



Addressing the issue of meaningful work during covid-19 through ldw model: An empirical study

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Abstract- The current study attempted to apply the LDW model to test the significance of employee training, career development, and work-life balance towards predicting the meaningfulness of work. The study used quantitative approach to obtain data via an online platform in this regard. Through applying structural equation modelling using Smart PLS 2.0, the study found a significant relationship between employee training and meaningful work. The study also found statistical support for career development and meaningful work association. Lastly, a significant association between work-life balance and employees' work meaningfulness during the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic. The study has concluded that these three factors are crucial for organizations to consider for the purpose of boosting their employees' work wellbeing. The results have landed support to the LDW model and its significance in predicting the meaningful work of employees. The study forwards implications for theory and practice for organizations and scholars.

Keywords: Covid-19, meaningful work, LDW model, employee training, career development, work life balance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The on-going pandemic has affected many aspects of our lives (Correia & Almeida, 2020; Darwish et al., 2020). There is a completely new world that we are experiencing today with a lot of dynamism and complexities. This has also notably made a major impact on how work life used to be, particularly when it comes to how people look at their work and job roles. Ahmed and Ismail (2020) recently pointed out that the ongoing pandemic has badly affected employees' meaningfulness towards work. Due to work pressure, increased job demands, responsibilities, and work schedules, employees seem to be lost in terms of their work's real meaning. The authors have further alarmed that this in the long run, can results in deleterious effects on employees' behaviors and outcomes, thus resulting in poor results. Meaningful work over the recent period has attracted much scholarly attention in various prospects (Minkkinen et al., 2020; Ahmed, Majid & Zin, 2016; Ahmed et al., 2019; Ahmed et al., 2018; Simonet & Castille, 2020). Therein, employees, in particular, are facing many challenges in terms of gaining the sense of connectivity, significance and contribution in their work (i.e., meaningful work) (Baum & Goh, 2021) (*In press*). Since employees perceiving work to be meaningful has many promising outcomes (Ahmed et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2019), the authors view it as an urgent issue requiring empirical attention to facilitate organizations with objective information to address this issue. Based on the literature's critical appraisal and the critical insights forwarded by Ahmed and Ismail (2020) on the topic, the present study attempted to examine the LDW model. The LDW model stands for Learning, Development, and Work-life balance. The study tested how employee training (learning), career development (development), and work-life balance (work-life balance) can help boost employees' meaningfulness of work during the on-going COVID-19 Pandemic.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The coming sections reveal the significance of three factors: employee training, career development, and work-life balance towards harnessing meaningful work. Reviewing the literature review within these factors, it is noteworthy to indicate the strong evidence that (Training, Career Development, and Work-life Balance can be instrumental for bringing sense to employees for their work especially during the pandemic period. The absence or weakness of the mentioned prospects can cause shortcomings in human resources within an organization leading to negative consequences in organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. It is praiseworthy to note that the literature

review reveals the strong link between training and career development with work-life balance and meaningfulness of work.

Meaningfulness of Work

Meaningful work is perceived through employees feeling relatively important, having a sense of “worth, “dignity” (Steger et al., 2012). According to Grant (2007), if the work positively affects people, they will desire to positively contribute to the organization more.

Compelling evidence in research (Tummers & Knies, 2013) indicates the importance of creating meaningful work in organizations leading to several aspects of success within an organizational environment. But there is limited research in defining specifically meaningful work within human resources development (Shrabi & Harpaz, 2010). Studies have indicated meaningful work leads to psychological well-being (Ahmed et al., 2016; Blustein, 2008), job satisfaction (Sparks & Schenk, 2001).

Analyzing different views of meaningful work reveals that training, career development, and monetary rewards create meaningful work (Pfeffer et al., 1995). Job characteristics, task significance, and job enrichment create meaningful work (Hackman & Oldham 1976; May et al., 2004; Fletcher et al., 2018). To reach towards meaningful work, career development is one way to form meaningful work (McDonald & Hite 2005) which can be formed a support system of supervisors (Noe & Wilk, 1993).

