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Perceived Organizational Purpose: Systematic Literature Review, Construct Definition, Measurement and Potential Employee Outcomes

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ABSTRACT   Organizational purpose has recently gained great popularity in research and practice. However, the development of this nascent research field has struggled with definitional ambiguity, the lack of a measurement instrument and little empirical testing of potential outcomes. In our paper, we first introduce and define the multidimensional construct of perceived organizational purpose, which sheds light on the individual and subjective experiences of organizational purpose. Second, building on our construct definition, we develop and validate a four-dimensional Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale. Third, we disentangle the related yet differentiated concepts of perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work and theorize how substantial knowledge in the field of meaningful work can be transferred to the relatively new and untested field of perceived organizational purpose. Fourth, we critically elaborate and empirically test the relationship of perceived organizational purpose with employee job satisfaction, subjective wellbeing and work-life conflict.

Keywords: purpose, perceived organizational purpose, meaningful work, subjective wellbeing, job satisfaction, work-life conflict

INTRODUCTION

Organizational purpose has recently gained great popularity in business practice and research. An increasing number of organizations have decided to designate a business purpose that goes beyond pure profit maximization and aims to contribute to the common good. Even organizations previously known for their strong shareholder and profit orientation have announced their commitment to renewed organizational purpose in

recent years. For example, 181 CEOs of the leading and most powerful US companies signed a statement underlining the need to commit to an organizational purpose that benefits society (Business Roundtable, 2019). Furthermore, Blackrock CEO Larry Fink (2018) stated that 'to prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance but also show how it makes a positive contribution to society'. The current paradigm shift from profit to purpose orientation is also increasingly reflected in organizational and management research. This line of research suggests that organizational purpose has a wide range of positive organizational and societal outcomes. Among the most prominent prospects of organizational purpose is its positive contribution to the wellbeing of its direct stakeholders (Hurth et al., 2018; Mayer, 2021; van Tuin et al., 2020). In particular, research often emphasizes the effect on employee job satisfaction and general wellbeing because organizational purpose should provide a trustworthy environment to satisfy the basic human needs of belonging, meaning and direction in life (Ellsworth, 2002; Henderson and van den Steen, 2015; Mayer, 2021; van Tuin et al., 2020).

However, prior research remained mainly conceptual and neglected the empirical testing of these optimistic prospects. We explain the scarcity of empirical testing in prior studies on organizational purpose by the lack of a clear construct definition, which also hinders an empirical measurement operationalization. Prior research found no agreement or consistency in the definition of organizational purpose (Gartenberg et al., 2019; Henderson, 2021; van Tuin et al., 2020) and applied broad and rather vague definitions (e.g., Henderson and van den Steen, 2015; Mayer, 2021). However, a clear and distinct construct definition is essential to develop and empirically test theory (Post et al., 2020; Suddaby, 2010). We propose that focusing on the individual perception of organizational purpose, a construct we name *perceived organizational purpose*, can help overcome the prior definitional challenges of the construct's breadth and vagueness and thereby enable the development of an appropriate measurement tool.

Moreover, focusing on perceived organizational purpose allows researchers to test its direct effects at the level of individual stakeholders, such as employees. Empirical testing of potential effects on direct stakeholders is particularly interesting because the results might be more nuanced than the literature on organizational purpose assumes. For example, in contrast to the proposed positive outcomes for employees' wellbeing (Hurth et al., 2018; Mayer, 2021; van Tuin et al., 2020), the literature on meaningful work indicates that employees who perceive too much purpose and meaning in their work face the risk of neglecting private and family responsibilities (Bailey et al., 2019a, 2019b; Dempsey and Sanders, 2010; Oelberger, 2019). In turn, this neglect bears the risk of negatively affecting their wellbeing at work and in general (Haar et al., 2014; Lunau et al., 2014).

Overall, our theoretical considerations and empirical findings contribute to the emerging field of organizational purpose by addressing and mitigating the construct's contiguous limitations of definitional ambiguity, lack of an empirical measurement tool, and outcome uncertainty. First, we introduce and define the multidimensional construct of perceived organizational purpose, which sheds light on the individual and subjective experiences of organizational purpose. Based on a systematic literature review, we define perceived organizational purpose as the individual perception of an authentic organizational aspiration to contribute positively to society, which guides

all organizational decisions and provides inspiration in daily operations. Second, we develop and validate a four-dimensional *Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale*. We show that the scale is correlated with, yet distinct from, related measures of perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) or social entrepreneurship. A rigorously validated and distinct empirical measurement tool is a prerequisite for quantitative research, which is needed to test and further develop theory in the nascent field of organizational purpose.

Third, we conceptualize and empirically test the relationship between perceived organizational purpose and the adjacent yet differentiated concept of meaningful work. Although prior research has noted the conceptual proximity of these two concepts (Dik et al., 2013, 2015; Rosso et al., 2010) or even used them interchangeably (Gartenberg et al., 2019; Kempster et al., 2011), the specific relationship remains unclear. A better theoretical understanding of how organizational purpose relates to adjacent fields, such as meaningful work, can help the emerging field of organizational purpose develop more effectively (Hoon and Baluch, 2020). Fourth, we critically discuss and empirically test the relationship of perceived organizational purpose with employee job satisfaction and subjective wellbeing. Consistent with prior conceptual research (e.g., Ellsworth, 2002; Henderson and van den Steen, 2015), we find support for the positive relationship of perceived organizational purpose and both job-related and general wellbeing. However, we also find that employees with a strong perceived organizational purpose risk seeing work as the main source of meaning making, which could lead to greater work-life conflict and reduced levels of wellbeing.

Beyond our theoretical contribution to the research on organizational purpose, our findings provide important implications for managerial practice. Our conceptualization of perceived organizational purpose and its validated measurement could help organizations better understand, develop, and manage their own organizational purpose. Moreover, we discuss the importance of and potential avenues for organizations' support of employees' balance between private and work responsibilities to implement their organizational purpose sustainably.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Purpose, Organizational Purpose, and Perceived Organizational Purpose

The term *purpose* finds its theoretical origins mainly in the field of philosophy and theology. People need a function in society and an overarching goal that gives their lives direction and meaning to achieve happiness (e.g., Aristotle and Ostwald, 1962; Frankl, 1977). Damon et al. (2003) describe purpose as 'a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self' (p. 121). Consequently, it 'brings a deep sense of worth or value, and provides a significant contribution to the common good' (Keyes, 2011, p. 281). Although the great management thinkers Chester Barnard (1938) and Peter Drucker (1973) applied the term *purpose* to the organizational context decades ago, it has only recently

received increased attention in modern managerial and organizational research (e.g., Gartenberg et al., 2019; Henderson and van den Steen, 2015; Hollensbe et al., 2014; Kirchgeorg et al., 2017; Mayer, 2021). According to recent conceptual research, organizational purpose provides a wide variety of positive outcomes, such as financial value (Birkinshaw et al., 2014; Gartenberg et al., 2019), increased stakeholder trust and legitimacy in challenging times (Hamel, 2009; Hollensbe et al., 2014; Henderson and van den Steen, 2015), and a positive contribution to individuals' wellbeing (Ellsworth, 2002; Mayer, 2021; van Tuin et al., 2020).

However, although scholars and practitioners (e.g., Fink, 2018) see high potential in organizational purpose, its hypothetical outcomes remain mainly conceptual and lack rigorous testing. The major obstacle to empirical testing is the lack of a clear definition of organizational purpose, which is the primary prerequisite of testable hypotheses and an empirical measurement instrument (Post et al., 2020; Suddaby, 2010). Currently, there is no academic consensus on the definition of the construct or a validated measurement instrument to appropriately capture the multifaceted concept of organizational purpose (Gartenberg et al., 2019; van Tuin et al., 2020). As Henderson (2021) pointed out '[t] here are almost as many definitions of purpose as there are papers about it in the literature' (p. 5481). One important area that lacks clarity in the multiple conceptualizations of organizational purpose is the role of the individual. Although organizational purpose is initially an organizational-level construct, many scholars stress the inherently perceptual and socio-cognitive nature of organizational purpose based on psychological microfoundations (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Birkinshaw et al., 2014; Collins and Porras, 1994; Freeman and Ginena, 2015; Kirchgeorg et al., 2017). Already in one of the earliest works on organizational purpose, Barnard (1938) underlined the importance of individual subjectivity, stating that organizational purpose is 'determined by organization knowledge, but is *personally interpreted*' (p. 87 emphasis added) and clarifying that 'the *individual* is always the basic strategic factor of organization' (p. 139, emphasis added). Additionally, recent work emphasizes that '[p]urpose is not just about having a higher goal; it is about how this is expressed and lived out daily' by the individual members of the organization (Hurth, 2017, p. 3). In line with this perspective, '[p]urpose is not an objective given but defined as a subjectively construed understanding of the most fundamental objectives of the organization' (van Knippenberg, 2020, p. 8).

