Is meaningful work always a resource toward wellbeing? The effect of autonomy, security and multiple dimensions of subjective meaningful work on wellbeing

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Abstract

Purpose – Using conservation of resources as a theoretical lens, the paper aims to investigate distinct objective meaningful work (OMW) and subjective meaningful work (SMW) domains as resources that contribute to wellbeing.

Design/methodology/approach – A cross-sectional questionnaire was conducted with 879 employees, measuring OMW resources (job security and autonomy), SMW using the well-validated multidimensional Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale (CMWS) focusing on five dimensions (integrity with self, expressing full potential, unity with others, service to others and balancing tensions), and three wellbeing outcomes (positive affect, negative affect and job stress). The authors conducted structural equation modeling, mediation analysis with PROCESS macro including bootstrapping, and dominance analysis, to identify the core relationships between OMW and SMW dimensions and three wellbeing constructs.

Findings – OMW resources are largely beneficially related to SMW dimensions; both OMW and SMW resources are mostly beneficially related to wellbeing outcomes; and the overall associations of OMW with the three wellbeing constructs are partially mediated by SMW. The dominance analyses of SMW with wellbeing shows expressing full potential is the most important predictor of positive affect, and integrity with self is the most important (negatively related) predictor of negative affect and job stress.

Practical implications – Our research, in pulling apart the different dimensions of MW, shows that to enhance wellbeing, HR professionals should not just pay attention to practices that support self-transcendent MW but also those that support the self. When not balanced, MW can lead to a loss of wellbeing.

Originality/value – The findings highlight that (1) while the current MW literature places a lot of emphasis on SMW, OMW remains an important consideration, and (2) while the MW literature often focuses on self-transcendent meanings, such as making a difference, the self-oriented dimensions of SMW are more dominant toward wellbeing. This is valuable to employees, managers, and HR professionals considering how to improve MW and wellbeing.

Keywords Meaningful work, Wellbeing, CMWS, HR, COR theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Both meaningful work (MW) and wellbeing are critical topics for employees, managers and the HR field (Chalofsky, 2010; Soane *et al.*, 2013). While MW predicts work engagement, job satisfaction and commitment (Allan *et al.*, 2019), there has been little study of how MW links to psychological wellbeing. A recent comprehensive review in the context of HR shows that

most advances at the intersection of HR and MW have taken place at a conceptual level (Bailey *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, recent reviews (Allan *et al.*, 2019; Bailey *et al.*, 2019; Lysova *et al.*, 2019) propose the need for empirical studies of MW to address the complexity of MW. The present study does this by exploring associations of objective meaningful work (OMW) with subjective meaningful work (SMW); of OMW and SMW with wellbeing; and including SMW as a mediator between OM and wellbeing. Furthermore, the use of dominance analysis provides finer-grained analysis to understand how SMW dimensions uniquely shape wellbeing, here also conceived of as comprising multiple dimensions – we focus on positive and negative affect and job stress.

OMW captures what a moral or decent employer–employee relationship should look like (Ciulla, 2012) through the design of work. Thus, employers are responsible for certain objective work features (Bailey *et al.*, 2019), such as autonomy, dignity, freedom and security that contribute to MW Ciulla (2012), Bowie (1998). Of these, we selected autonomy and job security to explore whether they operate differently toward SMW dimensions. SMW reflects an individual's perception as to whether their work is meaningful, and thus comprises dimensions that fluctuate considerably based on individual work experiences (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012). SMW dimensions jointly constitute the experience of SMW and answer existential questions about work, such as "Why am I here"? and "Why do I exist"?[*sic*]. In brief, the five SMW dimensions we chose are balance self versus other, and being versus doing (see Table 1 also). The third part of our overall model, wellbeing outcomes, extends the prevailing focus on negative affect (Allan *et al.*, 2019), and includes wellbeing characterized by high positive affect (mood) (Diener *et al.*, 2003) and low job stress (Roche *et al.*, 2014).

Overall, our paper makes three main contributions. First, it provides detailed empirical evidence of the OMW–SMW relationship (Bailey *et al.*, 2019), and contributes to the complexity of MW by extending beyond a unidimensional approach (see Allan *et al.*, 2019; Bailey *et al.*, 2019) to instead acknowledge the multiple dimensions comprising SMW (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012; Lips-Wiersma *et al.*, 2020; see Table 1 for an overview). The second contribution is

Dimension	Place in model	Explanation	Sample items
Integrity with self	Self/being – directed toward self, inward reflective process	Moral development through alignment of personal and work values	"I don't like who I am becoming at work", "at work my sense of what is right and wrong gets blurred" (R)
Expressing full potential	Self/doing – directed toward self, outward and active process	Bringing one's unique gifts and talents to the world	"I experience a sense of achievement", "I am excited by the available opportunities for me"
Unity with others	Others/being – directed toward others and reflective collaborative process	Experiencing a sense of being at one with others through high quality relationships	"I have a sense of belonging" "we talk about what matters to us"
Service to others	Others/doing –directed toward others and active process	Acting to the benefit of others	"I feel I truly help our customers/clients" "We contribute to products and services that enhance human well-being and/or the environment"
Balancing tensions	On the axes of the four dimensions	Achieving a dynamic state if balance through experiencing both self and other was well as both doing meaning dimensions	"I create enough space for me", "I have a good balance between the needs of others and my own needs"

Table 1.
Core dimensions of subjective meaningful work

to better understand the associations between OMW, SMW and wellbeing through exploring mediation relationships. This provides initial empirical evidence of how these components fit together, which can support further theorizing about how employers and employees can build workplaces that provide MW while supporting wellbeing. Finally, given initial evidence of associations between SMW and wellbeing (Allan *et al.*, 2019), our analysis expands on this using dominance analysis to determine the unique contribution of each SMW dimension to different types of wellbeing. Beyond being theoretically important, this provides practical value, enabling HR professionals to effectively develop interventions to cultivate MW and wellbeing. Our conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