Meaningfulness is also associated with high engagement levels through HRD activities such as training and career development (Fairlie, 2011; Kahn, 1990; Thory, 2016). The sense of empowerment is also fostered through meaningful work (Harpaz & Fu, 2002). Analyzing various views about meaningful work and career development and training practices surfaces strong evidence with the views of McLagan 1983 as developing human resources through “integrated use of training and development, career development, and organization development to improve individual and organizational performance” (p.7). Hence, this reveals that training and career development form pillars towards meaningful work, as indicated in earlier views.

Literature review surfaces the challenge in forming meaningful work is that different generations have different meanings to work (Michaelson et al., 2014; Yeoman, 2014). Meaningful work is not about what work means to people but work as significant and positive in valence (meaningfulness) (Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012). This, notably raises an interesting area to explore, as the coming generation prefers flexibility in work conditions and career development. Pandemic periods require flexibility from employees. Hence, the meaningfulness of work is instrumental (Ahmed & Ismail, 2020). Therefore, it can be created within organizations when the organization understands the needs in terms of training and development, enabling retaining employees.

Employee Training

Training is one of the main factors that have an impact on human resources within the organization. Reviewing several resources as indicated in the coming section provides evidence that training has a strong relation to work meaningfulness.

Training has evolved from carrying out tasks towards a process that can stimulate human resources within organizations. Training is defined as imparting job knowledge to employees to smoothly, efficiently, and cooperatively (Katz & Kahn, 1978). It is a process of increasing productivity and eventually managing and retaining knowledge within organizations (Krempale & Pace, 2001). Training is considered a systematic development of requirements for the knowledge, skills, and attitude required to perform job tasks (Abiodun, 1999). According to (Armstrong, 2001), training is considered as the formal and systematic modification of education, instruction, development, and planned experience to develop the organization’s culture to enhance individual performance and to strengthen the organization’s capability to improve and prepare an individual performance for the present and future (Krempale & Pace, 2001).

Employee development and training stimulate employees within organizations (Boselie, 2005; Mozammel, 2019; Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Training opportunities within organizations enhance human resources to perform competently, productively and promote organizational growth (Rohan & Madhumita, 2012; Satterfield & Hughes, 2007). The importance of training is evident in the literature review as resources emphasize investing in productivity, job satisfaction, and retention (Drost, Frayne, Lowe & Geringer 2002; Jennings & Moore, 1995).

Reviewing various research reflects the positive impact of training in several areas in various business industries. The impact of training on job satisfaction and retention (Neeraj, 2014). Job satisfaction and motivation are significantly correlated with training effectiveness in Greek organizations (Sahinidis & Bouris 2000). Studies in the hotel industry also indicate that training and development practices develop commitment cultures (McGunnigle & Jameson 2000). Having reviewed the significance

of training, the coming section explores the significance of career development in creating meaningful work.

Career Development

Career development involves creating a career pattern, decision-making style integration of roles, value expression, and life role self-concepts (Nile & Bowlsbey, 2002). The significance of career development within organizations is recognized for long-term positive effects within organizations as HR practice (Sullivan et al., 2003; McDonald & Hite 2005). This reflects the importance of having long-term practices rather than short-term cost reduction practices (Burke and Cooper 2005). Several studies in different contexts (Nigerian, Singaporean, Indian) indicate the correlation between career development and job satisfaction and commitment (Puah & Anatharam, 2006; Lamba & Choudry, 2013). Studies by Sturges, Conway, Guest & Lifefooghe 2005, Zaleska and Menezes 2007 indicate career development related to commitment and job attachment.

Career development is one HRM practice that can create a climate of concern and employee commitment (Kinicki et al., 1992). Lamba and Choudry (2013) research indicate the significance of career development from various sectors concluding the difficulty of achieving customer-centric strategic activities without achieving employee satisfaction through career development and other HRM practices. Anantharaman (2004) study among software professionals in India emphasizes career development's positive relationship with organizational commitment. Tan (2008) study proposes that a comprehensive career development program shows positive organizational investment that creates a sense of appreciation among employees.

Career development has shifted towards the employees' responsibility through organizations that provide enriched jobs, lateral moves and multiple career paths (Caudron 1994, Waterman et al., 1994). This is known as career resilience that causes employees to be committed and flexible in developing development opportunities and career planning support (Gope, Elia, & Passinate 2018).