In line with this research, we suggest that a focus on the individual-level conceptualization of organizational purpose – a construct that we call *perceived organizational purpose* – is a particularly useful starting point to understand the development, success, and outcomes of organizational purpose. First, organizational purpose is lived, motivated, or impeded by individuals (Barnard, 1938; Hurth, 2017; Kempster et al., 2011; Kirchgeorg et al., 2017; van Tuin et al., 2020). It is the perception and resulting behaviour of individual managers, employees, shareholders, and other key stakeholders that shape the way organizational purpose is developed and executed. Thus, organizational aims to contribute to society remain empty marketing claims unless stakeholders are motivated and guided by these aims (Bebchuk and Tallarita, 2020; Gartenberg et al., 2019). Consequently, a focus on individual perceptions helps to understand the foundations of organizational purpose and 'to circumvent corporate cheap talk' (Gartenberg et al., 2019, p. 2). Moreover, we can only predict potential outcomes of organizational purpose on stakeholders if we understand

whether and how they perceive the intended purpose. For example, research by Birkinshaw et al. (2014) showed that when organizational purpose 'was just a set of words – in effect, a veneer on top of a gain-driven company' (p. 51), there was no effect on the motivation or behaviour of employees. Accordingly, 'purpose is only as strong as employees and other stakeholders believe in it' (van Tuin et al., 2020, p. 2). Research concerned with other stakeholders, such as consumers, repeatedly shows that we need to understand subjective perceptions to predict reactions (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Lin et al., 2011).

The relevance of understanding organizational purpose from the individual level is accentuated by the fact that most of the few empirical studies on potential outcomes of organizational purpose have focused on perceptual measures (e.g., Gartenberg et al., 2019; van Tuin et al., 2020). However, due to the lack of a conceptualization and measurement scale, these studies used measures of related concepts, such as meaningful work (Gartenberg et al., 2019; e.g., 'My work has special meaning: this is "not just a job"'), common good-oriented job characteristics (Allan et al., 2018; e.g., 'My job enhances the welfare of others'), leadership style (Irving and Berndt, 2017; e.g., 'My leader understands our organization's place in the broader community outside the organization'), or workplace spirituality (Kolodinsky et al., 2008; e.g., 'In this organization we are encouraged to actively seek a sense of purpose in our lives'). This lack of definitional agreement and measurement clarity stands in the way of rigorous empirical research that is needed to advance theory on perceived organizational purpose. Accordingly, the first major aim of our research is to systematically develop a definition of perceived organizational purpose. Based on this definition, we aim to develop and empirically validate a measurement scale to enable empirical research.

Perceived Organizational Purpose and Meaningful Work

Because organizational purpose in general and perceived organizational purpose more specifically are relatively new and under-researched concepts, the field could develop more efficiently by learning from adjacent research fields (Hoon and Baluch, 2020; Post et al., 2020). One promising candidate to achieve this aim is research on meaningful work, a concept that is theoretically and conceptually closely related to the concept of perceived organizational purpose (for reviews, see Bailey et al., 2019b; Lysova et al., 2019). Meaningful work is generally defined as 'work experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals' (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 95). In other words, it is about the subjective interpretation of whether the personal work situation is 'significant and worthwhile' (Lysova et al., 2019, p. 375). Prior literature suggests that meaningful work might be strongly related to organizational purpose (e.g., Dik et al., 2013; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010) even to such a point that some studies use meaningful work as a measure of organizational purpose (e.g., Gartenberg et al., 2019).

For example, Gartenberg et al. (2019) 'consider companies with strong purpose to be those in which employees in aggregate have a strong sense of the meaningfulness and collective impact of their work, and firms with weak or no purpose will contain employees without this sense' (p. 2). The underlying assumption is that a shared organizational goal and shared values affect experiences of meaningfulness at work (Lysova et al., 2019; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Moreover, the more individuals

perceive that organizations 'aid the development of the individual's potential towards a desired future self, the more meaningful work will be in the present' (Bailey et al., 2019a, p. 485).

In contrast, some research proposes that the perception of organizational purpose might not always translate into meaningful work (Michaelson et al., 2014; Rey et al., 2019). Whereas meaningful work reflects the perceptions of the individual's personal work situation, perceived organizational purpose represents the individual evaluation of an organizational-level phenomenon mostly independent of individuals' personal position or situation within this organization (Michaelson et al., 2014; Rey et al., 2019). This means that employees might perceive the purpose of their organization to be very strong but find little meaningfulness in their personal work, for example, because the specific job tasks do not fit their personal needs or because they perceive their own work to be irrelevant to the organizational purpose. In turn, if employees perceive the organizational purpose to be very weak, they can still find their work to be meaningful, for example, because they feel that they contribute to other employees' wellbeing within the organization or because they perceive a strong fit between their personal needs and competencies and the specific job characteristics. Accordingly, we expect the following:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work are positively related but distinct concepts.

Perceived Organizational Purpose and Wellbeing

The question of what makes us happy is one of the most pondered enigmas in the history of humankind. *Subjective wellbeing* is defined as a 'broad category of phenomena that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction' (Diener et al., 1999, p. 277). It consists of an affective and a cognitive component, where the affective component focuses on the balance of positive versus negative affect and the cognitive component represents the subjective evaluation of one's personal satisfaction with life (Linley et al., 2009). For employees, *job satisfaction* is an important aspect of overall wellbeing. It describes the degree of affective and cognitive satisfaction or dissatisfaction felt toward one's job or related aspects of the job (Spector, 1997).

Philosophy and psychology emphasize that people are purposeful beings who strive to contribute to a greater whole to achieve happiness (Aristotle and Ostwald, 1962; Frankl, 1977). Research shows that having a purpose in life is one of the strongest predictors of subjective wellbeing (Linley et al., 2009; Reker et al., 1987). In this regard, the work environment can play a critical role because 'most adults spend the majority of their waking hours at work, which often serves as a primary source of purpose, belongingness, and identity' (Michaelson et al., 2014, p. 77). Additionally, the prior literature suggests that perceived organizational purpose has a positive effect on employee wellbeing as well as job satisfaction because it helps to fulfil the inherent need for purpose and meaning in life (Ellsworth, 2002; Henderson and van den

Steen, 2015; Hollensbe et al., 2014; Kempster et al., 2011). Thus far, however, these assumptions have been purely conceptual and not empirically tested. In line with this research, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Perceived organizational purpose is positively associated with (a) subjective wellbeing and (b) job satisfaction.

Perceived Organizational Purpose and the Potential Risk of Work-Life Conflict

Building on the hypothesis that perceived organizational purpose is positively associated with the perceived meaningfulness of work (*H1*), we can draw from the substantial theoretical and empirical research in the field of meaningful work on the question of its relationship with employee job satisfaction and subjective wellbeing (Bailey et al., 2019a). Whereas the field of organizational purpose research theorizes exclusively positive associations with work-related and general wellbeing variables (Ellsworth, 2002; Henderson and van den Steen, 2015; Hollensbe et al., 2014; Kempster et al., 2011; van Tuin et al., 2020), research on meaningful work provides a more complex picture (Bailey et al., 2019a; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Dempsey and Sanders, 2010; Florian et al., 2019; Oelberger, 2019). Bailey et al. (2019a) summarized prior research on meaningful work and identified a paradox in which 'individuals have an innate drive to seek out meaningful work to satisfy their inner needs, yet this same drive can push them to harmful excesses' (p. 489).

Accordingly, on the one hand, there is a positive prospect of meaningful work that helps employees satisfy their need for meaning in life, self-worth and belonging (Allan et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2019a). Meta-analyses confirm this positive potential, indicating strong positive correlations of meaningful work with various work- and nonwork-related outcomes, such as work engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, life satisfaction, and general health (Allan et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2019a). Furthermore, meaningful work might sometimes even facilitate the reconciliation of private and work activities, for example, by leading to reduced levels of work-to-life interference (McCrea et al., 2011) or even work-to-family enrichment (Bergmann et al., 2014; Tummers and Knies, 2013).