Conservation of resources theory

We use conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018) to understand how OMW and SMW contribute to wellbeing. A fundamental tenet of COR is that individuals are motivated to acquire and maintain resources, and guard against their loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Resources are defined as things that people value in them or that allow the attainment of resources, with meaning in life and wellbeing being commonly valued universal resources (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Applied to the workplace, organizations provide ecological conditions that foster or hamper the creation or maintenance of employee resources (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, a resource caravan effect occurs such that resources beget the acquisition of further resources, such that resources cluster together (Hobfoll, 2001). Consequently, employees with more resources report superior wellbeing outcomes. Applying resource caravans to the present study, for example, an employee with high autonomy, an OMW resource, may feel more able to deploy this resource to express their full potential, an SMW dimension, and in turn experience positive affect. Conversely, lower wellbeing occurs when key resources are threatened (e.g. low job security), or lost (e.g. low autonomy) or not obtained despite considerable effort (e.g. unsuccessfully trying to experience Unity with Others, an SMW dimension) (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018).
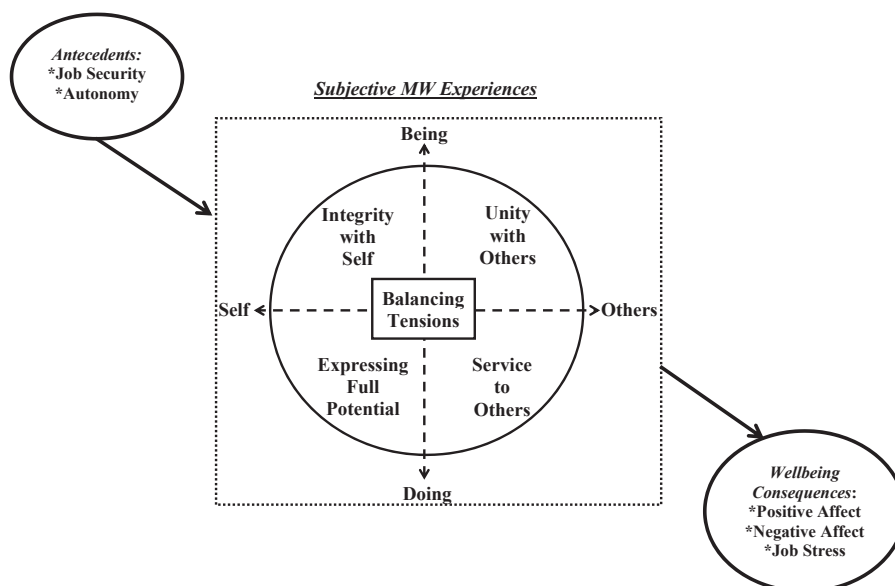

Figure 1.
Study model

Dimensions of subjective meaningful work

Experiencing the presence of meaning – rather than just having an abstract notion that it is important to live meaningfully – is associated with higher psychological wellbeing (Steger *et al.*, 2012). To capture the multiple dimensions of experienced meaningfulness, that is SMW, we followed the research of Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) in which they defined five dimensions of SMW in a work context. Of these, four SMW dimensions capture combinations of being versus doing and self versus other, and there is a fifth dimension which captures a person's experience of balancing between tensions of the other four dimensions. Life "is found meaningful through integration of different aspects of it into a coherent whole" (Martela, 2010, p. 6). The search for wholeness through balancing different dimensions of SMW is thus a part of SMW itself rather than a prerequisite to it. Moreover, following resource caravans within COR theory, SMW dimensions act as resources to help build other SMW resources that separately and mutually contribute to wellbeing.

Wellbeing outcomes

Wellbeing comprises multiple components (Roche *et al.*, 2014). Here, we focus on high positive affect and low negative affect (Watson *et al.*, 1988) along with low job stress (Roche *et al.*, 2014). We include both affect dimensions because employees can experience both dimensions simultaneously at different levels (Price, 1997), and factors that predict one affect dimension do not necessarily predict the other (e.g. ten Brummelhuis *et al.*, 2014). Under COR theory, both OMW and SMW benefit wellbeing because individuals who have more resources are better able to either tackle or else recast workplace challenges more positively. For example, individuals high on expressing full potential may genuinely feel they are bringing their gifts to the world, and thus report higher positive affect. In contrast, those with low SMW are constantly dealing with workplace issues that hamper experiencing meaning; consequently, low SMW contributes few resources to generating or sustaining wellbeing, neither does it help to generate additional resources.

Objective meaningful work hypotheses

The OMW literature argues that employers should provide the basic moral conditions for work (Bowie, 1998). We focus on OMW factors of job security and autonomy because they convey messages about the worth of the individual (Lysova *et al.*, 2019), and – like SMW – because they are fundamental to wellbeing (Patulny *et al.*, 2020; Ryan *et al.*, 2006). They also represent two distinct forms of OMW, which we suggest is useful for testing dimensional linkages of OMW with SMW.

Job security reflects perceived threat to continued employment (Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018). Intriguingly, the pursuit of MW has arisen in tandem with a rise in precarious forms of labor (Patulny *et al.*, 2020). On the one hand, it has been argued that individuals always have freedom of choice and therefore aspects of MW, such as service, can be found under even adverse and precarious conditions (Frankl, 1959). Alternatively, others argue that market forces potentially run counter to individuals' ability to find meaning and purpose through work, and that MW should not be harnessed to extract more existential labor from employees under increasingly insecure conditions (Bailey *et al.*, 2017; Ciulla, 2012).

Under COR theory, job security represents a resource. When job security is low, employees spend psychological energy contemplating their future employment, and thus have less energy to invest in SMW and wellbeing. In line with this, job insecurity has manifold negative consequences on worker wellbeing and mental health (Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018), whereas job security is a predictor of wellbeing (Kinnunen *et al.*, 2000).

While the links between job security and wellbeing are better established, the links of job security with SMW dimensions have not been explored. We argue here that job security will act as a resource toward all five SMW dimensions. Evidence to date shows employees with greater job security experience greater SMW (Patulny *et al.*, 2020), the latter measured unidimensionally. Under COR theory, high job security provides a positive resource for building SMW because the opposite – job insecurity – represents a state of resource loss (Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018). Thus, we anticipate positive relations of job security with all five SMW dimensions. Specifically, we expect job security to be positively associated with service to others as it enhances pro-social behavior (De Dreu and Nauta, 2009); to be positively associated with unity with others because of evidence that job insecurity leads to poorer interpersonal behaviors, such as diminishing coworker support and trust and satisfaction with coworkers (Shoss, 2017); to be positively related to expressing full potential as security leads to less conformity (Shoss, 2017); and to be positively related to integrity with self, as security enables the person to self-regulate whereas insecurity increases emotional exhaustion, which subsequently impairs an employee's ability to discern and avoid unethical behavior (Lawrence and Kacmar, 2017). Finally, job security meta-analytic findings highlight the challenge of balancing roles when security is poor (Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018), suggesting links with balancing tensions. We posit the following.

