(2, 197) = 96.71, p < .001$ . Both Decent Work and Work Meaning make a significant contribution to

the model with  $t(197) = 5.79, p < .001$  for Decent Work and  $t(197) = 7.37, p < .001$  for Work Meaning. Both predictors have a positive effect on Job Satisfaction, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Summary of multiple linear regression models for Job Satisfaction*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Step 1			
Constant	1.61	0.39	
Decent Work	0.78	0.07	.59***
Step 2			
Constant	1.11	0.36	
Decent Work	0.46	0.08	.35***
Work Meaning	0.41	0.06	.44***

$R^2 = .35$  for Step 1,  $\Delta R^2 = .14$  for Step 2 ( $p < .001$ ). \*\*\* $p < .001$

An analysis of standard residuals showed that the data contained no outliers and conforms to a fairly accurate model. Tests concerning the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Decent Work, Tolerance = .69, VIF = 1.44; Work Meaning, Tolerance = .69, VIF = 1.44). The data also met the assumption of independent errors with Durbin-Watson value of 1.97 (Field, 2006). The scatterplot of standardized residuals showed that the data met the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and linearity.

In the first model of the second multiple regression we consider Decent Work as a predictor, hypothesizing that it would impact our outcome, namely Life Satisfaction. An  $R^2$  of .41 reveals that Decent Work explains 41% of the variation in Life Satisfaction. Moreover, the value of the adjusted  $R^2$  (= .41) is the same as the one of  $R^2$  which indicates that this model generalizes very well to the population. The overall model was found to be a significant predictor



of life satisfaction,  $F(1,198) = 143.36, p < .001$ . Decent Work as a predictor made a significant contribution to the model with  $t(198) = 11.97, p < .001$  and has a positive relation to the predictor as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Summary of multiple linear regression models for Life Satisfaction*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Step 1			
Constant	-.54	0,48	
Decent Work	1.09	0.09	.64***
Step 2			
Constant	-1.44	0.37	
Decent Work	0.51	0.08	.30***
Work Meaning	0.73	0.06	.62***

$R^2 = .41$  for Step 1,  $\Delta R^2 = .27$  for Step 2 ( $p < .001$ ). \*\*\* $p < .001$

In the second model of the second multiple regression, we consider both Decent Work and Work Meaning as predictors of Life Satisfaction. An  $R^2$  of .68 reveals that adding Work Meaning accounts for an additional 27% of the variance in Life Satisfaction. The value of the adjusted  $R^2$  remains very close to the one of  $R^2$  assuring us that the model has very good cross-validity. Our initial model significantly predicted life satisfaction, our second model, however, did so even better with  $F(2, 197) = 214.64, p < .001$ . Both Decent Work and Work Meaning make a significant contribution to the model with  $t(197) = 6.35, p < .001$  for Decent Work and  $t(197) = 12.97, p < .001$  for Work Meaning. Both predictors have a positive effect on Life Satisfaction, as shown in Table 3.

An analysis of standard residuals showed that the data contained no outliers and conforms to a fairly accurate model. Tests concerning the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Decent Work, Tolerance = .69, VIF = 1.44; Work Meaning, Tolerance = .69, VIF = 1.44). The data also met the assumption of independent errors with Durbin-Watson value of 1.91 (Field, 2006). The scatterplot of standardized residuals showed that the data met the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and linearity.

### 3.4 Mediation Analyses

Following from our hypothesis that Work Meaning is a mediator in the relationship between Decent Work and Subjective Well-being, we have chosen to run mediation analyses using Hayes' PROCESS tool (2017). We have then assessed the indirect effects of the predictor Decent Work on the outcomes through the mediator Work Meaning using the Sobel test (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2010).

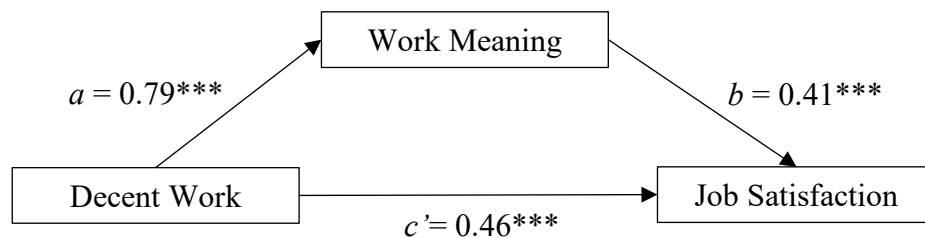


Figure 1. Mediation of Decent Work and Job Satisfaction through Work Meaning.  $N = 200$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

Using the Sobel test we have found the indirect effect ( $a*b$ ) of decent work on job satisfaction ( $Z = 5.80, p < .001$ ), life satisfaction ( $Z = 7.62, p < .001$ ), and subjective well-being ( $Z = 7.35, p < .001$ ) through work meaning to be significant.