Analyzing the literature review shows that career development plays a critical role in forming "meaningful work" through career development, causing retention rate to increase (Mahmud & Idrish, 2011). The challenge of career development remains in delivering cost-effective coaching and mentoring methods to stimulate career motivation and career resilience to enhance career transitions and career development (Sears, 1982). Understanding individuals' multiple commitments beyond the organization can help form career development programs that increase commitments individuals (Baruch, 2004).

Accordingly, analyzing the significance of career development, the next section reveals career development and training with the meaningfulness of work. Reviewing the importance of career development, it is evident that it is an area that deserves implementation that cannot be ignored under any challenges. Relating current organizational challenges of working within pandemic periods, it is noteworthy to explore ways of forming career development that can create significance in employees. The section explores the significance of work's meaningfulness by exploring its definition, significance, and positive relation with career development and training.

Work-Life Balance

Work-Life Balance is defined as employees' satisfaction among work and non-work domains (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Work-life balance indicates an individual's effectiveness by satisfying work and family roles (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Studies have indicated that imbalance in work and home leads employees to be emotionally tired (Karatepe & Uludag 2007). Stress owing to lack of work-life balance plays a crucial role in employee retention.

Scholars have started realizing the significance of work life balance (Ola et al., 2019). Work-life balance can be retained through HR practices (Luis, Thais, Antonio, & Rocio, 2020). Zheng et al. (2015) study indicates that work-life balance strategy is to be coordinated with HRM strategies such as training, job design, and intergroup communication. Work-life balance can also be flexible working arrangements (Lambert, 2000; Halpern, 2005; Zedeck & Moiser (1990), health and well-being programs (Baicker et al., 2010), child care assistance programs (Morrissey & Warner, 2011), organizational understanding (Dex & Bond, 2005; Casper et al., 2007; Mescher et al., 2010) that have a positive relationship with employees well-being.

III. METHODOLOGY

Sampling

Online survey was utilized for the current study through using Google forms. The questionnaire was floated through social media for administrative and academic staff in the education sector in Bahrain during the October 2020- January 2021 period. A total of 311 questionnaires were received, out of which 12 were discarded due to being inappropriately filled. Resultantly, 299 responses were taken for the final examination and analysis.

Data Analysis

Structural equation modelling using Smart PLS 2.0 was used for data analysis and interpretation (Ringle et al., 2005). Smart PLS is widely used for analysis and interpretation by prominent studies in this domain (e.g., AlZgool et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2020; Ahmed & Ismail, 2020; Islam et al., 2020; Pahi et al., 2020; Mozammel et al., 2018; Pintoa et al., 2020). Therein, we applied a two-stage approach in which the first stage is referred as measurement model assessment and the second state refers to structural model assessment (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

Measurement Model

Psychometric properties of the hypothesized model as examined at this stage to assure the internal consistency reliability, discriminant and convergent validity and indicator reliability (Ahmed et al., 2020; Hendeler et al., 2009). The individual factor loadings were maintained against the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2014). Furthermore, for internal consistency reliability, the present study examined composite reliability (CR). The CR scores for all the investigated constructs were assured to be higher than 0.70 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Moving further, the study also assessed the AVE scores for all the constructs in the conceptual framework to affirm they meet the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Chin, 1998). Table 1 and Figure 1 offers details on all the aforementioned tests, expressing objective achievement of all the thresholds, thus confirming the hypothesized model's psychometric properties.

TABLE 1. Loadings, AVE and CR

Construct	Loadings	AVE	Composite Reliability
Career Development		0.6854	0.9157
CD01	0.8393		
CD02	0.8681		
CD03	0.8487		
CD04	0.8167		
CD05	0.7625		
Employee Training		0.6758	0.92583
ET01	0.7580		
ET02	0.8050		
ET03	0.8596		
ET04	0.8439		
ET05	0.8611		
ET06	0.7996		
Meaningful Work		0.6726	0.8911
MW01	0.7525		
MW02	0.7816		
MW03	0.8868		
MW04	0.8523		
Work Life Balance		0.6614	0.9070
WLB01	0.7699		
WLB02	0.8016		
WLB03	0.8443		
WLB04	0.8579		
WLB05	0.7893		