H1. Job security will be positively related to all SMW dimensions.

H2. Job security will be (a) positively related to positive affect, and negatively related to (b) negative affect and (c) job stress.

Our second OMW domain is autonomy, which has been emphasized as a predictor of meaning (Breen, 2019; Ryan *et al.*, 2006). People with high autonomy perceive that their behavior emanates from the self, and is self-authored (Ryan *et al.*, 2006). Autonomy allows the individual to shape behaviors and goals toward MW outcomes and is also related to better employee wellbeing (Spell and Arnold, 2007; Hackman and Oldham, 1974). Under COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), high autonomy is a resource because discretion over work, such as its manner and timeliness, allows individuals to decide how to allocate their energies. Alternatively, low autonomy reflects lack of resource because employees' routine is set by others, and employees have less psychological control over what they do. In the context of MW, autonomy enables the individual to freely enact their own sense of what is meaningful rather than meaning being provided (Bailey *et al.*, 2017). Meta-analysis (Allan *et al.*, 2019) supports autonomy leading to positive wellbeing outcomes but studies have not regularly teased apart autonomy and SMW (Bailey *et al.*, 2019), and we expect this relationship to be more complex.

Turning to the specific SMW dimensions, we suggest autonomy might link more strongly with balancing tensions and the *self-oriented* SMW dimensions (see Figure 1). Autonomy implies self-concordance that is the degree to which people believe they behave consistently with their values, which is central to MW. Specifically, autonomy is negatively related to moral distress and positively related to feeling true to oneself (Papathanassoglou *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, we expect positive links from autonomy to integrity with self. Working autonomously permits opportunities for carrying out projects, exercising forethought and judgment, making or influencing decisions and taking on responsibilities, which we expect to be especially beneficial for expressing full potential. In contrast, we expect autonomy to be less advantageous to *other-oriented* SMW dimensions (see Figure 1). This is because autonomy focuses the attention on the individual, thereby decreasing identity and membership toward others (Langfred, 2000), making the autonomy resources (under COR theory) less beneficial to other-oriented SMW dimensions. For both unity and service to others, autonomy can be a double-edged sword, leading to time pressure and stress if not matched by appropriate resources or structures (Vaananen and Toivanen, 2017). Overall, we

expect employees with high autonomy to report higher SMW and wellbeing. Thus, we posit the following:

H3. (a) Autonomy will be positively related to SMW; and will show stronger associations with (b) expressing full potential, integrity with self, and balancing tensions.

H4. Autonomy will be (a) positively related to positive affect, and negatively related to (b) negative affect and (c) job stress.

Subjective meaningful work hypotheses to wellbeing

Under COR theory, we expect SMW to provide resources that offset negative affect, and this accords with meta-analytic evidence for a moderate negative association (Allan *et al.*, 2019). While positive affect is recognized as being under-explored in MW studies (Allan *et al.*, 2019), one study has reported a positive link between MW and positive affect (Allan *et al.*, 2020), suggesting greater resources from SMW shape positive mood. Our inclusion of job stress provides a more temporally stable view of wellbeing. While affect fluctuates, under COR theory, job stress occurs when job demands exceeds an employee's resources to manage (Mullen *et al.*, 2017). Allan *et al.* (2020) found MW was negatively related to job stress, which – under COR theory – would represent greater resources from high SMW leading to less stressful interpretations of work. Overall, we expect SMW to be beneficial to the various elements of wellbeing, reflecting the additional resources to manage and enhance work experiences.

However, capitalizing on the dimensionality of SMW, again we explore potential differences across SMW dimensions' associations with wellbeing. Allan *et al.*'s (2019) MW meta-analysis showed a lack of associations from SMW dimensions toward wellbeing outcomes, and the above studies highlight relationships toward wellbeing outcomes typically using MW measures that do not distinguish between the different SMW dimensions. Fundamentally, we know MW is beneficial, and that multidimensional SMW predicts outcomes like job satisfaction and withdrawal better than unidimensional SMW (Allan *et al.*, 2019). Here, we suggest more distinct relationships of SMW with wellbeing. Specifically, SMW dimensions that are *self-oriented* (integrity with self and expressing full potential) will be more beneficial. This is because, under COR theory, *other-oriented* SMW dimensions involve "giving" activities that involve both time and energy, although other resources may be received in return (Hobfoll, 2001). For example, service to others encompasses caring work that often involves giving away resources (e.g. time and attention) and may not always be reciprocated by receiving equivalent resources (Pavlish and Hunt, 2012). Thus, we propose the resource gains from high *other-oriented* actions will be weaker, indicating that not all SMW resources are equal in building wellbeing. Similarly, balancing tensions involves employees trying to balance *self-orientations* and *other-orientations* into an integrated whole and hence the same argument holds, that this involves greater resource expenditure than gain. Thus, balancing tensions may contribute less to wellbeing compared to self-oriented SMW dimensions because the nature of modern work, with its emphasis on customer or client service as well as teamwork, means workers are consistently pulled toward other-oriented dimensions (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2018).

H5. SMW will be (a) positively related to positive affect, (b) negatively related to negative affect and (c) negatively related to job stress.

H6. The self-oriented SMW dimensions, integrity with self and expressing full potential, will be more strongly related to (a) positively related to positive affect, (b) negatively related to negative affect and (c) negatively related to job stress.

Subjective meaningful work mediating objective meaningful work on wellbeing
Beyond the direct effects of both OMW and SMW on wellbeing outcomes, we also expect SMW to mediate the effects of OMW (job security and autonomy) toward wellbeing outcomes. OMW, while still interpreted by employees, is more strongly based on the objective reality of work characteristics. For example, if we asked two people in identical jobs with the same employer about their job security, we would expect a similar response. In contrast, SMW is about what people perceive work enables them to be and do, both solo and with others. This subjectivity engenders greater variation in perceptions. Under COR theory, and specifically the resource caravan effect, SMW potentially represents a reservoir of resources that build on OMW resources (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Hence, while OMW factors are important to wellbeing (Haar *et al.*, 2019), it is through building SMW dimensions which have a mediating influence, which in effect operate as charging SMW to act as a resource reservoir (Ghafoor and Haar, 2021), which is then utilized to aid wellbeing (Lysova *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, we posit the following.

