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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Absolute autonomy, respectful recognition and derived dignity: Towards a typology of meaningful work

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Abstract

Theoretical and empirical contributions to meaningful work (MW) have flourished in the last two decades; investigating how the interplay of organizational factors with employee attitudes and experiences enables or denies MW. This paper reviews MW literature in the fields of management and organizational behaviour, political philosophy, the humanities and sociology with the aim of identifying and comparing conceptualizations of MW and how they relate to low-skilled work. The review illustrates that a wide range of MW concepts either interpret low-skilled work as bereft of essential sources for MW, or focus exclusively on workers' innate drive to make meaningful experiences and thereby neglect the politics of working life. Making the point that low-skilled work can also be meaningful, the paper develops a framework for low-skilled work that has at its heart the interplay between the unique characteristics and dynamics of the labour process and workers' agential responses. The framework rests on a combination of labour process analysis and industrial relations approaches, along with sociological concepts of agency. It develops three interdependent conceptual dimensions of core autonomy, respectful recognition and derived dignity that aim to capture MW in low-skilled work settings. The framework contributes to vibrant debates in the MW literature by showcasing how meaningfulness emerges through bottom-up collective and individual practices, relations and strategies that are reflective of the formal structures, demands and relations of low-skilled work.

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical and empirical contributions to meaningful work (MW) have flourished in the last two decades; investigating how the interplay of organizational factors with employee attitudes and experiences enables or denies MW. However, while continuing discussions contribute important insights, MW remains a contested concept in terms of its scope and meaning as new conceptual puzzles emerge (Bailey et al., 2019a; Yeoman et al., 2019). A key aspect that this paper aims to address is the paucity of MW concepts that enable an analysis of how MW emerges in low-skilled work settings, while considering the interplay between the unique characteristics and dynamics of the labour process and workers' agential responses. We take a unique point of departure in order to address this gap by developing a framework that captures how MW emerges through bottom-up collective and individual practices, relations

and strategies in the formal and informal aspects of the labour process of low-skilled work.

The MW framework proposed is informed by a review of the MW literature from four academic research fields: management and organizational behaviour; political philosophy; the humanities; and sociology. The review illustrates that a dominant perspective in these fields associates low-skilled work with alienated and thereby meaningless work. Consequently, a wide range of approaches suggest that low-skilled work needs to be redesigned and 'enriched' by generating high levels of job autonomy that foster task identity and significance, and generating MW enablers such as self-efficacy, competence and self-worth (Beadle, 2019; Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004; Yeoman, 2014a). Nevertheless, case studies highlight that people in high-skilled work may also experience a lack of meaning; posing questions about theoretical frameworks that rest on a 'job-enrichment' perspective (Berg et al., 2010; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Sennett, 2006). Furthermore, recent research provides ample evidence that workers in low-skilled jobs, characterized by low levels of formalized technical knowledge and skills, narrow task autonomy and few training and development opportunities, find ways to make their work satisfying and meaningful (Deery et al., 2019; Findlay & Thompson, 2017; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Adding to the discussion, the review also considers alternative MW perspectives that focus on the intra-subjective dynamics of individuals' accounts that render work worthy and meaningful (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009), or discuss leadership practices and organizational cultures that infuse work with meaning (Carton, 2018; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010). Based on the literature review, we argue that such approaches provide invaluable perspectives on MW that offer important questions for approaching MW in low-skilled work. Nevertheless, the majority of approaches follow either an up-skilling and job enrichment perspective or focus on inter-subjective and intra-subjective dynamics that foster the individual experience of MW (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017), so that conceptual frameworks that capture how MW emerges 'beyond managerial reach' (Harding, 2019: 136) remain scarce.

Attempting to fill this conceptual gap, the paper combines labour process analysis (LPA) and industrial relations analysis (IRA) to capture how MW is experienced at the individual level, while its ingredients are relational and shaped by structural enablers and constraints at the organizational, corporate and labour process level. This understanding informs the formulation of a novel conceptual framework for exploring meaningful low-skilled work that highlights the politics and social relations of low-skilled labour, as well as the agency of human labour. Within this conceptual realm, the paper develops the following three core dimensions of MW for low-skilled work: core autonomy, derived dignity and respectful recognition. The review highlights how the dimensions play an important role, though in different shapes and forms, in the four fields of existing MW research. Furthermore, the paper suggests that in order to capture MW in low-skilled work settings, the three dimensions need to be revised and tailored towards the particularities of low-skilled work so that it can be emphasized how MW is achieved individually and in connection with others via the utilization of core autonomy, relations and structures that foster respectful recognition and practices, as well as human bonds that support dignity at work.

This paper combines LPA and IRA with a relational human agency approach that takes objective structures and their impact on people seriously, conceptualizing people as meaning-makers as well as interdependent beings who possess a concern for, and develop commitments to, their own and other's well-being; revealing a vulnerable, reflective, needy and relational character (Archer, 1995; Sayer, 2011). While acknowledging that people seek spaces to create and sustain MW, the framework we are proposing also acknowledges the pressures a fast-paced global capitalism brings; leading to a significant rise in reports of 'bad jobs' and concern for the serious consequences meaningless work can have, even when it is buffered and mediated by human connection (Felstead et al., 2009; Warhurst et al., 2012).

The paper answers calls for integrative conceptual frameworks that go beyond the dichotomist understanding of MW as either a product of managerial practices or as an entirely individual experience (Bailey et al., 2019b; Harding, 2019; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). In a similar vein, the lack of MW concepts that focus on the interplay of its subjective and objective dimensions has been noted (Yeoman, 2014a; Yeoman et al., 2019). In this way, the paper offers two key contributions. First, addressing the scarcity of MW frameworks for low-skilled work, a novel MW framework is presented that acknowledges the politics of MW by combining insights from LPA and IRA, and work and employment research, while emphasizing the power of human agency for creating and sustaining MW, even under conditions that are far from fulsome. This offers an understanding of how MW can be created and sustained by low-skilled workers from what may be objectively meaningless work against the backdrop of the contested terrain of the workplace. Second, the typology offers important discussion points for approaches to MW in the four reviewed fields of organizational behaviour, political philosophy, humanities and sociology; highlighting the relationship between the formal and informal organization of work, exploring what it is that enables and, respectively, constrains MW

and the role of human agency in experiencing meaningfulness within the labour process.

REVIEWING MEANINGFUL WORK

The review of literature was driven by the overarching question of if and how conceptual and empirical MW approaches offer an understanding of the experience of MW in low-skilled work. This focus informed three key objectives: (1) to identify key enablers and outcomes of MW as portrayed in the leading academic fields; (2) to compare the conceptualization of key enablers and outcomes of MW across the identified academic fields; and (3) to discuss the explanatory power of conceptualizations for MW in low-skilled work settings.

When approaching the field of MW, we found it to be characterized by a high level of heterogeneity rooted in the contribution of different academic disciplines. The initial sweep of literature supported recent observations that the most prevalent disciplines in the field of MW are management and organizational behaviour, political philosophy, the humanities and sociology (Bailey et al., 2019b; Yeoman et al., 2019). Representing the heterogeneity of the field, MW conceptualizations have a strong tendency to differ within and between the identified disciplines and fields, informed by the various conceptual frameworks and level of analysis. Furthermore, while MW research has increasingly been published in highly ranked social science and business and management peer-review journals, many influential MW approaches, particularly in the humanist discipline and field of political philosophy, have been published as monographs, or in non- and lower-ranked journals and policy reports.

The paradigmatic diversity of MW research means that precise boundaries for inclusion or exclusion of publications would lead, if applied too narrowly, to a neglect of ideas that could be crucial for understanding MW in low-skilled workplace settings or, if applied too broadly, would result in an unmanageable number of findings. Nevertheless, we also considered the heterogeneity of the MW debate as a potential strength that offered rich possibilities for understanding the enablers and constraints of MW from different angles. In this light, a mixed-method literature review approach was utilized that combines systematic review methods with 'eclectic' methods (Franco-Santos & Otley, 2018); aiming to identify and understand key contributions and research traditions within the diverse field of MW. The mixed-method approach enabled the review to evolve over time, so that literature that has been published throughout the writing of this paper and recommendations from reviewers were evaluated, analysed and integrated, while keeping the selection and analysis criteria transparent and rigorous. This approach has been recommended, on the one hand, for topics that are conceptualized in different ways and shaped by diverse disciplines and, on the other hand, for theory building and inquiries such as what and why theory does or does not work for a specific objective (Gough et al., 2012; Heyvaert et al., 2016).