On the other hand, there is also evidence that meaningful work could be associated with negative consequences for employees because it might motivate individuals to focus too much on work and neglect all other activities, resulting in overworking and work-life conflict (Bailey et al., 2019a; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Dempsey and Sanders, 2010; Florian et al., 2019; Oelberger, 2019). The term *work-life conflict* refers to an inter-role conflict between work and private areas of life, such as family responsibilities, home duties, and other nonwork activities (Netemeyer et al., 1996; Oelberger, 2019). Work-life conflict can severely reduce an individual's job satisfaction or subjective wellbeing (Haar et al., 2014; Lunau et al., 2014). Avanzi et al. (2012) stress the potential negative effects of overidentification with work on employee wellbeing because it 'encourages individuals to invest heavily in that one

group membership, but to neglect others that might provide them with greater balance and breadth' (p. 188). Empirical results by Steger et al. (2012) suggest that different dimensions of meaningful work might affect work-life conflict and employees differently. They propose *positive meaning in work*, *greater good motivations*, and *meaning making through work* as the three dimensions of meaningful work. In turn, they find that meaning making through work, which by definition helps employees to 'deepen their understanding of their selves and the world around them, facilitating their personal growth' (Steger et al., 2012, p. 325), has the largest positive association with intrinsic work motivation but also with anxiety compared to the other dimensions. These preliminary results imply that the subdimension of meaning making through work could have a comparably stronger positive association with work-life conflict due to higher intrinsic work motivation and a stronger negative association with wellbeing due to higher anxiety levels.

Given these ambivalent findings about the outcomes of meaningful work, we propose that the discussion about the potential effects of perceived organizational purpose, which has thus far been predominantly positive, should be broadened to include consideration of possible risks. Specifically, we argue that perceived organizational purpose, which is positively associated with meaningful work (H2), also carries the risk of work-life conflict and may thus be indirectly negatively associated with employee wellbeing and job satisfaction. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 3*: The relationship between perceived organizational purpose and (a) subjective wellbeing as well as (b) job satisfaction is sequentially mediated by meaningful work and work-life conflict.

Figure 1 summarizes the sequential mediation model.

DEFINING PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

The first step of our study was to develop a definition of perceived organizational that covers the full multidimensionality of the construct. For this purpose, in January 2021, we systematically reviewed the literature on organizational purpose (Briner and Denyer, 2012; Tranfield et al., 2003). We applied an integrative review approach, 'whereby authors revisit a body of knowledge that is usually fragmented, dispersed,
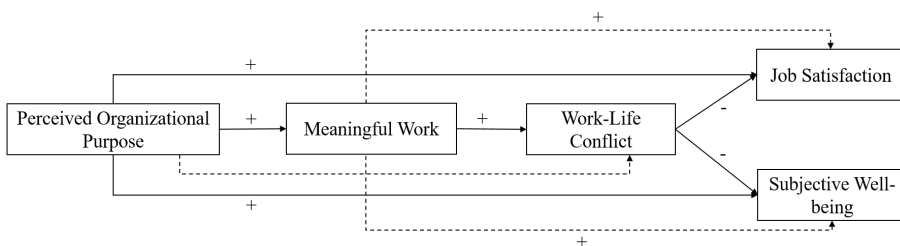

Figure 1. Summarized visualization of the hypotheses

contradictory, or saturated with the purpose of both consolidating current understandings and creating new ones' (Patriotta, 2020, p. 1273). Although our major focus was on individual perceived organizational purpose, we included definitions on all levels in our review to understand the full breadth of the construct (Hoon and Baluch, 2020; Post et al., 2020). We used the Google Scholar search engine, which is a highly comprehensive database that provides content from diverse publishers as well as content beyond controlled databases (Halevi et al., 2017; Walker, 2010). In the search, we combined the keyword 'purpose' with 'corporate', 'organizat+', 'organisat+', 'firm', and 'business' to focus on the conceptualization of purpose in the organizational context. We applied four major inclusion criteria for the literature selection. First, we selected only articles that were written in English, as it is the most commonly used language in academia. Second, we selected only articles published in peer-reviewed journals because they provide validated and rigorous scientific knowledge and are likely to have the highest impact in the field (Briner and Denyer, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2005). Third, in line with our focus on organizational and business research, we focused our search on journals in the broad area of business, management and organizational studies. Fourth, we excluded all articles that did not at least partially define the concept of organizational purpose (or similar constructs, such as corporate or business purpose) because they did not fit our main research aim of construct definition. Overall, this first search yielded 31 journal articles.

In the next step, we reviewed the reference lists of these full texts to identify additional references that were omitted due to our initial search criteria but were still important for the definition of perceived organizational purpose (as recommended by Briner and Denyer, 2012). Because we focused our initial search on journal articles, the second step allowed us to add books and statements from public figures that prior research on organizational purpose deemed important. Given that there are no clear objective criteria for the quality or adequacy of these sources, we only selected sources that were cited several times in the articles resulting from the initial search. Again, we included only English sources as well as sources that included a construct definition. We added 13 sources in the second step, resulting in a total of 44 references that provided a definition of perceived organizational purpose (all references and definitions are presented in Table AI in the appendix).

To synthesize the definitions from prior research, we applied an inductive content analysis, which is particularly recommended in cases of conceptual ambiguity and/or fragmented knowledge of the corresponding concept (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Tranfield et al., 2003). We identified the major themes within each definition and clustered them into thematic categories. We formed a category only if a topic appeared more than once in the definitions. In the final step, we examined the properties of the categories and identified patterns and relationships to draw conclusions for an integrative definition. To validate our definition, we discussed the final categories with four academic experts and, subsequently, with 17 management executives (see details in Table I).

Overall, we were able to identify four conceptual dimensions of perceived organizational purpose that were repeatedly emphasized in the literature: *contribution, authenticity, guidance*, and *inspiration*.

Table I. Overview of the scale development and validation process

Method	Objective	Sample	Process
Generation of a definition and an initial item pool (German Scale)			
Literature review	Construct understanding	Authors	Systematic review of the purpose literature based on predefined criteria resulting in 44 sources
Inductive content analysis	Generation of a definition	Authors and four academic experts (1 doctoral student, 1 professor; 2 postdocs)	Grouping of the defining characteristics resulting in four potential subdimensions
Executive discussion	Practitioner countercheck of the initial definition	17 executives from various industries (members of the *LF Group* network lfgruppe.de)	Open discussion about individual purpose definitions and practical insights from specific industries; recording and coding of statements
Item generation	Generation of an initial item pool	Authors	Formulating 70 provisory items based on previous steps
External review of provisory item pool	Reliability and validity assessment	Authors and six purpose experts (2 consultants; 2 executives; 2 academics)	Countercheck of content validity, clarity, and redundancy resulting in 35 items
Confirmatory Q-sort-method	Reliability and validity assessment	72 MBA students	Students allocated items to dimensions; exclusion of items with allocation rate <80% resulting in 33 items
Factor structure testing and item selection (German Scale)			
Online survey-1	Testing of the factor structure and item selection	379 Swiss employees	Exploratory assessment of the factor structure and the item fit using principal factor analysis (maximum likelihood) rotated to a promax solution resulting in 12 items

Table I. (Continued)

Method	Objective	Sample	Process
Scale Validation (German Scale)			
Online survey-2	Testing of the factor structure, reliability and validity	725 Swiss employees	Confirmatory assessment of the factor structure using confirmatory factor analysis; testing of convergent and discriminant validity (*perceived CSR*); testing of predictive validity (*affective organizational commitment; turnover intention; work engagement*)
Scale translation and validation (English Scale)			
Parallel translation	Translation of the German Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale into English	Authors	Independent translation of the items were compared, differences discussed and the most appropriate translation selected
Validation of scale translation	Clarity of English items	Four academic purpose experts; one native English copy-editor	Countercheck of clarity and grammar of the translated items.
Online survey-3	Testing of the factor structure, reliability and validity	701 US employees	Reassessment of the factor structure using CFA; test of convergent, discriminant (e.g., *perceived CSR, social entrepreneurship*) and predictive validity (e.g., *turnover intention*)

Contribution

Drucker (1973) was one of the first to specifically note the contribution logic inherent within the construct of organizational purpose. He clearly stated that '[b]usiness enterprises – and public-service institutions as well – are organs of society. They do not exist for their own sake, but to fulfill a specific social purpose and to satisfy a specific need of society, community, or individual' (Drucker, 1973, p. 36). Accordingly, organizations should consider themselves part of a larger whole that is legitimized by fulfilling a certain social function. Likewise, more recent definitions emphasize a societal notion of organizational purpose, stressing that organizational purpose goes beyond one's own benefits and aims to contribute to the common good and positive change in society (e.g., Freeman and Ginena, 2015; Gartenberg et al., 2019; Henderson and van den Steen, 2015; Kempster et al., 2011; Mayer, 2021).