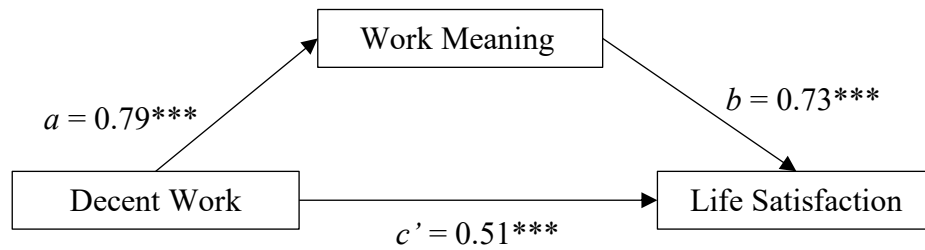


Figure 2. Mediation of Decent Work and Life Satisfaction through Work Meaning.  $N = 200$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

Work meaning is a mediator in the relationship between decent work and job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being, as depicted in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

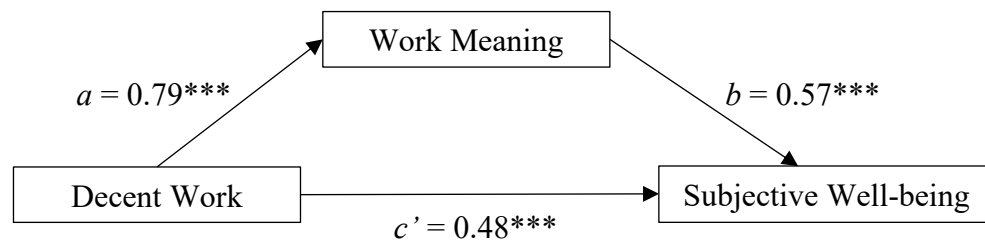


Figure 3. Mediation of Decent Work and Job Satisfaction through Work Meaning.  $N = 200$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

Moreover, the analyses also show that decent work is a significant predictor of work meaning  $b = 0.79$ , BCa CI [0.622. 0.953]. There are also noticed positive direct effects statistically different from 0 between Decent Work and Job Satisfaction,  $t(197) = 5.79$ ,  $p < .001$ , between Decent Work and Life Satisfaction,  $t(197) = 6.35$ ,  $p < .001$ , and between Decent Work and Subjective Well-being,  $t(197) = 7.01$ ,  $p < .001$ . The total effects of Decent work on Job Satisfaction, Life Satisfaction and Subjective Well-being are also positive and statistically different from 0,  $t(198) = 10.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $t(198) = 11.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $t(198) = 12.49$ ,  $p < .001$  respectively.

### Discussion

The main aim of the present study was to examine the mediation of the relationship between decent work and subjective well-being through work meaning. According to the results, work meaning acts indeed as a mediator for the proposed relationship, thereby allowing us to confirm our hypothesis. We have investigated the mediation relationships between our study variables and have also examined the direct relations between decent work, work meaning, job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being. The mediation analyses revealed that decent work is a predictor of job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being through work meaning as hypothesized. Work meaning also positively predicts job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Moreover, we have found decent work to positively predict work meaning. The mediation reveals that the more decent an individual perceives their work to be, the higher the work meaning they associate with their job and in turn the higher their level of job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being. While a positive direct effect between decent work and subjective well-being is confirmed, the current study adds to the decent work literature the fact that individuals perceiving their work as more decent will also associate higher levels of work meaning to it and that individuals who associate higher levels of work meaning to their job will experience even higher levels of job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being.

Findings from the present study are in line with existing literature as reviewed in the introductory part of the research. We have anticipated a positive relationship between decent work and subjective well-being. This has been confirmed by a significant direct effect of decent work on subjective well-being. Participants who perceived their job as being decent have reported higher levels of subjective well-being than those who perceived their job as less decent.