The review began with an extensive search of popular journal databases that covered a wide range of fields (Business Source Complete, International Bibliography for the Social Sciences, Proquest and Scopus). The authors agreed on the following search terms and inclusion criteria. First, the subject of interest: 'meaningful work'; keywords for the search included 'meaningful work'; OR 'meaningfulness at work'; OR 'meaningfulness in work'; OR 'meaning of work'; OR 'meaning at work'; OR 'decent work'. The keywords 'meaning in work' and 'meaning of work' were deliberately included as recent reviews have highlighted that they were frequently used interchangeably with MW (Bailey et al., 2017; Rosso et al., 2010). The second inclusion criterion was the format of each contribution: empirical literature (qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods), conceptual work and literature reviews were sought. The third inclusion criterion was contributions that were published in English. To respect the longevity of some MW discussions, the time period for published research was left open. The search produced more than 96 000 hits. To make the process more manageable, a fourth criterion was introduced that reduced the search terms to: 'meaningful work'; OR 'meaningfulness in/at work'; OR 'meaning in work'; OR 'meaning of work'. This created 4347 hits.

In order to narrow down the number of findings further, a fifth and sixth criterion were introduced. The fifth specified the document type: leading peer-reviewed academic journals that were rated 3 or higher by the Academic Journal Guide (AJG) 2015. The sixth criterion introduced the additional search terms of 'work'; OR 'employment'; OR 'management' with the aim to ensure that the publications offer a focus that meets the objectives of this paper. This search produced 163 findings. Both authors reviewed the abstracts independently, and after reaching consensus, removed duplicates and editorial publications without a unique conceptual contribution, or publications that were focusing only on the meaning 'of' or 'in' work without reference to MW. As a result, 89 empirical and conceptual articles were selected and analysed.

Due to the focus on leading peer-reviewed academic articles, the 89 publications had overwhelmingly a management and organizational behaviour and humanities focus. As the fields of political philosophy and sociology have a long tradition of publishing monographs, book chapters and in journals that do not conform to the fifth selection criteria, an eclectic review method was applied to

increase the number of publications from the two fields. This allowed a search, using the same keywords, in digital library databases, such as JSTOR and university libraries, that traditionally offer access to monographs, handbooks and alternative academic journals. In addition, ancestral searches were conducted, reviewing reference lists of selected articles to find sociological and political philosophical literature on MW. For the purpose of ensuring that the quality and relevance of the findings met the objectives of this paper, both authors reviewed the abstracts and, in some cases, included or removed publications from the process once consensus was reached. This search produced another 48 hits, reaching a total of 137 publications. Literature recommendations from the article reviewers were also considered and included where they met the criteria mentioned above. To reflect the diversity of the field, more than one publication from the same author(s) is only referenced in this paper when the contribution is distinguishable from their other publication(s). Due to this, not all publications that were selected and analysed are referenced in the final version of this paper. A qualitative synthesis allowed a crystallization of shared, but also different, conceptual and empirical assumptions about MW. Each publication was double-coded by the two authors along the following coding determinants: definition of MW; dimension(s) of MW; theories and/or measures of MW; disciplinary grounding; level of analysis; focus on type of work; key findings. In case of different outcomes, the authors revisited their analysis and mutually agreed the coding. As discussed above, MW research is a heterogenous academic field and the concept of MW is characterized as 'contested' due to the lack of a commonly accepted definition (Yeoman et al., 2019). In order to provide a more coherent analysis, the literature was grouped under one of the above-mentioned fields in an attempt to emphasize more clearly commonalities and differences between MW approaches. The allocation of the articles was based on one or several of the following categories: self-categorization of the article; theories that reflected a particular disciplinary focus; the publication outlet and the level of analysis. In order to meet the three objectives of the article, we analysed and compared definitions of MW, MW dimensions, their conceptualization and link to particular types of work or jobs. This allowed recognition of the multilevel and multi-dimensional nature of the MW debate and enabled a comparison of conceptual and empirical contributions from different fields. As a result of this process, four tables have been produced for the four fields of MW (Tables 1–4). The tables offer clarity on the strongest emergent themes that inspired the introduction of an MW framework for low-skilled work. They also highlight how the newly introduced framework reconceptualizes critical dimensions of MW via a unique theoretical approach that is rooted in the sociology of work and industrial relations.

THE LANDSCAPE OF MEANINGFUL WORK

The review of literature begins with the organizational behaviour approach to MW that includes management scholarship as well as social psychological approaches to work and organizations, ranging from early work on engagement to recent prominent work from positive organizational psychology. This is followed by a review of some of the most influential views from political philosophy; featuring classic Marxism and contemporary political philosophy that offers normative approaches to MW. The third section reviews the growing humanities literature on MW, which is characterized by an approach to MW that is grounded in ethical theory. The fourth section discusses sociological approaches to MW that offer a focus on subjective experiences, as well as structural enablers and constraints.

Management and organizational behaviour approaches to meaningful work

A guiding principle in classic psychological work motivation theories is a desire to be engaged in work and social relationships that support people's development as workers and human beings (Herzberg et al., 1959; Maslow, 1968). Grounded in the assumption that meaningless work is counter-productive to high performance, early organizational psychological accounts emphasize the identification of job design and a humanized leadership style that meets workers' individual psychological, social and economic needs, thus contributing to the experience of meaningfulness. Hackman and Oldham's (1975) influential job characteristics model (JCM) highlights the importance of job design for the experience of MW. They identify task variety, task identity and task significance, in tandem with job autonomy and a supportive feedback system, as key job dimensions that foster a psychological state from which the experience of MW arises (see also May et al., 2004). Hackman and Oldham's contribution was a milestone for MW research in the way it focused on the experience of MW as founded on the design of worthwhile, interesting and useful jobs. Indeed, the JCM inspired a wide range of MW accounts that explore the importance of stable and specific job characteristics involved in the formal organization of work, in combination with leadership styles, for the experience of MW and its positive outcomes for the organization in general and job engagement in particular

TABLE 1 Management and organizational behaviour

Authors	Definition of MW	Dimensions of MW	Conceptual underpinning	Focus of MW approach
Hackman and Oldham (1975)	'The degree to which the individual experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile' (p. 256).	Primary dimensions are task variety, task identity and task significance. Secondary dimensions are autonomy and feedback.	Psychological behaviour and motivation theory.	Meaningful work as a positive affect emerging from a psychological state that is prompted by primary and secondary dimensions.
Kahn (1990)	'People experienced such meaning fulness when they felt worthwhile, useful, and valuable – as though they made a difference and were not taken for granted' (p. 704).	Task characteristics (autonomy and interesting tasks); role characteristics (formal recognition of valuable status) and work interaction (promotion of dignity).	Psychological concepts of personal role engagement and personal disengagement.	Meaningful work is experienced when the individual receives a subjectively sufficient return of his/her physical or emotional investment.
Rosso et al. (2010)	'Work experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals' (p. 95).	Four dimensions: individuation (e.g. autonomy); self-connection (e.g. authenticity); contribution (e.g. self-efficacy); unification (e.g. purpose).	Primarily social psychology, that is, social identity theory.	Four key pathways to MW that emerge from the intersection of the four dimensions. They can be, but do not have to be, activated simultaneously.
Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2013)	'(. . .) meaningful work suggests an inclusive state of being. It is the way we express the meaning and purpose of our lives through the activities (work) that take up most of our waking hours' (p. 11).	Three key interdependent factors: sense of self (e.g. finding one's purpose); the work itself (autonomy; opportunities to learn and master skills; work that matches perceptions of higher purpose); the workplace (e.g. work–life balance).	Primary focus on social psychological theories on individual and organizational behaviour.	Quality of the match between self, work and the workplace.
Steger (2019)	'Meaningful work is work that people gladly, gratefully, and energetically give their best selves and effort' (p. 218).	When CARMA (clarity, authenticity, respect, mattering and autonomy) and SPIRE (strengths, personalization, integration, resonance and expansion) mutually reinforce each other.	Psychological theories that identify 'high-value levers' (p. 215) that enable the experience of MW.	When meaningful leadership meets individuals' construction of a meaningful life.