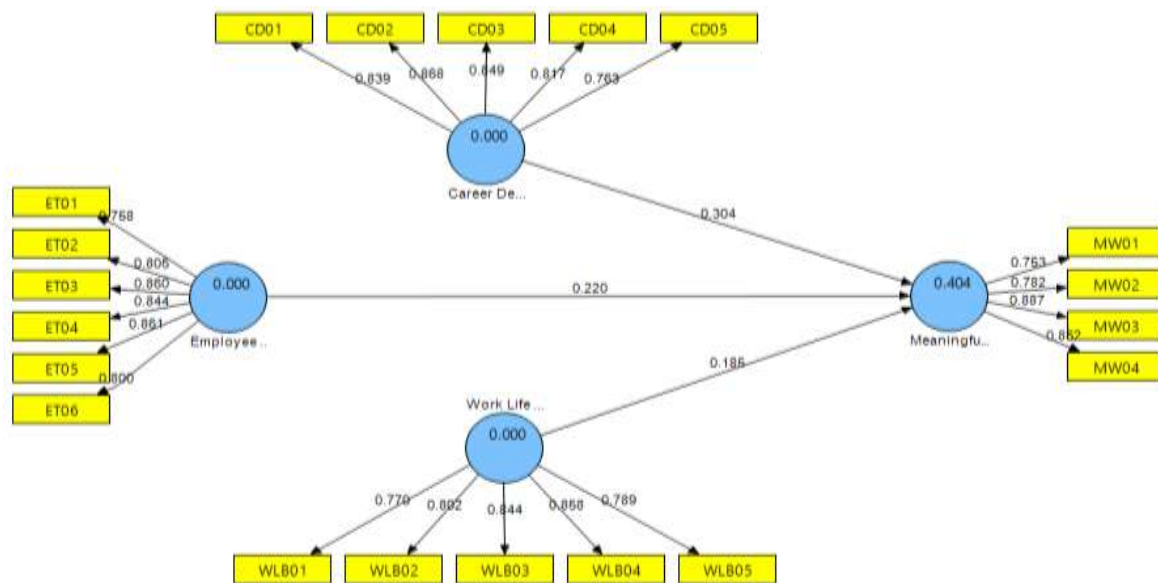


FIGURE 1. Measurement Model

Alongside this, the current study also followed the recommendations of Fornell and Larcker (1981) to assess discriminant validity. Therein, the current study checked the square root of the AVE scores in the cross table. As per Fornell and Larcker, the square root values should be higher than the interacting values. Table 2 outlines that all the AVE square root scores (in Bold) resulting in higher against the interacting values in the cross table.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	Career Development	Employee Training	Meaningful Work	Work Life Balance
Career Development	0.8279			
Employee Training	0.7570	0.82209		
Meaningful Work	0.5900	0.57482	0.8201	
Work Life Balance	0.6406	0.6682	0.5277	0.8133

Structural Model

Further to confirming the measurement model's psychometric properties, the current study tested the significance of the hypothesized relationships in the structural model assessment stage. By applying bootstrapping approach with 5000 bootstraps, we found a significant relationship between employee training and meaningfulness of work, supporting hypothesis 1. Accordingly, the structural model also reported significance of the association between career development and meaningfulness of work, thus lending support to hypothesis 2. Lastly, the results also indicated a strong role of work-life balance in boosting employees' work meaningfulness. Resultantly, the statistical results lend support to all three hypothesized relationships. Table 3 and Figure 2 provide further details in this regard.

Table 3. Structural Model Results

	Original Sample (O)	Standard Error (STERR)	T Statistics (O/STERR)
Career Development -> Meaningful Work	0.3044	0.0766	3.9716
Employee Training -> Meaningful Work	0.2204	0.0850	2.5911
Work Life Balance -> Meaningful Work	0.1854	0.0614	3.0148