Authenticity

According to Collins and Porras (1994), authenticity is 'the key' (p. 76) to organizational purpose. 'Purpose cannot be imposed through dictum' (Kempster et al., 2011, p. 321) but needs to reflect the organization's authentic identity, culture, core values, and beliefs (Abela, 2001; Ellsworth, 2002; Springett, 2004). In turn, the organizational purpose and core values should receive full commitment, support, and embodiment from the whole organization (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1994; Springett, 2004), even when conflicts of interest occur. For example, organizational purpose is 'authentic if the firm routinely makes costly investments in it at the expense of immediate profitability' (Henderson and Serafeim, 2020, p. 178).

Guidance

Organizational purpose 'is the end to which the strategy is directed' (Springett, 2004, p. 300) and 'an aim or objective which guides action' (Kempster et al., 2011, p. 320). It 'provides the leading orientation for every decision and action' (Pircher, 2016, p. 65). In other words, it serves as a guiding concept against which all subgoals are aligned, means are chosen, decisions are evaluated, current practices are revised, and innovations are directed (Barnard, 1938; Ellsworth, 2002; Hollensbe et al., 2014). Especially in times of complexity, uncertainty, and rapid change, it provides orientation and steadiness (Collins and Porras, 1994; Hollensbe et al., 2014).

Inspiration

Organizational purpose is a unifying force (Barnard, 1938; Malnight et al., 2019) that enables the interests of the organization and its employees to be harmonized because they are aligned with a higher cause (Abela, 2001; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1994; Collins and Porras, 1994). It 'allows individuals to align themselves with something bigger' (Freeman and Ginena, 2015, p.11). This 'inspires them to go the extra mile' (Birkinshaw et al., 2014, p. 49). Accordingly, organizational purpose possesses an inherent inspirational and motivational quality (Henderson, 2021; van Tuin et al., 2020) and produces a sense of being part of something bigger (Collins and Porras, 1994;

Ellsworth, 2002; Pradhan et al., 2017). Following an organizational purpose means 'creating an organization with which members can identify, in which they share a sense of pride, and to which they are willing to commit' (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1994, p. 81).

Based on the four dimensions and focusing on individuals' perceptions, we define perceived organizational purpose as the individual perception of an authentic organizational-level aspiration to contribute positively to society that guides all organizational decisions and provides inspiration in daily operations.

DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF A PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE SCALE

The next major aim of our study was to develop and validate the Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale that appropriately reflects the four-dimensional definition of perceived organizational purpose. To do this, we followed the broadly established and recommended process of scale development (e.g., Worthington and Whittaker, 2006). First, we used the definition based on our systematic literature review as a conceptual base for the development of the initial item pool. Second, we conducted an empirical study to test the factor structure and to choose the best-fitting items. Third, we conducted another empirical study to validate the scale. In the final step, we translated the German scale into English and validated the scale on an additional sample from the US. Table I shows an overview of the scale development process.

Following the four-dimensional definition, we formulated a provisional item pool of 70 items. We focused the items on the individual perceptions of employees even though the items can be adjusted to other stakeholders for future research (see the discussion of future research avenues below). We focused on employees because the potential positive effects of perceived organizational purpose should be higher for internal stakeholders than for external stakeholders. As Davis (2020) pointed out, '[p]erhaps more than any other constituency, workers experience the reputational consequences of being associated with a firm that fulfills its purpose – or fails to' (p. 13). Moreover, focusing on employee perception allows us to more clearly understand the relationship of perceived organizational purpose and employees' meaningful work and wellbeing, which is the focus of our study. The importance of employee perceptions of organizational purpose is accentuated by the fact that most empirical research has focused on it (Allan et al., 2018; Gartenberg et al., 2019; van Tuin et al., 2020).

In the item formulation, we strived for a balance between openness and explicitness to address the breadth and subjectivity of the theoretical conceptualization. The initial items were counterchecked by six organizational purpose experts with regard to content validity, clarity, and redundancy, resulting in 35 provisional items. Finally, we reassessed the validity of the items using a confirmatory Q-sorting method. After a thematic introduction to the four definitional properties of perceived organizational purpose, we presented the items to 72 MBA students. The students were asked to match the items to the definitions. We then excluded all items with an allocation rate <80 per cent, resulting in 33 items (see Table I).

Study 1: Item Selection and Factor Structure

Participants and procedure. In the next step, we tested the provisional item pool in an online survey to identify the items that best represent the four-dimensional structure of perceived organizational purpose. To recruit the participants, we cooperated with the independent Swiss market research institute intervista (intervista.ch), which invited a highly representative sample of German-speaking Swiss employees to participate in our study in exchange for bonus points redeemable for vouchers. Intervista offers a highly representative online access panel of over 100,000 active participants recruited actively via email and phone (see intervista's Panelbook for a detailed description of the panel) (Intervista, 2019). Overall, our sample consisted of 379 Swiss employees between 18 and 77 years old ($M = 44.65$; $SD = 12.58$). Approximately half of the sample was female (44.9 per cent), and 42% had a college education or higher. In the online survey, participants evaluated the perceived organizational purpose of their current employer by rating the 33 items in randomized order on a six-point Likert scale ranging from '1' (strongly disagree) to '6' (strongly agree). At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were informed that we were interested in their personal opinion and that there were no objective right or wrong answers. Moreover, we asked them to trust their gut feeling when they were unsure about an answer to further motivate the voicing of personal and subjective opinions. The study was conducted in German.

Analyses and results. To find the best-fitting items, we performed a principal factor analysis (maximum likelihood) rotated to a promax solution with four fixed factors. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin criterion (KMO) value was 0.95, indicating that the data were suitable for principal factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). We gradually excluded items with communalities lower than 0.50, misplaced factor loadings, and cross-loadings higher than 0.20 (Costello and Osborne, 2005). The screening process based on the exclusion criteria resulted in the elimination of 21 items, leaving the instrument with 12 items ($\alpha = 0.95$). All items showed factor loadings greater than 0.60, communalities greater than 0.58 and no cross-loadings above 0.35. In sum, the first study confirmed the hypothesized four-dimensional structure derived from the literature review.

Study 2: Scale Validation

Participants and procedure. The second study aimed to cross-validate the four-factorial structure of the Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale (12 items; $\alpha = 0.96$) and to subsequently examine its convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity (Cohen and Swerdlik, 2018). For the test of the scale's convergent and discriminant validity, we considered the relationship with perceived CSR (Glavas and Kelley, 2014; Lin et al., 2011), which is sometimes referred to as CSR image (Currás-Pérez et al., 2009) or CSR associations (Brown and Dacin, 1997). Perceived CSR represents a popular framework in management and marketing research that reflects if 'the organization is being perceived to be fair and caring for the well-being of others' (Glavas and Kelley, 2014, p. 167). On the one hand, we expect perceived organizational purpose to be conceptually related to perceived CSR because both constructs refer to a perceptual measure of an organization's aim and effort to contribute to the wellbeing of society. On the other hand, we emphasize that perceived CSR and

perceived organizational purpose are distinct constructs. Whereas perceived CSR results mainly from specific strategies such as 'community involvement, sponsorship of cultural activities, or corporate philanthropy,' which can be completely unrelated to the core activity of the organization (Brown and Dacin, 1997, p. 70), perceived organizational purpose is inherent to organizational core activities and focuses on major organizational aims and goals. In our study, we measured perceived CSR with a validated scale by Lin et al. (2011) (adopted from Currás-Pérez et al., 2009; $\alpha = 0.87$, six items, e.g., 'My organization fulfills its social responsibilities').