TABLE 2 Political philosophy

Authors	Definition of MW	Dimensions of MW	Conceptual underpinning	Focus of MW approach
Schwartz (1982)	'Work that allows workers to act as autonomous individuals and thus foster instead of stunting their autonomous development' (p. 642).	Autonomy; participation in decision-making; democratic division of labour; skilled work; training; good pay.	Political economy and philosophy.	Normative approach that calls for a restructuring of work. Focus is on enhancing participation in decision-making.
Breen (2019)	'Work that facilitates and enhances our sense of self and broader personal life' (p. 51).	Freedom as autonomy that fosters self-determination, 'a status basic to human dignity' (p. 59); freedom as self-realization and freedom as non-domination.	Political philosophy.	Normative concept that calls for a strengthening of protective measurements that safeguard workers from exploitation and abuse in capitalist organizations.
Bowie (2019)	Six characteristics: (1) autonomy on the job; (2) work that supports development of autonomy and rationality; (3) a wage that supports independency; (4) work that develops workers' rational capacities; (5) work that does not conflict with workers' moral development; and (6) work that is not paternalistic.	Autonomy; sufficient pay; task variety and task identity that fosters rational capacities and moral development; respect for different pathways to obtain happiness.	Ethical philosophy.	Focus is on the implementation of management practices that grant workers genuine autonomy (e.g. open book management) and supports their moral development.
Yeoman (2014a,b)	Meaningful work as work that allows workers to fulfil their fundamental needs and thus '(…) satisfy their inescapable interests in freedom, autonomy, and dignity' (2014b, p. 235).	When work is structured by the features of dignity, autonomy as non-alienation, respect, recognition and freedom.	Human capability approach; moral philosophy.	Implementation of a workplace democracy that enforces co-determination at work and allows workers to fulfil their fundamental needs.
Sayer (2009)	'Complex, interesting work [that] allows workers (…) to develop and exercise their capacities, and gain the satisfaction from achieving the internal goods of a practice, but to gain the external goods of recognition and esteem' (p. 1).	Challenging and interesting tasks; opportunities for workers to apply and develop their capacities; internal satisfaction; recognition from others; esteem from others.	Political philosophy: moral economy.	Emphasis is on the objective organization of work that allows all labour market participants equal access to meaningful tasks.

TABLE 3 Humanities

Authors	Definition of MW	Dimensions of MW	Conceptual underpinning	Focus of MW approach
Madden and Bailey (2019)	Work is meaningful when it 'allows us to transcend our selfhood, expanding our self-boundaries inter-subjectively, enabling us to flourish and realize our potential by gaining insight with and through others into the significance of our work' (p. 159).	Inter-subjective experience of the significance of one's work that goes beyond the individual. The experience is assumed to be embedded in an interpersonal, temporal or spatial context.	Humanist approaches to self-transcendence.	MW is experienced when contexts, activities or encounters at work are of great significance to the individual and go beyond the self. This experience can be temporal.
Pavlish et al. (2019)	'Meaningfulness emerges from actions that reflect the self and particularly from actions that aim to do good for others' (p. 243).	Useful work; purpose; task significance; contribution to well-being.	Interdisciplinary care theory; philosophy of meaning.	Focus is on the positive individual experience of the actor and the relational dimensions of work and its positive impact.
Bunderson and Thompson (2009)	MW as work that has 'significance, purpose, or transcendent meaning' (p. 32).	Significance, purpose and transcendence.	Humanist theories of calling; transcendence.	Focus is on the individual experience of work as a calling; that is, performing work that is perceived as one's destiny and duty.
Schnell et al. (2013)	'(…) meaningfulness as full mediator of relationships between task significance, task identity, autonomy, feedback, and skill variety and work engagement' (p. 544).	Self-efficacy, work-role fit, task significance, socio-moral climate and self-transcendent orientation.	Primary focus on social psychological theories of individual and organizational behaviour.	The dimensions of MW operate at an individual, work task and organizational level. They foster simultaneously, and incrementally, the experience of MW.
Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009)	Meaningful work is 'a property of human beings' (p. 493); that is, activated by 'a combination of work meanings' (p. 502).	Developing and becoming one's self; unity with others; serving others and expressing self (p. 499).	Eclectic combination of humanist approaches.	MW is a property of human beings that is activated by a set of enablers.

TABLE 4 Sociology

Authors	Definition of MW	Dimensions of MW	Conceptual underpinning	Focus of MW approach
Kalleberg and Marsden (2019)	MW as 'opportunities to exercise autonomy and to help others and society' (p. 45).	Importance people place on work generally; importance of specific work conditions, such as earnings, security, autonomy, advancement and intrinsic qualities of work.	Sociology of work values; life course.	Multi-dimensional view of work values, focusing on the importance workers place on specific conditions and features of work and how these enable them to care for others.
Bailey and Madden (2017)	'Meaningfulness arises when an individual perceives an authentic connection between their work and a broader transcendent life purpose beyond the self' (p. 4).	Two pathways to MW (p. 4): (1) when 'individuals perceive their work invokes the greater good in terms of societal or economic benefits'; (2) 'In the service of a "higher power" (…)'.	Social philosophy and sociology.	Stigmatized, craft and professional work can be experienced as meaningful when the two pathways are fulfilled. The experience of MW can be episodical.
Simpson et al. (2019)	MW as a '(…) complex system of interactions between psychological processes, institutionalized meanings, embodied practices, and normative judgment (…)' (p. 226).	Work that is characterized by inter-subjective, self-actualized and/or stigmatized dimensions that offer recognition and autonomy.	Sociological theory of habitus and agency.	Work-based meanings are created by workers; a sense of dignity and worth is derived even in stigmatized occupations through camaraderie and shared work values and norms.
Gallie (2019)	Work that is characterized by 'opportunities for people to pursue activities that they regard as worthwhile in terms of widely shared salient values' (p. 382).	Autonomy as job discretion; participation in decision-making; opportunities for self-determination and for realizing other valued objectives.	Sociology of job quality.	Focus is on objective workplace conditions and how these allow workers to develop and meet values that foster meaningful work.
Taylor and Roth (2019)	Meaningful work is discursively framed by its social context and wider cultural norms (p. 267).	Dimensions include autonomy, dignity, self-realization and use-value.	Sociology of vocations; calling; identity theory.	The experience of MW is shaped by context; that is, culture, policies and work conditions and subjective characteristics, such as experience of calling, social identity and work orientation.

(Allan et al., 2019; Kahn, 1990; Shuck, 2019). Nevertheless, such approaches are criticized for neglecting the relational and highly contextual nature, and presenting MW exclusively as a product of the formal organization of work (Bailey et al., 2019a; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003: 94).

Picking up the focus on job design, Kahn's (1990) pivotal research identifies MW as one of three key psychological factors that contribute to personal role engagement in the context of workers' identity, values and norms that inform ongoing evaluations concerning the meaningfulness of work activities, relationships and situations. This is represented in the definition of meaningfulness as the experience of feeling 'worthwhile, useful and valuable (…) [and] not taken for granted' (Kahn, 1990: 704). Individual experiences are shaped by objective job characteristics, such as task autonomy and variety, and via work interaction through which dignity is experienced (Kahn, 1990: 706). Kahn's work played a key role in the development of multi-dimensional conceptualizations of MW that emphasize it as a cumulative and dynamic psychological state from which the organization benefits via higher levels of employee engagement (Hirschi, 2012; Kahn & Fellows, 2013; May et al, 2004; Shuck, 2019).