H7. SMW dimensions will mediate the influence of OMW (job security and autonomy) on (a) positive affect, (b) negative affect and (c) job stress.

Subjective meaningful work dominance
Finally, as noted earlier, based on COR theory we suggest that some SMW dimensions will contribute more to wellbeing than that of others. We build on the above arguments and contribute to understanding the MW-wellbeing linkages by exploring the associations of SMW dimensions with wellbeing outcomes using dominance analysis (see Tonidandel and LeBreton, 2011), thereby heeding Lips-Wiersma *et al.*'s (2020) suggestion. For example, if expressing full potential most strongly predicts positive outcomes, such as wellbeing or work innovation, interventions could target employees' ability to bring their full selves to work. As such, dominance analysis provides a greater understanding of SMW, including whether SMW dimensions that are other-oriented are less advantageous through giving support but not receiving sufficient resources in return (Pavlish and Hunt, 2012), leading to physical and emotional exhaustion. In line with this, we argue that self-oriented SMW will dominate wellbeing because these forms of SMW provide more stable individualized resources with direct benefits. Both the self-oriented SMW dimensions – integrity with self and expressing full potential – are likely to create resources for both immediate and more enduring wellbeing, that is both proximal affect and lower stress (Hobfoll, 2001). Overall, we posit the following:

H8. Self-oriented SMW dimensions, integrity with self and expressing full potential, will be dominant predictors of (a) positive affect, (b) negative affect and (c) job stress.

Method
Sampling
This study combines two separately collected samples. For our first sample, we recruited participants from students' networks, including their working parents, siblings and colleagues. Each student was asked to collect data from a maximum of 10 workers for which she or he was paid $5 per completed, returned survey. As we have a very diverse local and international student body, workers from a diverse range of occupations and nationalities were recruited. We verified the integrity of the data by emailing a random sample of research participants seeking confirmation of participation. This method yielded 607 useable responses. Sample 2 was recruited from a general US population participant pool via MTurk. Participation was open to "Master" workers (verified by MTurk as having previously demonstrated reliability in their MTurk tasks) because these respondents provide

better quality data (Lovett *et al.*, 2018). Workers were paid $3 for a completed survey. This generated an additional 272 useable responses. Data collected from MTurk generally yield the same pattern of results as those collected via traditional methods (Buhrmester *et al.*, 2011) and in the present study, no significant differences between MTurk respondents and non-MTurk respondents were found across either of the MW dimensions (all $p > 0.05$) or the wellbeing outcomes (all $p > 0.05$). For simplicity, we combined the samples for analysis. Demographics of the sample (both individually and combined) are shown in Table 2.

Measures
We assessed the multiple dimensions of SMW through the Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale (CMWS) (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012), using the short 22-item version (Lips-Wiersma *et al.*, 2020). The CMWS has good validity and is superior to other MW scales for measuring SMW (Both-Nwabuwe *et al.*, 2017). We focus on the four core SMW dimensions (e.g. integrity with self, expressing full potential, unity with others and service to others) as well as the additional dimension of balancing tensions between self and other, doing and being. We briefly explain each dimension of SMW in Table 1 (see Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) for a more extensive overview). Questions follow the stem "How frequently do you experience the following at work"; please see Table 1 for example items. Responses were collected on a five-point scale: 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often and 5 = always.

We confirmed the measures in our study using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in SEM using AMOS v. 26. Williams *et al.* (2009) suggest three goodness-of-fit indexes to provide useful statistics for assessing model fit: (1) the comparative fit index (CFI $\geq$ 0.95), (2) the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA $\leq$ 0.08), and (3) the standardized root mean residual (SRMR $\leq$ 0.10). Overall, the five SMW dimensions were individually robust (factor loadings above 0.60 each) and reliable: *unity with others*, $\alpha = 0.82$, *service to others*, $\alpha = 0.87$,

	Combined sample	Sample 1	Sample 2 (MTurk)
Sample size	$N = 879$	$N = 607$	$N = 272$
Gender – Female	50.4%	51.6%	47.8%
Age (SD in brackets)	32.8 years (11.7)	33.2 years (12.0)	32.1 years (10.9)
Full-time worker	70.8%	71.6%	69.1%
Ethnicity			
Caucasian	71.1%	70.5%	72.4%
Asian	15.0%	16.9%	10.7%
Hispanic	4.2%	2.6%	7.7%
African American	3.0%	1.2%	7.0%
Other	6.7%	8.8%	2.2%
Bachelor's degree education	47%	44.6%	50.7%
Sector			
Commerce/private	60.5%	61.7%	58.1%
Education	13.7%	14.3%	12.5%
Construction	10.4%	10.6%	9.9%
Communication	7.0%	6.2%	8.5%
Other	8.4%	7.2%	11.0%
Firm Size			
Small (<50 employees)	42%	42.9%	39.3%
Medium (51–300 employees)	25%	23.3%	29.0%
Large (300+ employees)	33%	18.0%	15.1%

Table 2.
Study demographics

expressing full potential, $\alpha = 0.83$, *integrity with self*, $\alpha = 0.83$ and *balancing tensions*, $\alpha = 0.84$. Overall, the CFA showed a good fit to the data: χ^2 (df) = 203.3(94), CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.04 and SRMR = 0.04. Similar to Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012), we explored whether the CMWS provided a better fit if modeled as a higher order construct and – similar to those authors – we found the higher-order model was significantly worse fitting (chi-squared difference test significant at $p < 0.001$; Hair *et al.*, 2010). Thus, while the SMW dimensions are related, the measurement models supported a multidimensional approach.

Job security was measured using two items from Hackman and Oldham (1974), coded 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. A sample item is "I am satisfied with the amount of security I have" ($\alpha = 0.91$).

