



The personal experience of untapped potential in the work domain as a temporal perspective on meaning-making

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Introduction



- **Meaningfulness**
 - The feeling that work activities are a worthwhile and valuable investment of one's self (Kahn, 1990)

- **Current limitation MFW**
 - “Management of meaning” (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009)
 - Little attention for the role of the worker

Person-centric

People as creators of meaning

- **Temporal perspective** (Bailey & Madden, 2015)
 - Subjective temporal context of the individual (Sonnentag, 2012)
 - Heidegger: interconnection past – present – future



- Experience of untapped potential as particular integration of time in meaningful work

Untapped potential

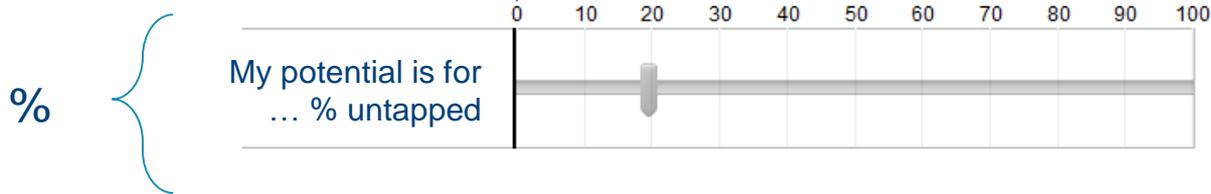
- The purpose of work is... to fulfill my potential (Ekman, 2013)
- Conceptualization
 - Aristotle: *potentialis* – *actualis*
 - Future temporal comparison
 - Idealized future self towards the person hopes to progress (Albert, 1977; Wilson & Ross, 2000)
 - Part of self-concept (Myers, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986)
- Through framing work in terms of (not) fulfilling one's potential work becomes meaningful/less to people

Research Design

- Survey
 - Wave 1 March 2015 ($N=769$)
 - Mixed sampling: diversity & stratified
 - Sample stratification based on 2013 Flemish employee population
 - 47% men
 - 68% age 25 – 49 years; 25% age 50+
 - 62% highly educated
 - 78% full time contract
 - Measures
 - Potential measure
 - Psychological meaningfulness (May et al., 2004)
 - Worker and work context variables

Focal potential measure

“Please indicate below the percentage that according to you corresponds best with the extent to which your potential is currently untapped in the work domain”



TEXT

Could you please explain briefly why you indicated the percentage above?

Because this is a personal experience, there are no right or wrong answers. We ask you to think out loud about how you came to this percentage and write this down.

Results

- **Qualitative Analyses**

- Method: template analysis (King, 2012)
 - 2 dimensions
 - Dynamic (tapped) – static (untapped)
 - Opportunity (stimulation) – Hindrance (limitation)
- **6 experience profiles** – Cohen's Kappa (.76)
 - 25,3% Frustration
 - 14,1% Fulfillment
 - 17,3% Expanding fulfillment
 - 12,4% Limited fulfillment
 - 6,7% Anticipation
 - 1% Exhaustion

Results

- **Frustration** – *focus on the present + disconnection with the past*

“A lot of my qualities and knowledge are untapped. For example, I have a good knowledge of marketing with which nothing is done. Sometimes, in my opinion, my superiors just act without knowing while they would better utilize the knowledge of and take into account their subordinates. Sometimes opposite things are even being done which makes me wonder at times what I am doing. Sometimes I am also the person who does repetitive administrative work while I do not want to do this at all but want to grow. I am capable of more.”

(woman, 34, mid of career, master degree, staff member)

- **(Expanding) Fulfillment** – *connection with the past and/or future*

“90% fulfilled because I receive many opportunities to learn. My work is surely not yet a routine. Besides, they give me the chance to maximally apply things that I learn now or have learned in the past (also during my studies) so that I have the feeling that my potential is utilized.”

(woman, 25, start of career, master degree, junior HR generalist)

- **Limited Fulfillment** - *upward counterfactuals*

“Within my specific area or department my potential is almost fully utilized, but I think I could contribute more at an organizational and conceptual level, if I would be allowed to participate fully there.”

(man, 45, mid of career, master degree, teacher)

- **Anticipation** – *connection with the future*

“A learning pathway is outlined so that I can grow steadily in the company. The responsibility and complexity of work increases gradually. So I dare to say that there is still a lot of potential untapped.”

(man, 26, start of career, master degree, financial analyst)

- **Exhaustion** – *focus on the present + disconnection with the past*

The tasks that I perform are, given my high school education, just about the maximum that I could handle. I have already been confronted with assignments that are slightly too ambitious for me.”

(man, 62, end of career, high school diploma, planning and shipping)