Rosso et al. (2010: 115) offer a widely utilized understanding of MW that sets out four key aspects. First, the label of 'individuation' refers to MW as a result of the interplay between self and agency and rests on the experience of autonomy as control over work, competence and self-efficacy at work. The second aspect, 'contribution', emerges from the juncture of agency and other orientation, referring to the anticipated positive impact work may have beyond oneself, triggering self-transcendence. Third, self-connection entails the experience of authenticity and self-affirmation, triggered by the interplay of communion and self-orientation. Fourth, unification refers to the meaningfulness experienced when work is connecting oneself with others or higher principles. Rosso et al.'s approach offers a valuable contribution to the debate, having at its heart a psychological concept of agency defined as a drive 'to separate, assert, expand, master, and create' (Rosso et al., 2010: 114). It reflects continuity and change within the JCM-informed MW discourse. The emphasis on a dynamic and relational understanding of human agency, however, is a welcome contribution, while formal autonomy in the form of control over tasks and processes continues to be a key requirement for the experience of MW. Nevertheless, the model remains rooted in the individual experience of the worker. It excludes from analysis the role of collective agency and the politics of working life that shape informal practices and relations beyond the gaze of formal management practices and wider institutional features. In addition, the focus on stable work environments, career goals and high degrees of autonomy and discretion as key requirements for MW tailors the model to professional and high-skilled work.

In a similar vein, prominent positive psychological approaches to MW highlight the relationship between intra-subjective factors of meaningful life and MW. The importance of leadership and organizational practice is underlined as a means of building favourable conditions for MW and leading to significant positive outcomes for the organization, such as high performance, engagement and motivation levels of employees. For example, Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2013) conceptualize MW as the interaction between three pillars: (1) the 'whole self', featuring intrinsic needs of the individual, such as wants and desires, that are rooted in emotions, mind, spirit and complex belief systems; (2) the 'work itself', referring to whether individuals are granted autonomy in work, if opportunities to learn and flourish are offered and how work is managed and organized, but also whether conditions at work enable autonomous decisions to be made in private life; and (3) the balance and alignment between the first two dimensions. Within this framework, the authors state that human resource developers (HRDs) can encourage and foster MW by ensuring 'organizational commitment and contribution to the quality of life of employees' (Chalofsky & Cavallaro, 2013: 338). The model helpfully distinguishes between people's wants and needs, illuminating the interplay between psychological processes and work organization factors for creating meaning at work.

A similar focus is inherent in Steger's (2019) contribution, which focuses explicitly on leadership dimensions for enabling MW in organizations (CARMA) and combines it with personal-level factors of workers (SPIRE). While the latter features necessary individual capabilities for experiencing MW, such as the need to personalize work and develop an ownership of one's work within the context of acting ethically, CARMA highlights the importance of leadership for organizing MW, encompassed in the creation of high levels of autonomy for employees, clarity, authenticity and respect when managing people (Steger, 2019). Here, autonomy is considered central to MW as it is encapsulated in the ability to 'exercise volition and judgment in one's work' (Steger, 2019: 216). The approaches of Steger and Chalofsky and Cavallaro continue the emphasis on deeply subjective processes and characteristics that shape or constrain the experience of MW, while the centrality of career paths, autonomy at work and sophisticated HRDs strengthen the causal relationship between highly skilled professional jobs that have sophisticated HRM agendas and MW.

Overall, despite differences concerning the conceptualization and analytical level of MW within the organizational behaviour literature, several consistent themes emerge that are crystallized in Table 1. First, a leitmotif

in these accounts is the importance of objective job conditions, such as skilled work that features high levels of task autonomy, task variety, employment security and respectful and supportive leadership and human resource development practices. The latter are understood to inform individual experiences of doing useful work that is recognized and esteemed by others. Second, strong causal chains between MW and positive outcomes for the organization are assumed. These include higher employee engagement, commitment and overall increasing levels of performance, but also individual gains for employees, such as higher levels of well-being, satisfaction and the experience of personal development. Third, the majority of MW models focus on the formal organization of work and strategies to manage, and respectively, create conditions that foster MW (Carton, 2018; Ciulla, 2019; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2016). Therein, MW is placed within the formal efficiency and engagement logic of organizations and the labour process.

Indeed, OB approaches have been criticized for their tendency to reduce MW to a product of management practices that fit attitudes and individual preferences, overemphasize harmonious relationships, while neglecting the politics of working life, and the wider organizational, societal and political dynamics that shape the nature, availability and experience of MW (Bailey & Madden, 2017; Harding, 2019; Lysova et al., 2019; May et al., 2004). Furthermore, recent evidence suggests that high levels of task autonomy, task variety, task significance and sophisticated training and development opportunities are only available to a minority of labour market participants (Foden, 2020; Kalleberg, 2018). This raises the question of how MW in less privileged workplace settings can be captured, or whether the majority of contemporary jobs are bereft of MW. And yet, the focus in this field on the centrality of formal job autonomy that allows workers to self-actualize, engage in work they find interesting and receive formal recognition from management offers important stimuli for our aim to offer a framework of MW in low-skilled work. However, in order to acknowledge the nature of low-skilled work, the dimension of autonomy needs to be decoupled from formal job autonomy, while recognition has to be disconnected from formal management practices, whereas the notion of self-actualization needs to encapsulate the power of workers' self-command and agency.

Political philosophy approaches to meaningful work

Political philosophy has a long-standing history of conceptualizing MW, highlighting its social, emancipatory and transformative potential (Honneth, 1982; MacIntyre, 1981; Marx, 1974). Karl Marx (1974), for example, draws on Hegel's notion of work as the determining force for the development of individuals. Marx extols a vision of a just society where work, labour and social relations are not subject to occupational divisions. More specifically, in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (Marx, 1964), Marx renders MW as social labour that empowers individuals to develop and apply their diverse skills and capabilities within a community of people. The emancipatory potential of work rests on the concept of the worker as a meaning-seeking individual whose innate capacities enable a realization of their true talents and desires through an engagement with the 'sensuous external world (…) the material on which labour is realised, in which it is active' (Marx, 1964: 109).

Marx's influence on contemporary political philosophy accounts is visible in the concentration on autonomy and dignity as key ingredients for MW, as both elements unravel emancipatory potential that spills over into the wider human project to 'lead lives of intelligence and initiative' (Schwartz, 1982: 635), empowering workers to become independent decision-makers (Breen, 2019). In this realm, autonomous work is broadly referred to as opportunities at work for people to exercise their capabilities without force, plan work-related activities and make independent decisions regarding the work process (Bowie, 2019; MacIntyre, 1981; Mei, 2019; Schwartz, 1982; Veltman, 2016).

Autonomous work as MW has been particularly prominent in Marxist-inspired virtue ethics approaches. Indeed, contributions that apply MacIntyre's (1981) work highlight the meaningfulness of work practices that create human goods and are organized in regulated spaces. Here, work qualifies as practice when it contains autonomous, challenging and stimulating work that is embedded in ongoing self-organized spaces of learning from teachers, colleagues and past and present experts in the relevant field (Beadle, 2019; MacIntyre, 1981). Informed by virtue ethics but diverting from the exclusive understanding of MW as professional work, Sayer (2009) portrays MW as a bundle of dignified activities that feature a combination of routine and semi-skilled tasks with stimulating, challenging high-skilled tasks, framed by high levels of autonomy that grant workers opportunities to engage in goal setting and wider work organization decisions. Here, dignity and autonomy are intertwined. Both facilitate MW when work is not competitively organized and characterized by a separation of conception from execution. The mutuality of dignity and autonomy as central pillars for MW is also key to Bowie's (2019) work, who deploys a Kantian approach to MW, linking tasks and processes at work that allow workers to utilize their autonomy on the job with intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of jobs that enable people to develop as

moral beings who can follow their conception of happiness.