Additionally, for the test of predictive validity, we expected a negative association of perceived organizational purpose with turnover intention (Baillod, 1992; one item, e.g., 'How often do you think about leaving your job?') as well as a positive relationship with work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2016; $\alpha = 0.94$, nine items, e.g., 'My job inspires me') and affective organizational commitment (Felfe et al., 2014; $\alpha = 0.84$, five items, e.g., 'I am proud to belong to this organization'), as prior literature indicated (e.g., Ellsworth, 2002; Henderson and van den Steen, 2015; van Tuin et al., 2020). Responses were recorded on a six-point Likert scale ranging from '1' (strongly disagree) to '6' (strongly agree) and from '1' (never) to '6' (always) for turnover intention.

We collected new data with the help of the market research institute intervista. The sample consisted of 725 Swiss employees who were between 19 and 75 years old ($M = 42.18$; $SD = 12.35$) and worked in different industries (see Table AIII in the appendix). Approximately half of the sample consisted of female employees (46.2 per cent), and 41.1 per cent of the respondents had a college education or higher. Overall, this distribution of socioeconomic characteristics is similar to the distribution of the Swiss population, indicating a relatively representative sample. The study was conducted in German. The resulting mean values, standard deviations, and correlations are displayed in Table II.

Analyses and results. To validate the four-factorial structure, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis in R using the package lavaan (Rosseel, 2012). We used the maximum likelihood method as the estimation method and calculated standard errors based on a bootstrap method (Efron, 1987). To assess the model fit, we used the following five common fit indices: Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Sun, 2005).

We compared the fit of four different factor structures. Based on our theoretical definition, we first tested a model consisting of a higher-order factor (i.e., perceived organizational purpose) with four correlated subfactors (i.e., contribution, authenticity, guidance, and inspiration). Second, we defined a similar four-factor model but without the second-order factor. The third model was one factorial, where all 12 items were indicative of the perceived organizational purpose factor. In the last step, we tested a theoretically alternative two-factor model in which we combined the items of the initial dimensions of *inspiration* and *contribution* to a factor, which indicates that the organizational purpose provides an inspiring higher goal. For the second factor, we combined the items of the initial dimensions *authenticity* and *guidance* into a factor that represents the authentic embodiment of the organizational purpose. Overall, the first two models showed the best fit indices. We chose the second-order factor model as the

Table II. Study 2: Correlations, means (M), standard deviations (SD), Chi-Square difference test results, Cronbach's alpha values (bold numbers) of the main constructs

	M (SD)	$\Delta\chi^2$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perceived Org. Purpose	3.84 (1.06)	—	**0.96**						
2. Perceived CSR	4.38 (1.15)	802.68***	0.82***	**0.92**					
3. Work Engagement	4.28 (0.98)	261.66***	0.55***	0.50***	**0.94**				
4. Org. Commitment	4.20 (1.20)	534.86***	0.71***	0.65***	0.66***	**0.89**			
5. Turnover Intention	2.54 (1.52)	185.83***	−0.48***	−0.45***	−0.58***	−0.67***	—		
6. Age	48.25 (17.21)	—	0.07*	0.07	0.15***	0.18***	−0.23***	—	
7. Sex	1.51 (0.50)	—	0.07	0.04	0.04	0.01	0.00	−0.12***	—
8. Education	6.89 (1.83)	—	−0.06	−0.07	−0.09*	−0.11**	0.03	−0.15***	−0.10***

Notes: $N = 725$.
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

final model because it was theoretically reasonable and methodologically favourable (Gerbing and Anderson, 1984). The fit indices of the final model implied a good model fit (CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.02; see Figure 2). All items loaded significantly (p < 0.001) on the specified factor (see Figure 2). Moreover, the overall scale and its subdimensions showed good internal consistencies ($\alpha \geq 0.87$). The fit indices of the alternative models are presented in Table AII in the appendix.

Additionally, we tested the relationship with theoretically related constructs to analyse the scale's convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. The results show a good convergent validity because the theoretically related concepts of perceived organizational purpose and perceived CSR correlate significantly ($r = 0.82$; p < 0.001). Moreover, the data supports the scale's predictive validity with significant relationships of perceived organizational purpose with affective organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.67$; $t(724) = 24.59$; p < 0.001), work engagement ($\beta = 0.55$; $t(724) = 17.84$; p < 0.001) and turnover intention ($\beta = -0.48$; $t(724) = -14.50$; p < 0.001). To test the discriminant validity of perceived organizational purpose and the other measures, we applied a chi-square difference test (Segars, 1997; Zaiţ and Bertea, 2011). Using
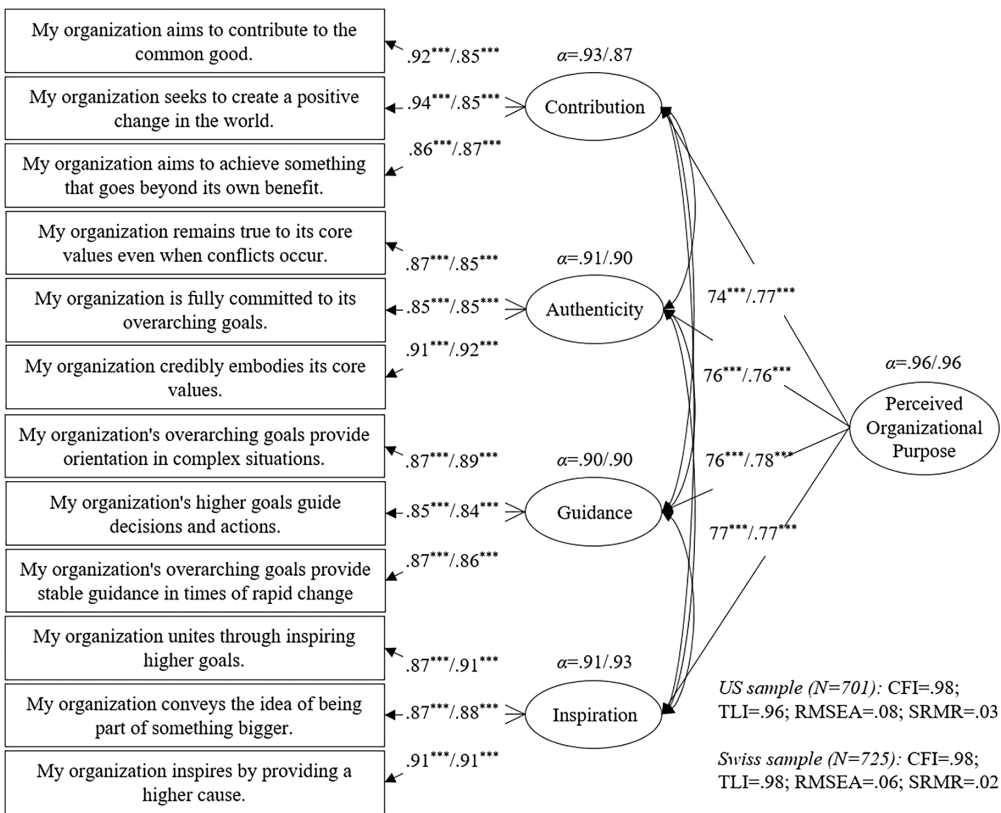

Figure 2. Visualization of the four-factor structure of perceived organizational purpose. Manifest variables (items) are shown in squares, latent variables in circles. The standardized factor loadings of the English/German scales are presented on the arrows and the internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) of the corresponding factors are shown above the circles in the same order

CFA, we analysed the chi-squares for a first set of models where perceived organizational purpose and each of the other constructs were not correlated and a second set of models where the two constructs were correlated. The chi-square difference test was significant for all tested constructs, indicating good discriminant validity of the Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale from the other constructs (see the results of all chi-square difference tests in Table II).