Autonomy was measured using the three-item self-determination scale by Spreitzer (1995), coded 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. A sample item is "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job" ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Affect was measured using six items from Watson *et al.* (1988) positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS), coded 1 = very slightly, to 5 = extremely. These were in relation to the way that work makes participants feel. A total of three items were used for *positive affect* (determined, excited and energized, $\alpha = 0.77$) and typical of the literature (e.g. Haar and Cordier, 2020); three items were used for *negative affect* (upset, hostile and ashamed, $\alpha = 0.73$).

Job stress was measured using three items from the job-related tension scale by House and Rizzo (1972), coded 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. A sample item is "I work under a great deal of tension" ($\alpha = 0.77$).

Williams *et al.* (2009) suggests using fewer control variables in SEM. We controlled for *Age* (in years) due to meta-analytic findings that older workers report more positive job attitudes including better wellbeing (Ng and Feldman, 2010). We also controlled for gender (1 = male, 2 = female) due to links with wellbeing outcomes (Pinquart and Sörensen, 2001).

Measurement models and analysis
The hypothesized measurement model and three alternative models are shown in Table 3.

Overall, the hypothesized measurement model (Table 3, Model A) provided the best fit for the data: χ^2 (df) = 836.0(360), CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.04 and SRMR = 0.04, with the three alternative CFA models (Models B-D) having significantly poorer fit (all $p < 0.001$) (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Skewness and kurtosis values were normally distributed (Hair *et al.*, 2010) and there were no missing data.

We tested direct and mediation hypotheses using SEM in AMOS v. 26. We followed Hayes' (2018) recommendations in calculating indirect effects (with bootstrapping 5,000 times) using the PROCESS macro (version 3.4). PROCESS calculates indirect effects for all mediators together (here five SMW dimensions) but also provides individual indirect effects for mediation through each of the five SMW dimensions. For the dominance analysis, we utilized the excel spreadsheet with macros by LeBreton (2006). Johnson and LeBreton (2004) defined dominance analysis as the extent to which a variable (e.g. balancing tensions) predicts an outcome relative to other variables. The dominance analysis allows us to determine a percentage contribution from each factor—out of the total variance explained—to identify which are the most important dimensions (see Tonidandel and LeBreton, 2011).

Results
Descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables are shown in Table 4. Both OMW and SMW dimensions are all positively correlated, with the exception of the SMW dimension service to others which shows no significant correlations. Similarly, all OMW and

Model fit indices										
Model	χ^2	df	p	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	p	Details
A	836.0	360	<0.001	0.97	0.04	0.04				
B	2327.3	377	<0.001	0.86	0.08	0.11	1491.3	17	<0.001	Model A to B
C	1991.3	369	<0.001	0.88	0.07	0.07	1155.3	9	<0.001	Model A to C
D	4932.0	390	<0.001	0.68	0.12	0.15	4096.0	30	<0.001	Model A to D

Note(s): In all models OMW conditions, SMW dimensions and wellbeing consequences co-vary with each other. Except when constructs are combined to test for alternative construct fit
Model A = Hypothesized ten-factor model: job security, autonomy, unity with others, service to others, expressing full potential, integrity with self, balancing tensions, positive affectivity, negative affectivity and job stress
Model B= Alternative 8-factor model: as model A, but with wellbeing consequences (positive affectivity and negative affectivity and job stress) *combined*.
Model C= Alternative 9-factor model: as per model A with conditions (job security and autonomy) *combined*
Model D = Alternative 6-factor model: as per model A with all MW dimensions *combined* (unity with others, service to others, expressing full potential, integrity with self and balancing tensions)

Table 3.
Results of
confirmatory factor
analysis model
differences

SMW dimensions are associated with better wellbeing outcomes, again excepting service to others which is not significantly correlated with positive affect or job stress but is positively correlated with negative affect; and expressing full potential which is not significantly correlated with job stress.

Structural models
We ran three structural models to establish the best fit to the data, controlling for age and gender. These compared job security and autonomy toward SMW dimensions and wellbeing outcomes (Model 1), a full mediation model through SMW (Model 2) and a partial mediation model (Model 3). Analysis showed Model 3 provided the best fit: χ^2(df) = 941.2(400), CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.04 and SRMR = 0.04, with the other structural models being significantly inferior (both $p < 0.01$). Thus, in broad terms, OMW dimensions (job security and autonomy) predict SMW dimensions, and OMW and SMW dimensions predict wellbeing outcomes. Table 5 includes the direct effects (Model 1) and partial mediation models (Model 3) (SEM results); full mediation (Model 2) was inferior and is not provided. Having established partial mediation was the best fit; we also re-ran Model 3 with the potential mediation effect of SMW through all dimensions simultaneously and through each SMW dimension (see Table 6).

Table 5 shows both job security and autonomy were significantly related to four SMW dimensions: unity with others, expressing full potential, integrity with self and balancing tensions (all $p < 0.01$), but neither was significantly related to service to others. This largely supports Hypothesis 1 and 3a. Hypothesis 3b suggested autonomy would particularly predict three SMW dimensions, expressing full potential, integrity with self and balancing tensions. Of these, autonomy more strongly predicted expressing full potential and balancing tensions, but also unity with others. Overall, this hypothesis is only partially supported.

Hypotheses 2 and 4 proposed job security and autonomy, respectively, predicting wellbeing outcomes, and these were largely supported (Table 5, Model 1). Job security significantly predicted all wellbeing outcomes in the expected direction (all $p < 0.001$) supporting Hypotheses 2a-2c. Autonomy was significantly related to positive affect ($p < 0.001$) and negative affect ($p < 0.05$) but not job stress, supporting Hypotheses 4a and 4b only.