Accounts of MW that highlight the centrality of work as autonomous and essentially emancipatory practice may deviate on the question of the nature of skills but are united in their understanding that meaningfulness can only emerge through non-dominated work that fosters virtuous dispositions and contributes to human flourishment. Yet, an integral feature of these accounts is the understanding that autonomy at work is inevitably squeezed by managerial attempts to rationalize, instrumentalize and control work (Breen, 2019; MacIntyre, 1981; Mei, 2019). Against this backdrop, political approaches to MW call for restructuring work by minimizing the technical and social division of labour, creating equal opportunities to engage in jobs that contain routine and stimulating tasks and thereby increasing opportunities for MW (Gomberg, 2007; Sayer, 2009). Agreeing with the necessity of restructuring the social, economic and political dimensions of work, Yeoman (2014a,b) utilizes a liberal perfectionist framework and develops a normative approach to MW that combines objective and subjective dimensions. Utilizing Wolf's (2010) philosophy of meaningfulness, she conceptualizes people as 'co-creators of values and meanings' who need to be empowered to become 'co-authorities in the realm of values' (Yeoman, 2014b: 235, 243). In this context, Yeoman argues that the organization of work must feature the principals of autonomy as non-alienation, freedom as non-domination and social recognition as dignified work. The subjective components of the approach shine through in the concept of 'worthy objects', where emphasis is placed on people's experience of a fulfilling emotional engagement with their work that involves an appreciation of its objective qualities, as well as an 'appropriate response to the nature of the object' (Yeoman, 2014b: 245). This stream of thought is also inherent in the understanding of dignity, which Yeoman, along with recent work on MW, emphasizes as a key component (Bowie, 2019; Roessler, 2012; Thompson, 2019). Indeed, Yeoman (2014a: 145) argues that 'a sense of dignity depends upon being able to exercise practices of care towards the worthy objects we have appropriated to the meaning content of our lives (…)'. The approach is valuable in the way it acknowledges the importance of the political economy context for the provision of objective conditions for MW, moving away from a focus on leadership and individual preferences that are dominant in the management and organizational behaviour literature. Yeoman's threefold typology is particularly useful in the way it fuses the objective and subjective features of MW, focusing on how people create lasting orientations within given structures towards 'objects of worth', so that 'meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness' (Wolf, 2010: 9).

Overall, the political philosophy approach contributes an important normative stance that emphasizes the importance of autonomy, dignity and respectful relations as key pillars of MW (Table 2). Yet, the requirements for achieving MW are high and restricted to a small group of occupations, such as professions and craft work. Prominent contributions in this field argue that an intervention by the state that restructures the economy and implements a genuine workplace democracy that enforces co-determination and is more responsive to workers' interests would enhance opportunities for MW (Sayer, 2009; Yeoman, 2014a). Arguably, within this diverse scholarship, the notion of people as meaning seekers who create and defend MW in low-skilled settings is underplayed and the small, but nevertheless meaningful, experiences of day-to-day autonomy, respect and dignity are lost. This paper argues that the combination of the philosophical underpinning of workers as 'co-creators of values and meanings' with labour process theory and human agency concepts would remedy this shortfall, portraying workers as actors who can, through individual and relational practices, foster a core autonomy, derive dignity and engage in respectful recognition (Yeoman, 2014b: 235).

Approaches in the humanities to meaningful work

A widely shared ontological understanding in the humanities approach to MW is, in reference to classic humanist psychological theory, people's powerful will to experience their work as purposeful and worthy (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). This informs the understanding that meaningfulness does not consist of a stable set of experiences that can be activated under certain circumstances but refers to intra- and inter-subjective dynamics that shape workers' ongoing sense-making (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). A prominent lens that represents such dynamics is the notion of self-transcendence (Bailey & Madden, 2017; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009). For example, Madden and Bailey (2019) suggest that MW is work that has value and purpose, offering opportunities for workers' self-realization by bringing together the 'inner and the outer life'. Here, the experience of MW is grounded in contexts, activities or encounters at work that are of great significance to the individual; fostering an understanding of the value and contribution of one's work that goes beyond the self. A similar understanding of MW is encoded in Pavlish et al.'s (2019) research on care work, where MW is understood to emerge when caring tasks are intertwined with caring relationships from which

recognition, value, significance and purpose are derived. In addition, Pavlish et al. emphasize that care workers cannot rely on external sources for MW and thereby search and create conditions and experiences intra-subjectively. This is an aspect of meaning making that is a key dynamic in humanist approaches to MW, reflecting what Lepisto and Pratt (2017) call a 'justification perspective', which argues that meaning is not inherent to the work and its relationships but is created and interpreted by workers.

Taking up the focus on self-transcendence and emphasizing the nature of work in tandem with a variety of inter-subjective and intra-subjective dimensions of MW, Schnell et al. (2013, 2019) understand MW as purposeful work that has a self-transcendent orientation, characterized by task significance, variety and identity, and embedded in significant levels of job autonomy and a supportive feedback system. The authors argue that these characteristics need to be in harmony with wider life goals, allowing individuals to experience coherence, orientation, significance and belonging. In a similar vein, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) conceptualize MW via an emphasis on 'other'- and 'self'-oriented dimensions. 'Other'-oriented dimensions are involved in the experience of 'unity with others through work' and the perception that work has a higher purpose beyond the self and offers opportunities to serve others. 'Self'-oriented dimensions are encoded in the opportunity to develop and deploy one's full potential at work, as well as spaces to further develop.

The humanities offer insightful illustrations of the experience of MW that go beyond objective work and job conditions. They amplify the subjective will to meaning that finds its expression in the experience of MW as a facilitator for the experience of purpose, belonging and, ultimately, self-transcendence (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Thereby, an approach to MW is offered that extends the dominant focus on enriched and relatively high-skilled jobs and professions, enabling an exploration of how meaningfulness might be experienced in less privileged jobs that are physically and mentally exhausting, not highly esteemed in society and feature precarious job and employment conditions (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Florian et al., 2019; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016; Oelberger, 2019; Veltman, 2016). Indeed, the recent focus on the 'dark side' of MW has added nuance to the primarily positive conceptualizations of MW in this field (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Oelberger, 2019; Schnell et al., 2019).

The humanities lie in stark contrast to the management and organizational behaviour approach, diverting from a top-down understanding of objective structures and policies as enablers of MW. Instead, a distinctive contribution of the humanities is the focus on the inter-subjective nature of MW and the necessary match of workers' interests with societal needs that emphasize the importance of purposeful, worthy and unifying work. This perspective shares important themes with the political philosophy literature and its conceptualization of MW as non-alienated, autonomous and interesting work that has use-value for oneself and others.

Consequentially, the experience of recognition from co-workers, line-managers, customers, patients and wider society for engaging in useful work and doing it well emerges as a central tenet of MW within this field (Table 3). Part and parcel of humanist approaches is their strong tendency to almost exclusively focus on the subjective experience of MW, whereas an analysis of the interplay between the particular dynamics of the labour process and politics of working life of low-skilled work, and how they shape subjective experiences and practices that foster MW is under-emphasized. The framework of MW for low-skilled work that is developed in this paper picks up the notion of workers as meaning makers who thrive on the experience of purpose, recognition and autonomy and connects them to the contested terrain of low-skilled work that shapes how the dimensions unfold and contribute to the experience of MW.

Sociological approaches to meaningful work

MW has a long, but also contested, history in sociology and sociologically informed academic fields, such as industrial relations (Budd, 2004). Rooted in the origins of social theory, MW is understood broadly as activities that serve human needs, have a substantive character and feature principals of craft work and workmanship. The Industrial Revolution disembedded labour from its organic roots and commodified and subsumed it under the principals of the capitalist division of labour (Marx, 1974), where opportunities to experience MW were lost. Consequentially, sociological accounts became sceptical of the idea of MW and focused for the majority of the second half of the 20th century on the nature and dominance of alienated work under a capitalist political economy (Blauner, 1964; Braverman, 1974).

Weber's (1958) work, however, takes a different path, suggesting that the Calvinist protestant religion informed the widely shared idea of work as virtuous activity when it is experienced as 'a calling'. According to Weber, work is perceived as a calling when God-given talents are exercised in a diligent manner, making contributions to the well-being of others. The concept of 'calling' became a focal point in sociologically informed MW debates that stress a causal relationship between the experience of work as a vocation and workers' heightened obligation to work well and hard for a higher cause (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015;

Madden et al., 2015). Against this backdrop, research suggests that MW that rests on the experience of a calling tends to go hand in hand with workers' acceptance of precarious, self-exploitative, dangerous and overly demanding conditions (Oelberger, 2019; Taylor & Roth, 2019). And yet, there is a debate whether 'calling' as a construct is not a social phenomenon in its own right that refers to processes and relations that are, despite overlaps, distinctive from MW (Lysova et al., 2019; Yeoman et al., 2019).