The effect of decent work on subjective well-being is in line with numerous other researches on the subject (Ferrari, 2009; Guichard, 2013; Paul & Moser, 2009; Swanson, 2012; Wanberg, 2012). This includes the PWT that finds decent work to positively impact well-being through need satisfaction (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Our findings might equally contribute to studies that find decent work to increase subjective well-being by means of inhibiting effects of marginalization (DiFabio & Maree, 2016). However, marginalization was not a focus variable in the current study.

Decent work also had a significant direct effect on job satisfaction. This confirms multiple other similar research in which a link between decent work and job satisfaction was also found (Duffy et al., 2017). Moreover, Duffy and his colleagues (2016) have found that gratification of the three needs: survival and power, social connection and self-determination paramount to achieving decent work, will predict higher levels of not only job satisfaction but also of satisfaction outside of work. Our results are also in line with this affirmation, as satisfaction with life was also found to be positively and significantly correlated to decent work and decent work had a significant direct effect on life satisfaction. We have found job satisfaction in particular to be positively significantly correlated to decent work. Moreover, job satisfaction has also been found to positively and significantly correlate with life satisfaction. This only reinforces previous findings attesting the impact of work, or lack thereof, on health and generalized satisfaction (Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012).

Contrary to other streams of research on similar subjects, we did not find income, social status, or level of education to correlate significantly with measures of decent work or job and life satisfaction. From this perspective, the current findings are not in line with the assumptions of the PWT (Duffy et al., 2016) which state that social and economic constraints (reflected in our

study through social status, level of education and income) are detrimental to accessing decent work and indirectly subjective well-being (reflected in our study through measures of job and life satisfaction). We assume, in this case, that it is the characteristics of our sample that have an important role to play, as privileged workers constitute for a large part of our group.

Within our study, we have also found decent work to positively predict work meaning. Our findings are consistent with the results of Duffy and his colleagues (2017) which reveal that decent work positively predicts work meaning. Our findings also confirm those of Ward and King (2016) that show economic constraints, also a negative predictor of decent work, to negatively predict work meaning. We find income to be significantly positively correlated to work meaning. Interestingly, our results also reveal a positive and significant correlation between work meaning and seniority. This implies that people who spend more time in their job have higher levels of work meaning associated to that specific job. We assume this is somewhat of an expected correlation as low levels of work meaning are associated to lower levels of work motivation and engagement (Geldenhuys et al., 2014; Steger, Littman-Ovadia, Miller, Menger, & Rothmann, 2013).

Our results show that work meaning is a predictor of subjective well-being. Higher levels of work meaning, as reported by participants, have positively impacted self-reported measures of subjective well-being. These results confirm those of others who have also found work meaning to positively relate to subjective well-being (Ward & King, 2017). Furthermore, work meaning also positively predicted job and life satisfaction in our sample. The results are in line with those in the literature that also show a positive relationship between work meaning and job satisfaction (Fairlie, 2011; Steger et al., 2012).

The three mediation models show that work meaning is a factor of paramount importance for individuals on their path to achieving higher levels of job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Our research also shows that decent work is an important predictor of work meaning, so we draw from the literature on the subject to make reflections regarding the implications on the contemporary world of work and workers. Seeing how the labor market is a dynamic system which proposes constant advancements, those who work or want to work need to learn how adapt to contextual and environmental changes in order to access decent jobs while also being aware of internal factors in regards to what makes a job meaningful (Briscoe & D. T. Hall, 2006). Having a sense of professional identity as well as higher levels of career adaptability are two aspects linked in the literature with increased work meaning (D. T. Hall, 2004). Career adaptability and awareness of one's professional identity are also emphasized within the Life Design paradigm as promoting well-being (Maree & Twigge, 2016) and in the light of our findings, it may also be so due to a positive impact on the level of work meaning.

Within the psychological perspective of decent work, the main focus is the individual so, in the sense of our results, work meaning will also be supported by factors more characteristic to the individual such as self-determination, autonomy, access to growth opportunities, work volition and professional preferences (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna and Agloni, 2013; Deranty & McMillan, 2012; Schleicher et al., 2011; Ward & King, 2017). Our results support the idea that careers shift from their traditional definitions to become more and more protean (Maguire, 2002) whereby individuals derive work meaning and satisfaction from subjective criteria such as personal values and self-defined career goals as opposed to organizational indices (Volmer & Spurk, 2010). Protean Career Orientation (PCO), as an attitude towards work (Briscoe & D. T. Hall, 2006), is associated in the literature with higher job satisfaction and work meaning (D. T.