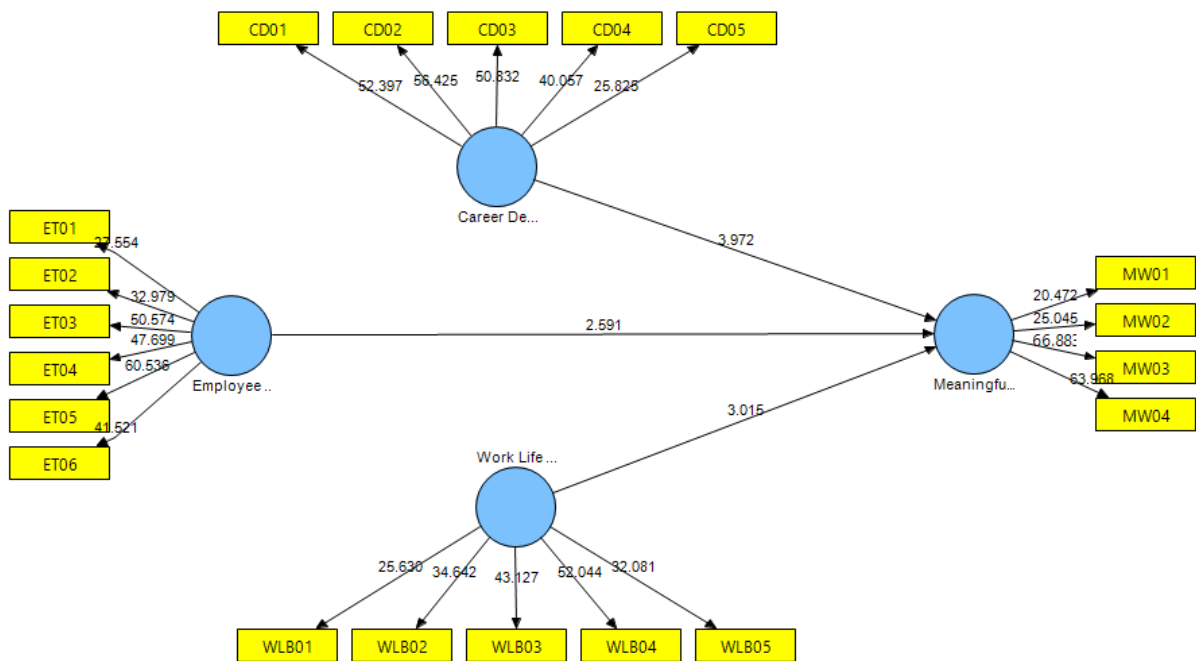


FIGURE 2. Structural Model

IV. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study attempted to investigate one of the important issues organizations face globally pertaining to the employees work meaningfulness, particularly during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. The study presented a conceptual framework based on how it tested how career development, employee training, and work-life balance can boost employee meaningfulness. The results indicated employee training boosting work meaningfulness. The results have confirmed the notable role of training on employee behaviors and outcomes (Becker 1962, Katz and Kahn 1978, Mclagan 1989), outlining that when employees are provided with training opportunities, it helps them to boost their skills and make much greater understanding of the work role and responsibilities, thus enhancing their work meaningfulness (Awang et al., 2017). This also asserts that training opportunities may let employees see an element of employers' concern since they are making investments in employees' skill development. As a result, they may harness psychological connectivity with the work, hence predicting meaningfulness in work. The results imply that organizations need to provide training opportunities as it is not a cost but an investment that reap promising results in the near future in the shape of enriched behaviors and outcomes.

Accordingly, the results expressed that career development opportunities can help employees make a much greater sense of the workplace, role, and career path that they are working in, thereby obtaining a greater sense of understanding about the job and responsibilities they are performing, thus enhancing their meaningfulness of work. These findings have landed support to the assertions of (Blustein, 2008; Brown & Miycell 2010). The finding implies that organizations need to clearly outline career path and development programs respectively for employees to help them develop a sense of purpose and connectivity with the work to showcase profound behaviors and outcomes.

Lastly, the study also investigated and found support for work-life balance and work meaningfulness association. The findings have statistically confirmed the significance of work-life balance (Maragret 2007; Carelson et al., 2011; Rantenen et al., 2008) in boosting employees' psychological resourcefulness to develop a greater sense of purpose connectivity, and contribution towards the work. The findings imply that employees need a greater level of work-life balance to respond effectively to domestic, personal, and professional obligations simultaneously.

V. CONCLUSION

The current study attempted to examine the role of three factors, namely employee training, career development, and work-life balance, towards predicting meaningfulness of work. The study found

significant relationship of all three with the meaningfulness of work. The study results have concluded that these factors are crucial for businesses to boost the work well-being of employees, particularly during the COVID-19 hit period.

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