Another influential approach within this field is the sociologically informed industrial relations scholarship and research on good and decent work. Here, the focus rests on enablers for MW at the regulatory, job and employment level. For example, Kalleberg and Marsden (2019: 45) understand MW as 'opportunities to exercise autonomy and to help others and society', referring to objective conditions that enable the experience of meaningfulness. This stance is inherent in a range of industrial relations accounts that focus on the necessity of particular institutional settings and policies for MW at the macro-level to buffer the commodification of labour via legal frameworks and policies and establish opportunities for 'voice', such as through the right to collective bargaining, employee protection rules and the development of life-long learning and training schemes (DGB, 2019; Eurofound, 2016; Foden, 2020; ILO, 2017; Thompson, 2019). At the workplace level, the provision of interesting and skilful work that is characterized by task autonomy and bears use-value (Kalleberg, 2011), in tandem with direct worker involvement, participation and voice mechanisms, is considered paramount for MW (Budd, 2004; Gallie, 2019; Gunawardana, 2014). One approach that brings the institutional and workplace level together comes from Honneth (2012), who argues that MW needs to meet workers' recognition claims. These claims are met via access to adequately paid jobs that are not in conflict with other life goals, opportunities for the application and enhancement of skills, and spaces for co-determination and esteem for work well done from others. In a similar vein, Bailey and Madden (2017: 325) emphasize the importance of horizontal exchanges of recognition that refuse collectors experience via the collective endeavour of returning the lorry load at the end of the working day. Meanwhile research on dignity and gender at work refers to the importance of fair and equal employment practices that pave the way for MW by respecting individual needs, responsibilities and interests (Budd, 2004; Sayer, 2009; Sharabi, 2017). Sociological research has further unravelled how workers' moral evaluations, encoded in reflections on how they and others are treated at work, can inform a wide range of meaningful practices, such as union activities at work (Yu, 2016), communities of coping (Korczynski, 2003) and informal cooperation (Karlsson, 2012). It is suggested that these practices reframe the experience of low-skilled work as employees seek to snatch back autonomy and, by association, dignity (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Hodson, 2001; Noronha et al., 2020).

In sum, the sociological field offers important contributions to the objective and subjective nature of MW (Table 4). Yet there is a strong tendency to focus either on the objective or subjective characteristics of MW and thereby neglect an understanding of their interplay. The focus on objective conditions places a welcome focus on the importance of regulatory regimes and institutions for MW. In turn, the emphasis on the subjective dimensions reveals how, even within objectively meaningless work, people can derive subjective meanings in different ways; seeking and securing autonomy from management control and deriving meaningfulness from the recognition they receive for their work. The framework that is developed in the next section proposes that autonomy, recognition and dignity, three dimensions that also play central roles in the sociological field, are key tenets of MW for low-skilled work. It is suggested that these dimensions are experienced at the subjective level and also shaped by the objective conditions of the labour process of low-skilled work.

TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF MEANINGFUL WORK

Though generalizing what is a heterogenous and complex debate, the review of the literature illustrates that there is a strong tendency in the field of management and organizational behaviour and political philosophy to link MW with high-skilled work that is embedded in privileged employment conditions. In this light, low-skilled work is implicitly or explicitly characterized as alienated and meaningless and the dimensions that are used to measure MW—primarily task autonomy, but also task variety, democratic participation and learning and development systems—do not, or only in a very constrained way, apply to low-skilled work (see also Foden, 2020; Kalleberg, 2011; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Meanwhile, the heterogenous field of humanities is characterized by a focus on the subjective will to find, and respectively create, purposeful and worthy work. This perspective offers invaluable insights into the power of meaning making, going beyond the focus on privileged job conditions. Yet the concentration on subjective processes comes with the idea that the experience of meaningfulness is entirely open and not inherent to, or significantly shaped by, work tasks, employment conditions and social relations of specific workplace settings (Bailey et al., 2019b). In this way, the characteristics and political dimensions of the labour process and the objective constraints and enablers of MW are neglected, limiting the explanatory power to explore issues such as the lack of meaningfulness

that high-skilled workers experience, or why workers experience MW in low-skilled jobs (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Sociological approaches tend to offer either an understanding of objective dimensions, such as specific employment conditions and work facets as facilitators for MW, or present empirical insights into MW that capture the multi-layered dynamics of workers' subjective experiences in the context of the characteristics of individual workplaces. While this field includes studies on low-skilled work that illustrate the importance of dimensions such as autonomy, recognition and dignity, that are also characterized by other fields of MW research, they lack conceptualizations of MW that go beyond single case studies.

Inspired by the four fields of MW literature, this paper presents a typology of MW for low-skilled work that rests on the dimensions of core autonomy, respectful recognition and derived dignity. The typology is informed by a novel combination of LPA and IRA. IRA and LPA have a long history in exploring the politics of working life and the nature and complex social relations of low-skilled work, enabling a firm theoretical grounding for an MW typology for low-skilled work. LPA places a particular emphasis on the struggles between capital and labour over conflicting interests and identities at the point of production (Thompson & Newsome, 2016). It captures the intentional self-organization of workers and their informal voice, offering insight into workers' core autonomy that operates outside of formal hierarchies and management control, aiming to establish practices and relations in which work is appropriated, respectful recognition is created and dignity derived (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Hodson, 2001; Karlsson, 2012; Korczynski, 2016). IRA adds to the understanding of the power asymmetry between capital and labour that allows management to dictate terms and conditions of the employment relationship, while emphasizing the importance of formal and informal worker organizations that mediate the power of the employer and establish spaces in which core autonomy can be exercised and dignity derived (Budd, 2004; Foden, 2020; Gunawardana, 2014; Noronha et al., 2020). IRA and LPA offer a conceptual toolkit that explores how workers individually and collectively exercise a core autonomy that serves to humanize the employment relationship and build the foundations of MW in low-skilled work by deriving dignity from work and building practices, relations and informal spaces in which respectful recognition is exchanged (Budd, 2004; Hodson, 2001; Karlsson, 2012; Thompson & Newsome, 2016). In order to strengthen the understanding of the agency of labour, the typology adds to IRA and LPA the social theory of Archer (2003) and Sayer (2005, 2011). This combination provides a rich conceptual understanding of people's capacity for self-command and 'degrees of freedom in determining their own course of action' (Archer, 2003: 7). Here, human agency is portrayed as a capacity to mediate structures due to people's independent causal power (Archer, 1995: 375), thus emphasizing the fundamental desire of people to experience meaningfulness by creating and enhancing autonomy that is unique to them.

While the MW dimensions of autonomy, respect, recognition and dignity are familiar themes in MW debates, the following typology picks up these themes, revises them conceptually and extends them in new directions. As a result, a typology is introduced that rests on three dimensions: core autonomy, derived dignity and respectful recognition. The typology paves the way for an analysis of how people at work flourish, suffer, defend and aim to improve conditions and relations within and through their relationship with others. Such an approach also allows a focus on how wider economic and social structures situate organizations, both limiting and supporting prospects for human agency. In line with Figure 1, the analysis presented here suggests that (i) MW is experienced at the individual level, (ii) its ingredients are relational and (iii) shaped by structural enablers and constraints at the organizational level. It is against this backdrop that people, individually and in connection with others, achieve core autonomy, respectful recognition and derived dignity, the essential ingredients for MW in low-skilled work settings.