Study 3: Perceived Organizational Purpose and Employee Wellbeing

Participants and procedure. The purpose of our third study was to test our hypotheses regarding the association of perceived organizational purpose with meaningful work, work-life conflict and wellbeing. Moreover, we aimed to validate the English translation of the Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale in the US. Specifically, we aimed to test the convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity of the English translation as for the German scale version tested in the second study. In addition to the constructs used in Study 2, we added social entrepreneurship as another conceptually similar yet distinct construct to further strengthen the conceptual differentiation of perceived organizational purpose from related constructs. Social entrepreneurship can be defined as an 'innovative approach for dealing with complex social needs' (Johnson, 2000, p. 1). On the one hand, both perceived organizational purpose and social entrepreneurship represent a visible aim to contribute positively to society (Johnson, 2000; Martin and Osberg, 2007; Mort et al., 2003). On the other hand, social entrepreneurship is about creating value in an entrepreneurial or innovative way, whereas (perceived) organizational purpose is not bound to an innovative business strategy. As Mort et al. (2003) note, 'social entrepreneurs display innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking propensity in their key decision making' (p. 82), which is not necessarily relevant for perceived organizational purpose. Finally, because we used a six-point scale in the prior studies, we used a seven-point scale in the third study to control for any measurement errors due to a missing middle point (Weijters et al., 2010).

We recruited US employees using the online recruiting platform Prolific (prolic.co; see also Peer et al., 2017 for evaluation of the platform). The final sample consisted of 701 US employees who were between 18 and 67 years old ($M = 38.76$; $SD = 10.24$). Approximately half of the sample was female (45.4 per cent), and 58.4 per cent had a college degree or higher. The participants worked in different industries (see Table AIII in the appendix), and 59.3 per cent of the participants had a leadership role in their current job. After indicating their demographic data (age, gender, education, employment details), participants rated the perceived organizational purpose of their current employing organization by applying the scale developed and validated in our first study (12 items; e.g., 'My organization aims to contribute to the common good'; $\alpha = 0.94$; see Figure 2 for an overview of all items). To translate the items of the Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale appropriately, we used a parallel translation method and counterchecked our translation with four academic purpose experts and a professional US English copy-editor (see Table I). As in our prior studies, we informed the participants that we were interested in their personal opinions and that

there were no objectively right or wrong answers to motivate the voicing of personal and subjective opinions about their organization's purpose.

Next, participants completed the Work as Meaning Inventory (WAMI, Steger et al., 2012; ten items, e.g., 'I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning'; α = 0.95), the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience, which captures the affective component of subjective wellbeing (SPANE, Diener et al., 2010; six positive items, e.g., happy; α = 0.91; six negative items, e.g., sad; α = 0.85), the Satisfaction with Life Scale, which captures the cognitive component of subjective wellbeing (Diener et al., 1985; five items, e.g., 'In most ways my life is close to my ideal'; α = 0.93), a job satisfaction scale (Cammann et al., 1983; three items, e.g., 'All in all I am satisfied with my job'; α = 0.82), and a work-life conflict scale (Netemeyer et al., 1996; five items, e.g., 'The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life'; α = 0.93).

Subsequently, for the validation of the scale, participants completed a turnover intention scale (Mobley et al., 1978; three items; e.g., 'I think a lot about leaving the organization'; α = 0.93), a work engagement scale (Schaufeli et al., 2016; α = 0.93, nine items, e.g., 'My job inspires me'), and a perceived CSR scale (Lin et al., 2011 adopted from Currás-Pérez et al., 2009; α = 0.91, six items, e.g., 'My organization fulfills its social responsibilities') as in Study 2. We added the Social Entrepreneurship Scale (Helm and Andersson, 2010; ten items, e.g., 'My organization placed a strong emphasis on the development of new products or services'; α = 0.77).

Participants completed these scales using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from '1' (never) to '7' (very often) for the SPANE and from '1' (strongly disagree) to '7' (strongly agree) for the other scales. We presented the scales to the participants in randomized order. The study was conducted in English. The resulting mean values, standard deviations, and correlations are displayed in Table III.

Analyses and Results

Scale validation. To validate the four-factorial structure for the English scale, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis in R using the package lavaan (Rosseel, 2012), specifying the same factor structure and applying the same process and fit indices as in Study 2. The final model supported the hypothesized hierarchical structure with the four second-order factors (i.e., contribution, authenticity, guidance, and inspiration). The fit indices implied a good model fit (CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.08; SRMR = 0.03). All items loaded significantly ($p < 0.001$) on the specified factor (see Figure 2). Moreover, the overall scale and its subdimensions showed good internal consistencies ($α \geq 0.90$). As in Study 2, the four-factorial structure showed a superior fit compared to alternative model structures (see Table AII in the appendix).

Additionally, we tested the relationship with theoretically related constructs. Consistent with the theoretical expectations regarding the convergent validity, perceived organizational purpose was positively related to perceived CSR ($r = 0.77$; $p < 0.001$) and social entrepreneurship ($r = 0.33$; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, perceived organizational purpose was positively associated with work engagement ($β = 0.61$; $t(700) = 20.39$; $p < 0.001$) and negatively associated with turnover intention ($β = -0.52$; $t(700) = -15.94$; $p < 0.001$), which further supports the scale's predictive

Table III. Study 3: Correlations, means (M), standard deviations (SD), Chi-Square difference test results and Cronbach's alpha values (bold numbers) of the main constructs

	M (SD)	Δχ²	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Perceived Org. Purpose	5.37 (1.19)	—	**0.96**											
2. Perceived CSR	5.42 (1.13)	664.26***	0.77***	**0.91**										
3. Social Entrepren.	4.35 (0.98)	129.50***	0.33***	0.33***	**0.77**									
4. Work Engagement	4.79 (1.30)	373.38***	0.61***	0.54***	0.27***	**0.93**								
5. Turnover Intention	2.97 (1.87)	222.63***	-0.52***	-0.47***	-0.11***	-0.55***	**0.93**							
6. Meaningful Work	5.10 (1.35)	461.81***	0.69***	0.58***	0.24***	0.80***	-0.49***	**0.95**						
7. Work-Life Conflict	3.42 (1.63)	—	-0.24***	-0.22***	0.05**	-0.13***	0.36***	-0.14***	**0.94**					
8. Job Satisfaction	4.49 (0.61)	—	0.50***	0.45***	0.19***	0.55***	-0.41***	0.49***	-0.15***	**0.93**				
9. Affective Wellbeing	2.26 (2.03)	—	0.41***	0.41***	0.15***	0.57***	-0.40***	0.50***	-0.28***	0.37***	**0.79**			
10. Cognitive Wellbeing	4.69 (1.40)	—	0.43***	0.36***	0.19***	0.53***	-0.40***	0.49***	-0.20***	0.47***	0.67***	**0.92**		
11. Age	38.76 (10.24)	—	-0.08*	-0.06	-0.02	0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.05	-0.01	0.07	-0.02	—	
12. Sex	1.55 (0.51)	—	-0.07*	-0.12**	-0.15***	-0.15***	0.03	-0.09*	-0.02	-0.10**	-0.23***	-0.15***	-0.08*	—
13. Education	5.13 (1.24)	—	0.17***	0.14**	0.16***	0.17***	-0.05	0.21***	0.07	0.10**	0.12**	0.20***	0.00	-0.12**

Notes. $N = 701$.
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

validity. To test the discriminant validity of perceived organizational purpose and the other measures, we applied a chi-square difference test as in Study 2. The test was significant for all tested constructs, indicating good discriminant validity of the Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale (see the results of all chi-square difference tests in Table III).

Perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work. To test our first hypothesis that posited that perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work are positively related yet distinct constructs, first, we conducted a bivariate regression analysis where we defined perceived organizational purpose as the independent variable and meaningful work as the dependent variable. As hypothesized, the results indicated a positive association between perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work (β = 0.79; $p < 0.001$; ΔR^2 = 0.48; ΔF = 642.69; $p < 0.001$).

Second, to test whether meaningful work and perceived organizational purpose represent distinct constructs, we performed a principal factor analysis (maximum likelihood) rotated to a promax solution with two fixed factors. The KMO criterion was 0.96, indicating that the data set was suitable for principal factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). As expected, the items of meaningful work and perceived organizational purpose loaded on different factors with high factor loadings (≥ 0.62) and low cross-loadings (≤ 0.35). Additionally, we used a chi-square difference test to further understand the discriminant validity of perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work (Segars, 1997; Zaiţ and Bertea, 2011). The test was significant ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 461.81; Δdf = 1; $p < 0.001$). Thus, overall, our data support our first hypothesis that perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work represent positively related yet distinct constructs.