Hypotheses 5 proposed SMW predicting the wellbeing outcomes, while Hypotheses 6a-c predicted the two self-oriented SMW dimensions would show stronger effects. Of the two

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	32.9	11.7	–										
Objective MW													
2. Autonomy	3.7	0.93	0.14**	–									
3. Job security	3.5	1.0	-0.02	0.26**	–								
Subjective MW													
4. Unity with others	3.8	0.81	0.08*	0.39**	0.39**	–							
5. Service to others	3.8	0.87	-0.03	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	–						
6. Expressing full potential	3.5	0.91	0.06	0.45**	0.38**	0.60**	-0.03	–					
7. Integrity with self	4.2	0.87	0.06	0.15**	0.20**	0.30**	0.00	0.19**	–				
8. Balancing tensions	3.5	0.86	0.04	0.52**	0.34**	0.48**	-0.02	0.52**	0.22**	–			
Wellbeing Consequences													
9. Positive affect	3.4	0.85	0.09**	0.35**	0.30**	0.47**	-0.01	0.58**	0.16**	0.38**	–		
10. Negative affect	2.0	0.74	-0.08*	-0.13**	-0.24**	-0.24**	0.12**	-0.15**	-0.42**	-0.26**	-0.09*	–	
11. Job stress	2.7	0.99	0.06	-0.07*	-0.14**	-0.20**	0.01	-0.02	-0.38**	-0.29**	-0.01	0.44**	–

Note(s): $N = 879$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

Table 4.
Correlations and descriptive statistics of study variables

Variables	Model 1	Model 3
Controls		
Age → job stress		0.01*
OMW to Wellbeing (model 3 with mediators)		
Job security → positive affect	0.28***	0.04
Job security → negative affect	−0.23***	−0.11***
Job security → job stress	−0.11***	−0.02
Autonomy → positive affect	0.36***	0.06
Autonomy → negative affect	−0.08*	0.02
Autonomy → job stress	−0.04	0.08
OMW to SMW Dimensions (Mediators)		
Job security → unity with others		0.32***
Job security → service to others		−0.02
Job security → expressing full potential		0.27***
Job security → integrity with self		0.16***
Job security → balancing tensions		0.19***
Autonomy → unity with others		0.32***
Autonomy → service to others		0.00
Autonomy → expressing full potential		0.34***
Autonomy → integrity with self		0.09**
Autonomy → balancing tensions		0.46***
SMW Dimensions (Mediators) to Wellbeing		
Unity with others → positive affect		0.15*
Unity with others → negative affect		−0.10
Unity with others → job stress		−0.19**
Service to others → positive affect		0.00
Service to others → negative affect		0.19***
Service to others → job stress		0.04
Expressing full potential → positive affect		0.75***
Expressing full potential → negative affect		0.15*
Expressing full potential → job stress		0.43***
Integrity with self → positive affect		−0.04
Integrity with self → negative affect		−0.55***
Integrity with self → job stress		−0.48***
Balancing tensions → positive affect		−0.02
Balancing tensions → negative affect		−0.15**
Balancing tensions → job stress		−0.35***
r^2 Values		
Unity with others		0.31
Service to others		0.01
Expressing full potential		0.35
Integrity with self		0.08
Balancing tensions		0.38
Positive affect		0.54
Negative affect		0.35
Job stress		0.33

Note(s): For control variables, only significant effects are shown. Unstandardized path coefficients. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$. Model 1 (direct effects) and model 3 (partial mediation) shown only

Table 5.
Direct and mediating effects of structural models

self-oriented SMW dimensions, integrity with self predicted positive affect, and negatively predicted negative affect and job stress (all $p < 0.01$), supporting expectations. Expressing full potential was positively related to positive affect ($p < 0.001$), but also positively related to negative affect and job stress, counter to expectations. For the remaining three SMW

Predictors	Positive affect	Wellbeing Consequences Negative affect	Job stress
Autonomy			
→ through all 5 SMW dimensions	*0.25* (0.20, 0.30)	*−0.12* (−0.17, −0.08)	*−0.16* (−0.22, −0.10)
Through individual SMW dimensions			
→ unity with others	*0.05* (0.03, 0.08)	−0.03 (−0.06, 0.00)	*−0.05* (−0.09, −0.02)
→ service to others	0.00 (−0.00, 0.00)	−0.00 (−0.01, 0.00)	−0.00 (−0.00, 0.00)
→ expressing full potential	*0.18* (0.14, 0.22)	0.02 (−0.01, 0.05)	*0.12* (0.08, 0.17)
→ integrity with self	0.00 (−0.01, 0.01)	*−0.04* (−0.07, −0.02)	*−0.05* (−0.08, −0.02)
→ balancing tensions	0.02 (−0.01, 0.05)	*−0.08* (−0.11, −0.04)	*−0.18* (−0.23, −0.13)
Job security			
→ through all 5 SMW dimensions	*0.21* (0.17, 0.25)	*−0.08* (−0.12, −0.05)	*−0.11* (−0.15, −0.06)
Through individual SMW dimensions			
→ through unity with others	*0.05* (0.03, 0.08)	−0.02 (−0.04, 0.01)	*−0.05* (−0.08, −0.02)
→ through service to others	0.00 (−0.00, 0.00)	−0.00 (−0.01, 0.00)	−0.00 (−0.00, 0.00)
→ through expressing full potential	*0.14* (0.11, 0.18)	*0.03* (0.00, 0.05)	*0.10* (0.07, 0.14)
→ through integrity with self	0.00 (−0.01, 0.01)	*−0.05* (−0.08, −0.03)	*−0.07* (−0.10, −0.04)
→ through balancing tensions	0.02 (−0.00, 0.04)	*−0.04* (−0.06, −0.02)	*−0.10* (−0.13, −0.07)

Note(s): 95% Interval bootstrapped confidence intervals are shown in brackets (lower limit, upper limit). Italic indirect β indicates significant indirect effect

Table 6.
Results of indirect
effects of predictors
on wellbeing
consequences

dimensions, balancing tensions predicted wellbeing outcomes as expected (all $p < 0.01$); Unity with others positively predicted positive affect ($p < 0.05$) and negatively predicted job stress ($p < 0.01$) but did not predict negative affect. Finally, service to others was positively related only to negative affect ($p < 0.001$), contradicting expectations. Overall, there is partial support for Hypotheses 5a-c concerning the SMW dimensions overall. There is support for Hypothesis 6 for integrity with self, but only partially for expressing full potential in predicting wellbeing outcomes.

Hypotheses 7 proposed SMW will mediate the effects of OMW on wellbeing outcomes. Table 5 shows the direct effects of job security and autonomy become largely non-significant in predicting wellbeing outcomes once SMW dimensions are accounted for. Table 6 provides bootstrapped results which are more accurate for representing indirect effects (Cheung and Lau, 2008). The overall results support mediation via all five SMW dimensions analyzed concurrently, supporting Hypotheses 7. We also provide the results for each SMW dimension considered individually[1].