Core autonomy

A widely shared assumption across all four reviewed fields is that formal autonomy in the labour process is a prerequisite for experiencing MW. Formal autonomy is broadly understood as levels of control and discretion workers have over tasks, processes, work scheduling and performance evaluation in the formal organization of work (Felstead et al., 2009; Thompson, 2019). Low-skilled work, however, tends to be characterized by low levels of job autonomy, constrained task variety and tight managerial control (Braverman, 1974; Thompson, 1990). In this light, the term 'core autonomy' argues that workers' self-command enables them to create and defend autonomy at work, even when formal autonomy is far from reached. The notion of self-command rests on a relational understanding of agency, emphasizing people's capacity for reflexive deliberations of how oneself and others are faring, taking seriously their interdependency and embeddedness in webs of social relationships (Archer, 2003; Karlsson, 2019; Sayer, 2011; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

A wide range of critical work and employment research on low-skilled work illustrates the power of core autonomy by revealing people's drive to create informal communities that are guided by values of care, solidarity, reciprocity and mutuality, and framed by collective norms

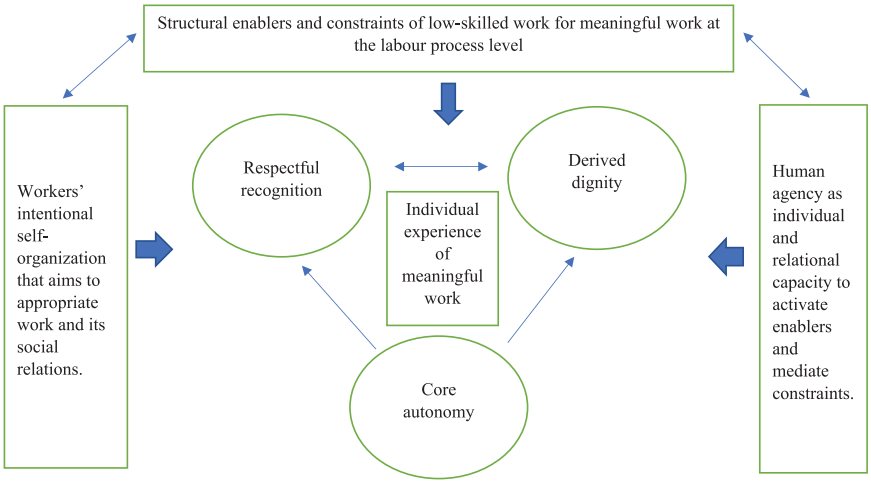

FIGURE 1 A typology of the essential ingredients for meaningful work in low-skilled work settings. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

of justice and fairness (Axelsson et al., 2019; Burawoy, 1979; Harding, 2019; Roy, 1959). For example, Burawoy's (1979) and Roy's (1959) celebrated ethnographies of manual work point towards low levels of objective autonomy at work, but refer to workers' informal shopfloor games and 'making out' practices that created autonomy and made work more meaningful. Analysing service work, Korczynski's (2003) concept of 'communities of coping' captures workers' reflexive deliberations via networks of support in light of constrained autonomy and exhausting emotional labour. In a similar vein, Harding (2019: 146) highlights how workers in a manufacturing firm experienced meaningfulness by creating temporal spaces throughout the working day in which they socialized informally and pursued personal interests on the shopfloor, experiencing themselves as 'fully human rather than an appendage of a machine'. Meanwhile, Bailey and Madden (2017) illustrate how refuse collectors pursued relative autonomy in the labour process that allowed them to experience meaningfulness by extending control over the pace and structure of their work.

These examples reveal the importance of core agency for MW, resting on the 'thick cultural ensembles of [workers'] own making' (Vallas, 2006: 1709). It is through core autonomy that workers express voice, infuse autonomous spaces in the labour process and establish informal communities and practices that are built on mutuality and the aim to humanize and reappropriate work beyond managerial reach (Gunawardana, 2014; Hodson, 2001; Korczynski, 2016; Thompson & Newsome, 2016). These relational practices are complemented by individuals' pursuit of autonomy, such as developing individualized approaches to work patterns, but also subtle oppositional practices. For example, Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2003) research on hospital cleaners shows how cleaners derived meaning from their work by informally including or excluding tasks, as well as modifying their sequence and number, while autonomously deciding how they relationally engage with patients. Labour unions and non-governmental organizations can be important enablers for the development of core autonomy through the promotion of values such as solidarity, the securing of voice patterns and opportunities for getting together and participating in actions to improve workplace conditions (Gunawardana, 2014; Korczynski & Wittel, 2020).

Respectful recognition

The social philosophy of recognition, most prominently represented by Honneth (2012), suggests that healthy self-relations, self-development and stable social relations are more broadly dependent on the experience of inter-subjective recognition. This perspective plays a key role in political philosophy accounts of MW (Sayer, 2009; Yeoman, 2014a), where it is suggested that inter-subjective experiences of recognition foster MW when social relations in the workplace are free and equal. Nevertheless, the potential explanatory power of recognition theory for understanding MW in the capitalist labour process has recently been restated, arguing that the experience of MW is inevitably interwoven with workers' experience of self-worth and self-respect at work, which is fostered or destroyed through inter-subjective recognition acts (Bailey et al., 2019a; Dutton et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Going back to sociological recognition theory and its long-standing history in emphasizing the relational and dependent nature of people, the term 'respectful recognition' emphasizes the importance of how actions and commitments are recognized and esteemed by others, but also how structures—such as the organization of work and employment conditions—enable and enhance recognition exchanges (Calhoun, 2004; Honneth, 1982; Sayer, 2011).

Inspired by Honneth (2012), respectful recognition plays out via two forms of recognition: conditional and unconditional recognition (see also Sayer, 2009; Voswinkel, 2012). Conditional recognition refers to a form of esteem for achievements, capabilities and contributions, whereas unconditional recognition is represented in the experience of being esteemed and regarded as a person within a mutual value system. At the workplace level, the social environment of work is understood to shape intersubjective communication through which achievements, actions, contributions, relations and commitments are recognized and esteemed by colleagues and line managers. Conditional recognition at the workplace level connects the granting of formalized esteem and worth with satisfying performances and relations, while unconditional recognition refers to the respect and esteem workers exchange as part of a mutual web of obligations and commitments (Sayer, 2009). Conditional and unconditional recognition is also experienced in relationships with customers, no matter how transient, as customer service is humanized and care is offered and recognition received (Foden, 2020; Hodson, 2001; ILO, 2017; Voswinkel, 2012). For example, though lacking objective status, care workers experience meaningfulness by attributing worth to their activities via caring labour (Bolton & Laaser, 2013). Indeed, work involved in personnel services, which is mostly made up of different types of 'care work', has been found to offer rich sources of recognition on the micro-level that are clearly missing from the mainly 'dirty work' done by cleaners (Pavlish et al., 2019; Simpson et al., 2019) and front-line 'McJobs' (Lindsay & McQuaid, 2004). Regarding the latter, the biggest complaint from workers, other than low pay and unsociable hours, is the lack of recognition from either employers or the public—despite feelings of pride in the work itself (Dutton et al., 2012). In a similar vein, research on street cleaners (Simpson et al., 2019) and refuse collectors (Bailey & Madden, 2017) amplifies how unconditional peer recognition encoded in mutual respect for the use-value of the work and its physicality contributed to a strengthening of workers' self-esteem and self-worth. Respectful recognition shares similarities with previously reviewed MW dimensions such as 'unity with others' (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016) or 'self-esteem' (Rosso et al., 2010), but differs in its acknowledgement of the politics of low-skilled work. At the workplace level, respectful recognition refers to workers' drive to 'constitute sociality' (Harding, 2019: 139) inter-subjectively, and create and defend informal social spaces that reassure their worth.

Adding to the social analysis at the workplace level, unconditional recognition may also be inherent to the organization of work and concrete HRM practices, and whether well-being is supported via support and safety-oriented policies, such as flexible and family-friendly work patterns, employment security and health and safety policies (Guest, 2017; Voswinkel, 2012). Though offering similarities with approaches in the management and organizational behaviour field of MW, and their emphasis on objective job dimensions, our utilization of respectful recognition differs as we acknowledge that a sophisticated HRM employee well-being agenda is unlikely in low-skilled workplace settings. In this way, the term 'respectful recognition' places emphasis on how the experience of meaningfulness relies on mutuality, recognition and respect from co-workers, customers and management (rarely offered in tandem) to support a sense of self-worth and instil pride and dignity into the day-to-day work process.

Derived dignity

In the last two decades, dignity has emerged as a central factor for the conceptualization of decent work (Bolton, 2007; Budd, 2004; ILO, 2017; Noronha et al., 2020). Though much of the decent work debate has centred on achieving quantifiable measures, such as secure and non-discriminatory terms of employment, to aid in its realization, the emphasis on the capacity to create and defend dignity in low-skilled work from the bottom up has encouraged a growing body of work that highlights well-being and meaningfulness being closely associated with the experience of dignity (Breen, 2019; Dutton et al., 2012; Hodson, 2001; Karlsson, 2012; Lamont, 2000; Yu, 2016).