The relationship of perceived organizational purpose with subjective Wellbeing and job satisfaction. In the next step, we analysed the direct (*H2*) and indirect relationships (*H3*) of perceived organizational purpose with subjective wellbeing and job satisfaction using structural equation modelling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation (ML) in R applying the package lavaan (Rosseel, 2012). First, to test the second hypothesis, we analysed a model with the direct paths of perceived organizational purpose to subjective wellbeing (consisting of the subfactors cognitive and affective wellbeing) and job satisfaction. The measurement model showed an acceptable fit to the data (see Model 1 in Table IV). Moreover, we found positive and significant regression paths of perceived organizational purpose to subjective wellbeing (β = 0.54; z = 9.85; $p < 0.001$) and job satisfaction (β = 0.68; z = 13.76; $p < 0.001$). Thus, our data corroborated our second hypothesis that perceived organizational purpose is positively associated with subjective wellbeing (*H2a*) and job satisfaction (*H2b*).

Second, we tested our third hypothesis that the direct relationship of perceived organizational purpose and subjective wellbeing as well as job satisfaction is sequentially mediated by meaningful work and work-life conflict. For that purpose, we added the two latent constructs of meaningful work (i.e., first mediator) and work-life conflict (i.e., second mediator) as sequential mediators to our initial model. For this sequential mediation analysis, we tested two potential models: a model of full mediation (see

Table IV. Study 3: Fit indices of the measurement models

	Model 1 Direct paths only	Model 2 Full mediation (Full WAMI)	Model 3 Partial mediation (Full WAMI)	Model 4 Full mediation (Meaning making)	Model 5 Partial mediation (Meaning making)
CFI	0.91	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.92
TLI	0.90	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.92
RMSEA	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.07
SRMR	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.05

Model 2 in Table IV) where the direct paths from perceived organizational purpose on subjective wellbeing as well as job satisfaction were set to zero and a model of partial mediation (see Model 3 in Table IV) where the direct path was not constrained. Both measurement models showed an acceptable model fit. A chi-square difference test demonstrated that the inclusion of the direct path significantly improved the fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 10.22$, $p < 0.01$). Consequently, we chose the partial sequential mediation model as our final model. To test the hypothesized sequential mediation effect, we used the adjusted bootstrap percentile (BCa) method with 1500 bootstrap samples. All direct and indirect paths of this model are presented in Table V (see Model 3). Neither the sequential indirect path to subjective wellbeing nor the sequential indirect path to job satisfaction were significant. Thus, our third hypothesis that the relationship between perceived organizational purpose and subjective wellbeing as well as job satisfaction was sequentially mediated by meaningful work and work-life conflict was not supported.

Since prior work suggests that the three dimensions of meaningful work might be differently related to work-life conflict and wellbeing (Steger et al., 2012), we additionally considered the subdimensions of meaningful work separately. As outlined in the theory section, Steger et al. (2012) differentiate between three subdimensions of meaningful work, which are also reflected in the WAMI scale utilized in our study. Initial results by Steger et al. (2012) suggest that the subdimension of *meaning making through work* might have the strongest association with work-life conflict because it was shown to affect intrinsic work motivation and anxiety more strongly than the other dimensions. Accordingly, we tested our model of sequential mediation with the WAMI's three-item subscale for the subdimension of meaning making through work as the first mediator instead of the full WAMI (three items; e.g., 'I view my work as contributing to my personal growth'; $\alpha = 0.89$). Again, we tested a full mediation model (Model 4 in Table IV) and a partial mediation model (Model 5 in Table IV). Both measurement models showed acceptable model fit. However, a chi-square difference test demonstrated that the inclusion of the direct paths significantly improved fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 53.16$, $p < 0.001$). Consequently, we chose the partial mediation model as our final model. Again, we applied the adjusted bootstrap percentile (BCa) method with 1500 bootstrap samples to test the hypothesized sequential mediation effect. As presented in

Table V. Study 3: Direct and indirect paths of Model 3 and Model 5. Estimated effects are presented with 95% confidence intervals

Direct paths	Model 3 Partial mediation (full WAMI)	Model 5 Partial mediation (Meaning making)
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ meaningful work	0.706 [614; 0.777]	0.794 [734; 0.856]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ work-life conflict	−0.552 [−0.784; −0.263]	−0.599 [−0.801; −0.405]
Meaningful work ➜ work-life conflict	0.138 [−0.055; 0.309]	0.170 [0.031; 308]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ subjective wellbeing (direct)	−0.221 [−0.381; −0.060]	0.099 [−0.077; 0.266]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ subjective wellbeing (total)	0.341 [0.210; 0.484]	0.610 [0.481; 740]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ job satisfaction (direct)	0.116 [−0.074; 0.330]	0.511 [0.328; 0.707]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ job satisfaction (total)	0.667 [0.516; 0.820]	0.957 [0.819; 1.105]
Meaningful work ➜ subjective wellbeing	0.692 [0.582; 0.804]	0.591 [0.439; 0.666]
Work–family conflict ➜ subjective wellbeing	−0.163 [−0.224; −0.103]	−0.164 [−0.226; −0.104]
Meaningful work ➜ job satisfaction	0.685 [0.559; 787]	0.478 [0.456; 0.596]
Work–family conflict ➜ job satisfaction	−0.150 [−0.216; −0.094]	−0.144 [−0.203; −0.081]
Indirect paths		
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ meaningful work ➜ subjective wellbeing	0.488 [0.398; 0.573]	0.436 [0.340; 534]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ work-life conflict ➜ subjective wellbeing	0.090 [0.043; 0.156]	0.098 [0.056; 0.158]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ meaningful work ➜ work-life conflict ➜ subjective wellbeing	−0.016 [−0.041; 0.003]	−0.022 [−0.046; −0.005]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ meaningful work ➜ job satisfaction	0.483 [0.375; 0.583]	0.379 [0.281; 0.473]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ work-life conflict ➜ job satisfaction	0.083 [0.039; 0.148]	0.087 [0.046; 0.140]
Perceived org. Purpose ➜ meaningful work ➜ work-life conflict ➜ job satisfaction	−0.015 [−0.040; 0.003]	−0.019 [−0.042; −0.004]

Table V (see Model 5), both sequential indirect paths of perceived organizational purpose on subjective wellbeing and job satisfaction were significantly negative. This means that perceived organizational purpose has the risk of contributing to a stronger work-life conflict and lower levels of subjective wellbeing and job satisfaction because it is associated with higher levels of meaning making through work. Because meaning making through work is an essential subdimension of meaningful work, these results partially support our third hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The popularity of organizational purpose is rising in research and practice (e.g., Business Roundtable, 2019; Gartenberg et al., 2019; Mayer, 2021). However, this nascent research field suffers from definitional ambiguity, the lack of an empirical measurement tool, and outcome uncertainty. In our study, we suggest that focusing on perceived organizational purpose, a construct focused on subjective individual-level judgements, can help to overcome definitional unclarity, provide an optimal base for a quantitative measurement instrument, and thereby contribute to the rigorous testing of potential outcomes. Based on a systematic literature review, we defined perceived organizational purpose as a four-dimensional construct. Following this definition, we developed and validated the 12-item Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale. This new definition and measurement scale enabled us to theoretically conceptualize and empirically test the relationships of perceived organizational purpose with employees' meaningful work and wellbeing. Our studies with employees from Switzerland and the US support the hypotheses based on prior conceptual work (e.g., Ellsworth, 2002; Hollensbe et al., 2014; Kempster et al., 2011; Rosso et al., 2010) that perceived organizational purpose is positively related to meaningful work as well as subjective wellbeing and job satisfaction. In addition to these positive associations, we conceptualized and empirically tested the potential risk of a highly perceived organizational purpose to generate work-life conflict and thereby potentially reduce subjective wellbeing and job satisfaction. Our results offer important implications for management theory and practice.

Theoretical Contributions

Overall, our study contributes to organizational and managerial research concerned with organizational purpose in general and perceived organizational purpose more specifically (e.g., Gartenberg et al., 2019; Henderson and van den Steen, 2015; Mayer, 2021). First, we introduce and define the multidimensional construct of perceived organizational purpose, an individual-level construct of organizational purpose that focuses on individual and subjective experiences. Our conceptualization is based on a systematic literature review and resulted in the four major dimensions of authenticity, guidance, contribution, and inspiration. Prior research found no agreement or consistency about the definition of organizational purpose, which hampered further theoretical development and empirical testing (Gartenberg et al., 2019; Henderson, 2021; van Tuin et al., 2020). Our conceptualization of perceived organizational purpose can help to overcome prior definitional challenges and thereby enable more rigorous theoretical and empirical work in the future (Post et al., 2020; Suddaby, 2010). Moreover, taking the subjective perception of individuals into account allows us to better understand its relationship with important individual-level outcomes, such as employees' job satisfaction or consumers' willingness to buy.