Hall, Feldman, & Kim, 2013; Volmer & Spurk, 2010). In terms of socioeconomical and political dimensions, it seems that privileged individuals develop their PCO less as they develop their self-direction less (D. T. Hall, Feldman, & Kim, 2013). However, similarly to the PWT, if environmental factors hinder access to resources and work volition, the relationship between PCO and work meaning is rendered non-significant (D. T. Hall, Feldman, & Kim, 2013). Our results show that work meaning is an important factor in achieving job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being and that it mediates their relationship with decent work. As society changes and features of decent work become more anchored in psychological constructs, individuals achieve job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being by pursuing more self-interested careers from which they derive work meaning.

#### **4.1 Practical Implications**

In the light of our findings, we will make several recommendations for career counsellors and vocational psychologists aiming to support their consultants in achieving higher levels of satisfaction in their jobs and in life. Given the existing relationship between decent work and subjective well-being, we would advise counselors to evaluate the extent to which the client's current job corresponds to its five dimensions: complementary values, access to health care, adequate free time and rest, safe working conditions and fair income. We advise counselors to foster these dimensions by guiding their clients to defend their rights at work, negotiate adequate wages and healthcare protection and find balance between their work and their personal life. Additional resources could be beneficial, such as support in defining one's personal and professional values and highlighting opportunities of professional development.



As we have found meaning to predict subjective well-being, we advise counselors to assess the centrality of work in their client's life and ask guiding questions with a view to co-formulate ideas of meaningful work. We know each career path is unique, and so it is work meaning. We recommend following the principles of the Life Design paradigm, and techniques such as narratability, in order to de-construct and re-co-construct the individual's life story (Rossier et al., 2015). This will work to give the client new views regarding meaningful work. Practitioners can, when necessary, also support in changing ideas of work meaning through social influence techniques embedded within their client-centered approach (Savickas, 1991).

As we have also found income levels to be related to work meaning, vocational psychologists and career counselors could also approach topics of social injustice, and more specifically of inequality and marginalization. Psychoeducation could prove as a powerful tool in promoting equity and equality in the decent work subject (Blustein, Kenny, Di Fabio, & Guichard, 2018). Clients may very well benefit from this as they feel informed and encouraged to start conversations about social injustices within their workplace, their group or their communities. Workers' unions, organizations and associations are several of the important actors that vocational psychology and career counseling can turn to in order to achieve results on this specific topic.

## **4.2 Limitations**

There are several limitations in this study that have to be taken into account when interpreting the current findings. First, we consider somewhat of a limitation the fact that our scores are self-reported. It so becomes possible that perceptions of social status and income have impacted subsequent answers regarding work conditions and job satisfaction. A pertinent

recommendation would be the use of external reports such as the ones of work colleagues, superiors, close family and friends for reasons of triangulation. Second, we consider the methods used to collect our sample. We argue that the current pool of participants might not be best representing the population as we consider that most of the participants work for the same international company in the Netherlands. Moreover, an important amount of our participants did not have permanent contracts, but temporary ones as part of an internship program. Most of the job titles made available to us in the dataset could qualify our participants as privileged workers. Despite our sample being reflective of reality in terms of gender proportion, we tend to believe that many of the participants were rather young (between 18 and 22) and at their first job. We consider important that future studies focus on samples more representative of the population, more diverse in their job domains, income, social status.

Regarding our model, we have chosen what we consider to be a limited number of variables within the PWT (Duffy et al., 2016). Mediators such as career adaptability and work volition and moderators such as proactive personality and critical consciousness (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016) could have played a very important role when added to our models and would have given us a more holistic image. It would be equally interesting to introduce, in the spirit of inclusion, measures of marginalization and social oppression within the model and study the situation of typically marginalized populations such as migrants (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

In the current study we have tested work meaning as a mediator for the relationship between decent work and subjective well-being. Our sample consists of adults living and working in the Netherlands. Yielded results can be considered to confirm work meaning as a mediator in the relationship studied. Empirical support has been brought for the PWT as well as for research looking at work meaning by studying the relationships between all proposed variables. Specifically, decent work predicts job satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being, and so does work meaning, which is also an outcome of decent work. Moreover, income and seniority are positively correlated to work meaning. Our findings suggest that vocational psychology and career counselling practitioners have an important role to play in advancing decent work and its agenda. This can be achieved by supporting one's clients in creating meaning in the context of work and encouraging conversations of fair treatment and equity in the professional world.

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## Appendix 1

### The Questionnaire

The questionnaire and summary of results was found online in Google Drive. Below the integral text as participants have seen when accessing the link which they have received via email or chose to access from the LinkedIn post.