Finally, we explored SMW dimensions prediction of wellbeing via dominance analysis. In Hypothesis 8, we proposed that, among the five SMW dimensions, the two self-oriented dimensions (integrity with self and expressing full potential) would be the dominant predictors of wellbeing. The results in Table 7 support Hypothesis 8. Thus, expressing full potential (42.6%) most strongly predicts positive affect, while integrity with self most strongly predicts negative affect (56.5%) and job stress (43.9%).

Discussion

The overall purpose of this study is to better understand how OMW work factors of job security and autonomy, and SMW factors of unity with others, service to others, expressing full potential, integrity with self and balancing tensions, fit together and predict wellbeing, both uniquely and in unison. Overall, we found a partial mediation model fitted the data best, and therefore job security and autonomy play an important role in predicting both SMW and wellbeing, but that SMW also mediated these OMW effects on wellbeing. Resolving the lack

MW dimensions	Positive affect	*Wellbeing Consequences* Negative affect	Job stress
Unity with others			
β	0.129	0.042	0.040
%	23.8%	11.8%	12.0%
Service to others			
β	0.054	0.039	0.001
%	10.0%	11.2%	1.7%
Expressing full potential			
β	*0.230*	0.030	0.058
%	*42.6%*	8.4%	17.2%
Integrity with self			
β	0.057	*0.199*	*0.147*
%	10.5%	*56.5%*	*43.9%*
Balancing tensions			
β	0.071	0.043	0.084
%	13.1%	12.1%	25.2%

Table 7.
Results of dominance analyses on MW dimensions

Note(s): Italic scores indicate most dominant MW dimension

of clarity on associations (Bailey *et al.*, 2019), our results show that OMW operates as a condition to SMW. Our findings support earlier literature where job security and autonomy are found to have significant effect on both MW and wellbeing (Cheng and Chan, 2008; Allan *et al.*, 2019). We also extend this literature by showing that SMW mediates the effects of job security and autonomy on worker wellbeing, highlighting that under COR theory, security and autonomy build SMW as a resource, which ultimately facilitates wellbeing. However, the indirect effects tests show that job security and autonomy remain significantly related to wellbeing outcomes, indicating that even when jobs have strong SMW dimensions, OMW resources such as security and autonomy still predict wellbeing. The exception is that autonomy does not predict job stress, suggesting autonomy might have dual functions in both supplying and draining resources because with more autonomy comes more responsibility.

The present study also extends the exploration of MW in influencing wellbeing by examining two additional wellbeing outcomes, job stress and positive affect; both currently understudied (Allan *et al.*, 2019). We find that SMW dimensions were strong predictors of all three wellbeing outcomes, but there are some interesting differences also. For example, integrity with self only (negatively) predicts negative affect but not positive affect, and expressing full potential strongly predicted positive affect but weakly predicted negative affect. While more evidence is required, it seems that the associations of SMW dimensions with wellbeing function similarly to motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959), with dimensions differentially predicting wellbeing gain and loss. We touch on this idea further below under "theoretical implications'.

Interestingly, the relationships between job security and negative affect were only partially mediated by the SMW dimensions, which show that even within the context of high SMW, having high job security is beneficial to experiencing less negative emotion (Patulny *et al.*, 2020). This, plus our finding that job security positively predicts four out of five SMW dimensions, highlights job security as a fundamental resource for employees.

Although most effects from MW to wellbeing were in the direction hypothesized, a few relationships ran counter to our expectations. Service to others was positively related to

negative affect (in correlations and the SEM) and expressing full potential was positively related to negative affect and job stress (but was also positively related to positive affect). The correlation analysis showed expressing full potential was positively associated with positive affect, and negatively with negative affect, but the association with job stress was non-significant. We explored whether the parallel mediation (with five SMW dimensions) might account for the reverse direction of effect. When we repeated the model analysis with only expressing full potential, we still find a significant and positive effect toward positive affect, a significant and negative direct effect toward negative affect and a non-significant effect toward job stress. These align with the correlations. As such, this suggests that with regard to expressing full potential, the effects from the parallel mediation that are counter to the expected direction are statistical effects due to other SMW dimensions being significant and distorting the influence of expressing full potential, specifically toward negative affect and job stress.

Finally, the findings from the dominance analysis highlight that all five dimensions of MW play a role in wellbeing but do so in different ways, which aligns with Lips-Wiersma and Wright's (2012) argument that only by incorporating all elements of MW can its complexity be adequately and more comprehensively understood (see also Martela, 2010). integrity with self most strongly predicts negative affect and job stress. Thus, integrity with self seems key in minimizing detrimental mood as well as stress. Notably, integrity with self is measured with negative (reversed) items that measure threat to a person's moral values; thus, when a person has high integrity with self (experiencing no threat to their moral values) this protects against both more variable negative affect and enduring stress. For the other SMW dimension, expressing full potential, this was the strongest predictor of positive affect. Thus, employees who have opportunities to develop their talents, influence decisions, and experience a sense of achievement, are most likely to report proximal positive mood states.

Theoretical implications

The findings offer useful theoretical insights. First, our research addresses some of the fundamental issues concerning the relationship between OMW and SMW (Bailey *et al.*, 2019), demonstrating the importance of studying these in tandem. Our findings are timely in supporting the development of the MW literature, following several reviews (Allan *et al.*, 2019; Lysova *et al.*, 2019; Bailey *et al.*, 2019). Jointly, these emphasize that future research should include not only conditions and outcomes of MW but also focus on which conceptualization and related measures best suit the specific MW research questions. Drawing on Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012), we adopted a more fine-grained approach to SMW, and used the associated CMWS which revealed complex patterns of relationships. Different conceptualizations and measures may explain why some findings to date have been somewhat contradictory. Unexpectedly, our findings show that there may be some exceptions to the benefits of multidimensional approaches in some cases. For example, job security shows reasonably uniform patterns of association with SMW. In such cases, a unidimensional MW measure may work just as well.