Results

- **Quantitative analyses**
 - Method: One-Way ANOVA + Tukey's Post-Hoc tests

| | Fulfillment | Expanding | Limited | Anticipation | Frustration |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | <i>m (sd)</i> |
| 1. % untapped potential | 12.70 (8.97) | 25.82 (12.9) | 25.28 (10.9) | 36.25 (16.4) | 41.82 (19.2) |
| <i>Trait variables</i> | | | | | |
| 2. General self-efficacy | 4.02 (.53) | 4.01 (.49) | 3.95 (.52) | 3.78 (.47) | 3.90 (.56) |
| 3. Locus of control (<u>internal</u>) | 3.66 (.74) | 3.74 (.62) | 3.72 (.59) | 3.74 (.53) | 3.61 (.69) |
| 4. Locus of control (chance) | 2.38 (.77) | 2.36 (.71) | 2.38 (.68) | 2.35 (.53) | 2.49 (.77) |
| 5. Locus of control (others) | 2.29 (.97) | 2.19 (.76) | 2.24 (.87) | 2.10 (.55) | 2.37 (.85) |
| 6. General self-esteem | 4.08 (.65) | 4.18 (.54) | 4.10 (.69) | 4.07 (.60) | 4.00 (.68) |
| 7. Goal orientation (approach) | 3.48 (.82) | 3.54 (.78) | 3.69 (.64) | 3.65 (.77) | 3.57 (.86) |
| 8. Goal orientation (avoidance) | 2.87 (.86) | 2.93 (.71) | 3.01 (.65) | 3.16 (.69) | 3.02 (.74) |
| 9. Goal orientation (mastery) | 4.01 (.59) | 4.13 (.55) | 4.06 (.52) | 4.13 (.51) | 4.06 (.59) |
| 10. <u>Maximizing tendency</u> | 3.52 (.62) | 3.55 (.66) | 3.47 (.56) | 3.41 (.60) | 3.58 (.67) |
| 11. Subjective happiness | 5.18 (1.04) | 5.29 (.92) | 5.13 (.98) | 5.09 (.95) | 4.99 (1.10) |
| <i>State variables</i> | | | | | |
| 12. Engagement | 4.46 (.54) | 4.32 (.46) | 4.15 (.56) | 4.30 (.53) | 3.83 (.77) |
| 13. Job boredom | 1.65 (.62) | 1.84 (.70) | 2.15 (.86) | 2.19 (.79) | 2.58 (1.22) |
| 14. Burn-out | 2.45 (1.03) | 2.28 (.95) | 2.53 (1.07) | 2.31 (.96) | 2.77 (1.07) |
| 15. Exploration | 4.75 (1.46) | 4.71 (1.33) | 4.41 (1.35) | 4.63 (1.34) | 4.21 (1.36) |
| 16. Exploitation | 5.56 (1.14) | 5.19 (1.05) | 5.01 (.97) | 4.90 (1.01) | 5.14 (1.07) |
| 17. Job crafting | 2.78 (.57) | 2.70 (.43) | 2.66 (.42) | 2.84 (.51) | 2.72 (.48) |
| 18. Job involvement | 3.58 (.74) | 3.30 (.70) | 3.25 (.70) | 3.24 (.74) | 2.93 (.81) |
| 19. Self-evaluative involvement | 2.60 (.88) | 2.74 (.78) | 2.79 (.82) | 2.72 (.74) | 3.03 (.84) |
| 20. Psychological meaningfulness | 4.18 (.74) | 3.90 (.64) | 3.85 (.82) | 3.77 (.72) | 3.30 (.98) |
| 21. Instrumental work orientation | 2.47 (1.12) | 2.30 (.94) | 2.43 (1.06) | 2.33 (1.01) | 2.51 (1.04) |
| 22. Satisfaction with life | 4.06 (1.03) | 4.19 (1.09) | 3.90 (1.09) | 3.97 (.97) | 3.74 (1.19) |
| <i>Work context variables</i> | | | | | |
| 23. <u>Skill utilization</u> | 5.64 (.78) | 5.34 (.81) | 4.94 (.83) | 5.14 (.61) | 4.29 (1.13) |
| 24. <u>Autonomy</u> | 5.71 (1.07) | 5.52 (.97) | 5.42 (1.25) | 5.52 (1.16) | 4.84 (1.45) |
| 25. <u>Skill variety</u> | 5.33 (1.33) | 5.23 (1.36) | 5.16 (1.45) | 5.43 (1.13) | 4.80 (1.52) |
| 26. <u>Task identity</u> | 5.44 (1.56) | 5.49 (1.26) | 5.33 (1.40) | 5.20 (1.41) | 4.93 (1.59) |
| 27. <u>Task significance</u> | 5.63 (1.00) | 5.49 (1.19) | 5.11 (1.29) | 5.53 (1.04) | 4.87 (1.36) |
| 28. Job feedback | 5.24 (1.17) | 5.00 (1.24) | 4.71 (1.37) | 4.91 (1.15) | 4.47 (1.42) |
| 29. <u>Perceived overqualification</u> | 2.31 (.71) | 2.52 (.76) | 2.88 (.70) | 2.62 (.77) | 3.13 (.98) |
| 30. Workplace self-expansion | 4.90 (1.23) | 4.79 (1.05) | 4.61 (1.06) | 5.01 (1.04) | 4.08 (1.16) |
| 31. Psychological safety | 3.71 (.66) | 3.86 (.70) | 3.82 (.65) | 3.99 (.51) | 3.51 (.78) |
| 32. Leader-member exchange | 3.67 (.80) | 3.60 (.66) | 3.61 (.63) | 3.72 (.51) | 3.21 (.78) |
| 33. <u>Distributive justice</u> | 3.46 (1.11) | 3.13 (.98) | 3.33 (1.07) | 3.37 (.88) | 2.81 (1.08) |
| <i>Demographic information</i> | | | | | |
| 34. Age | 42.17 (12.8) | 35.43 (10.9) | 36.71 (12.0) | 30.10 (9.23) | 37.51 (12.9) |



Discussion

- Theoretical contributions
 - Temporal recontextualization (Bailey & Madden, 2015)
 - Work experience in general ↔ specific events
 - Alternative selves: upward counterfactuals (Baumeister & Bushman, 2013)
 - Knowledge, skills, and abilities: utilization and development
- Practical implications
 - Paradox in Western society: the American Nightmare

Discussion

- **Where to go next? Challenge of mixed-methods**
 - Limited richness of qualitative data
 - Descriptive use of quantitative data
 - 2nd data wave November 2016 (+- 1.5y)
- **2 options**
 - Test the effect of experience profiles on meaningfulness on top of established worker- and work context sources
 - Investigate changes in experience profiles over time (*qualitatively*) and link these to the change in meaningfulness over time (*quantitatively*)