### **Work Meaning in Career Development Processes and Overall Satisfaction**

### **Informed Consent to participate in a Research Study**

### **University of Lausanne**

#### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The present research study is aimed at analyzing the impact of perceived job meaning on the relationship between decent work perception and overall life and job satisfaction. The present research is part of a Master Thesis led under the supervision of Jonas Masdonati, associate professor at the Institute of Psychology of the University of Lausanne. You have been invited to take part as you are an eligible adult living in the Netherlands.

#### PROCEDURES

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire concerning themes such as job meaning, life and job satisfaction, decent work and demographic information. It is anticipated that your involvement will take between 10 and 15 minutes.

## RISKS

The present study proposes a minimal risk of loss of privacy. The researcher is the only one with access to the collected data.

There may also be the case that you feel uncomfortable with the study procedure or the nature of the questions. If this is the case, feel free to leave any question(s) unanswered or end your participation at any time. You are free to stop at any moment and ask to withdraw your answers after you have submitted them may you change your mind regarding your participation.

If you experience any distress after finishing the study, the researcher can be reached by mail at [ioana-casandra.petrea@unil.ch](mailto:ioana-casandra.petrea@unil.ch).

## CONFIDENTIALITY

All responses are anonymous. Data is used solely for the purpose of the current study and only the researcher will have access to it. After concluding the study, all data will be deleted.

## BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefits to you participating in this research study. Your answers are, however, very valuable and may benefit the study field.

## COSTS

There are no costs to you participating in this study.

## COMPENSATION

No compensation is offered for this study, financial or other.

## QUESTIONS

May you have any additional questions about the study or your rights as a study participant, please contact the researcher at [ioana-casandra.petrea@unil.ch](mailto:ioana-casandra.petrea@unil.ch)

PARTICIPATION IN THE CURRENT STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline taking part in this research or withdraw your participation at any given time without penalty.

Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status at your current company or your current position.

If you consent to participate, please click NEXT to be taken to the survey. Thank you!

1. To which gender identity do you most identify?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Other
  
2. Please choose the option that most accurately describes your employment status.
  - a. Full time
  - b. Part time
  - c. Self-employed full-time
  - d. Self-employed part-time



- e. Retired
  - f. On disability
  - g. Stay at home parent
  - h. Unemployed
  - i. Other (e.g., Full/Part time and self-employed) \_\_\_\_\_
3. If employed, how long have you been in your current job?
- a. Less than 1 year
  - b. 1-5 years
  - c. 5-10 years
  - d. 10-15 years
  - e. Over 15 years
4. What is your current position?
- \_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you ever been unemployed?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
6. If you have ever been unemployed, for how long? (please answer in months)
- \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.
- a. Less than High School
  - b. Some High School
  - c. High School Degree

- d. Trade/Vocational School
  - e. Some Bachelor's credit
  - f. Bachelor's Degree (BA, BSc etc.)
  - g. Some Master's credit
  - h. Master's Degree (M.B.A., M.S., M.D. etc.)
  - i. Doctorate Degree (Ph.D etc.)
8. What is your average yearly household income? Please include income from your spouse/partner as well.
- a. Less than €25,000 per year
  - b. €25,000-€50,000 per year
  - c. €51,000-€75,000 per year
  - d. €76,000-€100,000 per year
  - e. €101,000-€125,000 per year
  - f. €126,000-€150,000 per year
  - g. €151,000-€175,000 per year
  - h. €176,000-€200,000 per year
  - i. €201,000 + per year
  - j. I don't know or I'd rather not say
9. How many family members live with you and are supported by this household income?
- \_\_\_\_\_
10. How would you describe your current social class?
- a. Lower class
  - b. Working class

- c. Middle class
  - d. Upper middle class
  - e. Upper class
11. I identify as a/an... (Please fill in country affiliation, e.g. "Canadian", "American", etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_

12. How strong is your identification with the Netherlands?

- a. Very Weak
  - b. Weak
  - c. Strong
  - d. Very Strong
13. Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in the country you currently live in. At the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off - those who have the most money, the most education and the most respected jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off - who have the least money, least education, and the least respected jobs or no job. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom. Where would you place yourself on this ladder?

















46. I am satisfied with my life.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

47. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

48. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

### **Work Meaning in Career Development Processes and Overall Satisfaction**

Thank you very much for your participation! Your responses have been recorded. You might now quit the page.