Under COR theory, employees with higher MW are expected to have more resources that help drive and sustain their wellbeing. However, our results suggestion caution – MW dimensions may not be universally beneficial. Indeed, within certain contexts some MW dimensions might support resource loss more than gain. Specifically, the SMW literature has a significant focus on service to others (Bailey *et al.*, 2019). For example, "people who say their role is meaningful, *and/or serves some greater social or communal good,* report better psychological adjustment and simultaneously possess qualities that are desirable to organizations" (Steger *et al.*, 2012, p. 323, italics added). Contradicting this, we found service to others did not predict wellbeing, showing only a positive correlation with negative affect.

Thus, examining the dimensions separately enhances our understanding of how MW operates under COR theory and contributes to wellbeing. In a similar vein, the differential effects across wellbeing outcomes support the benefit of measuring a range of wellbeing outcomes to understand the detail of associations.

The SMW literature generally assumes that integrity is an important aspect of MW but, while some attention has been paid to the effects of ethics on wellbeing (Mullen *et al.*, 2017), to date, the MW literature has not yet really addressed the role of personal ethics in relation to outcomes, including wellbeing outcomes. We suggest future research is required on relationships between integrity and MW as well as integrity and wellbeing.

Finally, we suggest that more research is needed on the relationship between MW and emotions. In the context of positive psychology, Hertzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959) has been resurrected (Sachau, 2007) and it will be interesting for further research to investigate whether meaning as a resource operates similarly to the motivation hygiene theory.

Future research could utilize the CMWS to further test effects under COR theory, and include other critical job outcomes, such as performance and turnover. In addition, building on recent research by Both-Nwabuwe *et al.* (2019) showing that individual autonomy has a greater effect on SMW than team autonomy, we suggest testing associations using multi-level data.

Practical implications

Our findings show that OMW resources of security and autonomy are best cultivated simultaneously with SMW to achieve optimum wellbeing. OMW remains a consideration even with SMW in place. That is, even if employees are supported in developing transferable skills, such as expressing full potential, this and other SMW dimensions cannot supplant job security as a resource supporting wellbeing. Our analyses show that, apart from service to others which we return to below, the SMW dimensions all predicted employee wellbeing. The implication is that a combination of SMW dimensions needs to be cultivated simultaneously to build MW as a resource caravan. Practically, this is likely to be a joint responsibility of HR professionals, managers and employees, with interconnected approaches that complement and do not detract from each other. For example, one approach that organizations have taken to improve the ecological conditions of work (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018) is to introduce ethical codes of conduct. Under certain circumstances, codes of ethics can help facilitate ethical decision making and lead to higher levels of integrity (Banks, 2003), suggesting that an ethical code could support integrity with self. At the same time, codes of ethics might be so prescriptive that they take away any creativity (Banks, 2003). In this case, such a code might hamper expressing full potential. As another example, opportunities for promotion might support expressing full potential yet, if these opportunities create too much competition, they may constrain unity with others. Thus, gains in certain resources can (inadvertently) lead to loss in other resources. These examples emphasize the importance of building a multilayered interconnecting approach to foster wellbeing.

The nuanced findings for SMW dimensions suggest that managers and HR professionals will benefit from seeking feedback from employees on their own experiences of MW in specific contexts. For example, rather than asking employees a unidimensional question, "To what extent do you have meaningful work?", we suggest a more useful approach would be a set of questions covering the dimensions, such as, "To what extent does your work enable you to fully express your talents?" for expressing full potential. We caution organizations that prioritizing or legitimizing certain SMW dimensions over others may create emotional dissonance for employees (Patulny *et al.*, 2020) as well as stress. Our findings that self-

oriented dimensions more strongly predict wellbeing, and that the dimension of service to others was positively associated with negative affect, particularly caution against the organization pushing only certain dimensions of MW.

Of the SMW dimensions we examined, service to others is most likely to be promoted by the organization as it coincides with organizational objectives such as providing excellent customer service or going the extra mile. However, our findings suggest that service to others can become misaligned and could even lead employees contributing so strongly to others that they leave themselves depleted of resources. We located one study that found that it may not be the act of helping that is related to wellbeing, but rather the freedom to choose in the helping that determines its impact on wellbeing (Weinstein and Ryan, 2010), supporting the notion that service to others needs to be carefully managed to not block wellbeing. Because of these potential risks, we suggest that it may be important to keep SMW dimensions dynamically balanced. For example, in developmental reviews, managers should focus not only on the contributions the employee makes in service to others, but also whether this contribution is sustainable for the employee, and what they as a manager and the organization might put in place, or what obstacles they might remove to nurture the other SMW dimensions as resources.

Limitations and future research

While our data represents a broad sample of respondents in various occupations and sectors, there is still the issue around common method variance (CMV) due to constructs being measured at the same time (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) describes various post-hoc tests to investigate CMV and these are popular in the literature (e.g. Kmieciak, 2021; Ghafoor and Haar, 2021). We conducted Harman's one factor test, which resulted in multiple factors, with the largest being 23.5%, well-below the threshold of 50% (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). We also conducted Lindell and Whitney's (2001) CMV assessment procedure, using a partial correlation adjustment between our study variables, controlling for an unrelated construct (household income). This analysis showed no change in correlation strength or significance, further indicating no evidence of CMV (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). However, the differences found between the correlation (Table 4) and mediation effects (Table 5) suggest the variables explain overlapping variance; we examined the variance inflation factors and these were all below 2.5, which suggests this effect is not due to multicollinearity (Hair *et al.*, 2010), however further research of multiple MW dimensions is warranted. Furthermore, more qualitative as well as longitudinal studies are required on the dynamic balance between SMW and wellbeing, both measured along multiple dimensions. In addition, we included two OMW measures and suggested further exploration of OMW domains, especially moral conditions such as dignity and inclusion.

Conclusion

The current study leverages COR theory and the notion of resource caravans to examine the impact of OMW and SMW dimensions on wellbeing. The findings highlight that (1) while the current MW literature places significant emphasis on SMW, OMW remains an important consideration, and (2) while the MW literature often focuses on self-transcendent meanings, such as making a difference, the self-oriented dimensions of SMW are more dominant toward wellbeing. This is valuable to employees, managers and HR professionals considering how to improve MW and wellbeing. Managers and HR professionals should be well prepared to manage OMW and SMW simultaneously and particularly need to focus on opportunities for employees to express their full potential and maintain their integrity at work to support their wellbeing.

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