A widely deployed concept is Bolton's (2007) 'dimensions of dignity at work' model that refers to the objective factors of security, just reward, equality, voice and well-being, and subjective factors of autonomy, meaning and respect. This approach allows a stronger focus on how subjective dimensions might defend or result in experiences of dignity, even though objective characteristics of work are tenuous. Hand in hand with the emphasis on meso-level recognition, the term 'derived dignity' is not a substitute for objective measures of decent work, such as secure, safe and well-paid work. Rather, it offers insight into the power of core autonomy and respectful recognition to maintain self-worth in the face of crushing structural pressures that deny objective dimensions of dignity. Indeed, Hodson's (2001) influential work illuminates the quest for dignity in low-skilled and low-status work, stating that workers derive or defend dignity at work and thereby 'transform jobs with insufficient meaning into jobs that are more worthy of their personal stature, time and effort' (p. 45). For example, Lamont (2000) and Simpson et al. (2019) illustrate how dignity is derived from low-skilled and stigmatized work through emphasizing how the physical and mental labour involved is experienced as a personal sacrifice to support families. Informed by this research, the term 'derived dignity' refers

to workers' capacities for self-command, responsibility and care for oneself and others.

Derived dignity is visible in autonomously organized spaces, activities and relationships that value and esteem people independently of their work effort, while providing a shield against disrespect and abuse (Sayer, 2011; Yeoman, 2014a). For example, research on 'dirty work', such as refuse and garbage collectors (Deery et al., 2019; Simpson et al., 2019), emphasizes that workers derive dignity by informally modifying or enhancing work tasks, reorganizing work processes within the work group and building informal communities of learning. At the heart of these practices is, on the one hand, workers' desire to buffer the commodification of labour to experience dignity beyond price (Breen, 2019) and, on the other hand, to create spaces in which their inclination for responsibility and self-command shape the organization and nature of work (Hodson, 2001). Thus, in tandem with core autonomy and respectful recognition, derived dignity is encoded in relations and actions that establish, enhance and defend workers' self-worth and respect, offering options to address injustice and experience meaningfulness through the power of webs of responsibility, mutuality and care (Korczynski, 2016).

In low-skilled work, derived dignity emerges as a vulnerable but imminent condition of workers that is deeply relational. Following Sayer (2011), dignity is viewed as a subjective value, activity or experience that is intertwined with a person's autonomy, quality of relationships, concerns, needs and if and how they are met. Derived dignity is thus dependent on the core autonomy of employees not being violated via attempts to control or even manipulate their ultimate concerns, needs and interests. Furthermore, even though the concept of derived dignity celebrates people's subjective and relational characteristics of responsibility, self-command and sense-making, these characteristics and practices are in a dialectical relationship with the objective structures of work and employment. In this way, the informal practices, strategies and cultures workers develop at work to rescue and enhance self-worth are reflective of the objective social and economic structures of the workplaces and, therefore, a reaction to them (Karlsson, 2012).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: CORE AUTONOMY, RESPECTFUL RECOGNITION AND DERIVED DIGNITY

In reviewing four fields of MW literature, this paper has highlighted and compared the dimensions and dynamics considered essential for MW. The review discusses the rich conceptualizations of organizational behaviour and management approaches to MW that rest on sophisticated management and leadership practices in combination with privileged employment conditions. Meanwhile, philosophically fuelled normative accounts provide frameworks on how waged work ought to be structured in order to become meaningful, whereas humanist accounts illustrate the many ways people's powerful will for meaning shapes the experience of MW. Lastly, sociological accounts offer rich insights into 'bad jobs' and appear well equipped to investigate single dimensions of MW. The differences in approach reveal how important a clarification of the type and nature of work is for conceptualizing MW. Important insights are also drawn from the review in terms of similarities rather than differences in what are understood as the key pillars of MW. Despite conceptual disparity, autonomy, recognition and dignity continually emerge as important factors for the achievement of MW. However, theoretical differences mean that the typology introduced in this paper allows new pathways for understanding and researching MW in low-skilled work.

The introduction of the typology is timely; as the global demand for service, retail and personal care workers continues to increase, the proportion of people working in low-skilled jobs also grows significantly (Foden, 2020). By illustrating how workers experience and defend meaningfulness in low-skilled work, the typology represents insight into the centrality and importance of work and how core autonomy, respectful recognition and derived dignity fuel people's capacity to add meaningfulness to work that holds little status or material reward. This is an important contribution to the field of MW research and beyond, as it addresses some conceptual weaknesses in current MW research. Indeed, a strong theme in the field of management and organizational behaviour and political philosophy is the association of low-skilled work with alienated, and thus meaningless, work (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Yeoman, 2014a). Therein, an MW framework that captures the nature, dynamics and politics of low-skilled work remains, thus far, under-developed.

The typology that this paper introduces addresses this gap by acknowledging the particular politics, nature and experience of low-skilled work through the introduction of an agency-informed theoretical framework involving LPA, IRA and sociologically informed theories of agency. In this way, the paper offers two novel contributions. First, a new theoretical scaffold is built from established approaches to support the introduction of an MW typology. The paper showcases how the new theoretical framework is well equipped to capture the interplay between the nature of low-skilled work and workers' individual and relational responses that are at the heart of MW. Second, by developing three dimensions of MW for low-skilled work, the paper offers a pathway for future research to explore the complexity of low-skilled work and the power

of worker agency to establish and defend MW beyond the constraints of the formal work process. In this way, a balanced approach is offered that explores the objective conditions of low-skilled work and the subjective dimensions of MW (Yeoman et al., 2019), along with understandings of how MW is created 'beyond managerial reach' (Harding, 2019: 136). Indeed, the MW framework emphasizes that the practices and relations workers engage in to create MW are enabled, and respectively constrained, by the organization of work and wider economic, political and social structures in which organizations are embedded. This highlights how relationships and actions at work stand in a dialectical relationship with the way work is organized and managed (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Korczynski & Wittel, 2020). Therein, how the three dimensions of core autonomy, derived dignity and respectful recognition in low-skilled work are created and sustained is subject to the concrete conditions and structures at work. The combination of the three dimensions adds to the fields of MW literature an acknowledgement of the importance of workers' bottom-up practices that include oppositional practices, informal spaces and relationships vis-à-vis the formal organization. These practices are particularly strong when the formal organization of work significantly constrains agency, dignity and recognition, as is often the case in low-skilled work (Burawoy, 1979; Karlsson, 2012).

It would be useful to explore the explanatory power of the MW framework for high-skilled work to reveal how core autonomy, respectful recognition and derived dignity play out in different labour processes and workplace settings. For some labour market participants, opportunities to experience autonomy, respect and dignity may be more plentiful and the space more supportive so that subjective and objective dimensions of MW can be achieved. That is, the structures and practices are in place that offer pathways to grow and develop and fully utilize core autonomy; one feels safe at work and is justly rewarded so that the objective elements of MW are achieved. In such an environment, it is more likely that a sense of pride in work and achievement of recognition for the contribution to the well-being of others (as individuals or as a society), and a sense of freedom to be flexible in how practices and processes may be enacted, are achieved (Sayer, 2009).

The framework that we propose is not free from limitations. There are work environments that deny possibilities for both objective and subjective MW in the way that the basic needs of safety and security are not met, and autonomy, self-worth and dignity are squeezed dry by minutely controlled and mindless work processes. There are other situations where people engage in dirty work and their status is undermined so that through the eyes of others, work becomes demeaned and meaningless (Simpson et al., 2019). However, it is in recognizing these material conditions that we continue to hold the normative ideal of MW while understanding that it remains a political issue. In stating that people actively seek MW no matter how poor the objective conditions, we are relying on the notion of available spaces to do so. This is all the more salient in light of the rise of highly routinized low-skilled work and new forms of paid work, such as platform-mediated work, where spaces to experience core autonomy, respectful recognition and derived dignity are further constrained. Finally, we argue that the perception of MW (whether it is achieved or not) is ingrained in a vibrant mixture of employees' ambivalent experiences at work, ranging from the safeguarding of dignity to the establishment of autonomy at work, to experiences of objectification. However, these experiences, though they are often incompatible, are not contradictory, but reflected upon, evaluated and interwoven by people within their wider needs, commitments and attachments.

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