Second, we developed and validated the new Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale based on our four-dimensional definition of perceived organizational purpose. To date, empirical studies on organizational purpose have been scarce due to the lack of conceptual clarity and an appropriate measurement instrument. The few existing studies in the field that have tried to overcome the definitional issue have applied measures of related yet theoretically different concepts, such as the meaningfulness of work (Gartenberg et al., 2019). We developed a scale based on our four-dimensional definition and validated

it in three independent empirical studies in German (Switzerland) and in English (US). The scale repeatedly showed very good reliability and validity. Moreover, we showed that the Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale is correlated with yet distinct from adjacent measures of perceived CSR and social entrepreneurship. With this new validated measure, we aim to enable and motivate future research to further test the potential individual-level antecedents and outcomes of perceived organizational purpose and thereby contribute to rigorous theory development.

Third, we conceptualized and empirically tested the relationship between perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work. Although prior research has mentioned conceptual proximity (Dik et al., 2013, 2015; Rosso et al., 2010) or even used these two concepts interchangeably (Gartenberg et al., 2019; Kempster et al., 2011), the specific relationship remains unclear. Based on a literature review of both research streams, we find that perceived organizational purpose focuses on the subjective perception of the organizational-level purpose independent of the personal position within the organization (i.e., 'Does the organization have a higher purpose?'), whereas meaningful work refers to the subjective evaluation of whether the personal work situation contributes to individual meaning and purpose in life (i.e., 'Is the work I do meaningful to me?'). Additionally, our empirical data support the notion that perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work are positively related yet conceptually distinct concepts. This established relationship between perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work contributes to the relatively new literature on organizational purpose in general and perceived organizational purpose more specifically because it facilitates learning from the more established field of meaningful work. As we have shown in our study, the field of meaningful work can provide interesting new perspectives relative to the potential outcomes of perceived organizational purpose.

Fourth, we critically reflected on and empirically tested the hypothesized positive association of perceived organizational purpose with job satisfaction and subjective wellbeing suggested by prior research (Ellsworth, 2002; Henderson and van den Steen, 2015; Hollensbe et al., 2014; Kempster et al., 2011). Consistent with this previous conceptual work, our paper provides empirical evidence that perceived organizational purpose is positively associated with employees' job-related and general wellbeing. Building on research in the field of meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2019a), we further theorize that perceived organizational purpose might have ambivalent associations with employees' job-related and general wellbeing. We find that there are indirect negative associations of perceived organizational purpose with subjective wellbeing and job satisfaction when meaning making through work and the resulting work-life conflict are taken into account. Accordingly, individuals who perceive the organizational purpose to be high tend to see their work as the major source of meaningfulness in their life, which leads to higher levels of conflict between work and private life and thereby reduces general and work-related wellbeing. However, this negative association was only significant when looking at the meaningful work subdimension of *meaning making through work*; the results were insignificant for the full measure of meaningful work. Consequently, we see perceived organizational purpose overall mainly as a positive force, but potential risks to employees' job-related and overall wellbeing must be taken seriously as well.

Implications for Practice

The lack of a clear construct definition, measurement tools, and empirical testing of optimistic prospects in prior research on organizational purpose, as outlined throughout our study, is also a major challenge for practitioners. Without a clear understanding of what the concept of organizational purpose means, it is difficult to develop it successfully for an organization. Although there are organizations that seem to master their purpose very well (Mayer, 2021), there are also many organizations that seem less successful in that matter (Birkinshaw et al., 2014). Our conceptualization of perceived organizational purpose with four dimensions and the focus on individual subjective perception could help organizations better understand, develop, and manage their own organizational purpose.

Building on prior research (Barnard, 1938; Birkinshaw et al., 2014; Hurth, 2017; van Tuin et al., 2020), we introduce the concept of perceived organizational purpose and suggest that the subjective perception of individuals is essential for the success and sustainability of organizational purpose. We define four dimensions of perceived organizational purpose that imply that it should go beyond the sole higher goal formulation (i.e., contribution) and should also be authentic and provide guidance and inspiration to its stakeholders. Accordingly, to implement a highly perceived organizational purpose, practitioners should not only ask themselves how their organization can contribute positively to society but also whether this potential contribution can be authentically incorporated into daily organizational actions and whether it would provide good inspiration and practical guidance to its stakeholders. Additionally, our newly developed and rigorously validated Perceived Organizational Purpose Scale can help organizations assess and report the status quo of perceived organizational purpose and quantitatively track the changes over time.

Moreover, our study provides initial empirical support for the positive relationship of perceived organizational purpose, meaningful work, job satisfaction and wellbeing but also implies the potential risk of contributing to a stronger work-life conflict. With these results, we aim, first, to contribute to the rising awareness of practitioners about the importance and value of perceived organizational purpose. The significant association of perceived organizational purpose with several positive employee variables should provide great motivation for organizations to invest in purpose – especially in the current 'war for talent', where it is particularly difficult to attract and retain good employees for organizations (Kane et al., 2017). However, our study also shows that perceived organizational purpose bears the risk of harming employees' wellbeing because it motivates them to see work as such a strong source of meaning that they may neglect nonwork aspects of their lives. Organizations should therefore be aware of and actively manage the risk of work-life conflict. Organizations could do this by offering work-life initiatives, targeted training programs, supervisor support and systemic measures such as flexible working hours and work practices (Kossek et al., 2010). Davis (2020) proposes that 'if we want companies to pursue a higher purpose and to avoid paths that are profitable but morally questionable, let's give democratic control to those who do the real work' (p. 13). This could help managers understand what employees truly need to balance their personal needs.

Limitations and Future Research Avenues

Despite the value of our findings, our study is not without limitations, and more research is needed to further understand and advance the concept of organizational purpose in general and perceived organizational purpose more specifically. First, we focus on the individual perception of organizational purpose in our construct definition, scale development, and empirical testing. The concept of perceived organizational purpose emphasizes the subjective nature of organizational purpose, and it is the perceptual aspect that is most influential for psychological outcomes, such as wellbeing (e.g., Allan et al., 2018; Gartenberg et al., 2019; van Knippenberg, 2020; van Tuin et al., 2020). However, organizational-level conceptualizations and resulting measures of purpose are important as well and could be addressed by future research. The most obvious path to measure organizational-level purpose would be to capture the publicly stated organizational purpose. However, as our systematic literature review revealed that authenticity, guidance, and inspiration are also important parts of successful organizational purpose, we recommend combining the stated purpose with measurements of organizational actions, such as investments, business strategies or incentive structures.

Moreover, our empirical testing focuses on the perceptions of employees because they have the best organizational insights and are most directly affected by organizational purpose (e.g., Davis, 2020). Nevertheless, other stakeholder groups, such as consumers, local communities or governments, can be strongly affected by perceived organizational purpose as well and are important additional evaluators of it. External stakeholders should play a particularly important role in the evaluation of the contribution dimension of perceived organizational purpose because this dimension is about the contribution to the general society. To obtain a fuller picture of organizational purpose, practitioners and researchers could use the contribution subscale to survey external stakeholders. From a theoretical perspective, it would be very interesting to examine if, how, and why internal and external perspectives differ.

Our research establishes initial theory and provides empirical testing of the relationship between perceived organizational purpose, meaningful work, and their route to work-life conflict and wellbeing. However, future research is needed to further elaborate on the mechanism underlying these relationships. For example, it would be interesting to further examine which mechanisms strengthen or weaken the relationship of perceived organizational purpose and meaningful work. We find that meaning making through work has the potential to lead to employee work-life conflict and reduced wellbeing. Therefore, it is particularly important to understand which aspects of perceived organizational purpose affect this dimension. Based on prior literature, we propose that a major explanation to relate perceived organizational purpose with meaningful work might be the fit between individual values and goals and the organizational purpose (Michaelson et al., 2014). Moreover, findings from a meta-analysis on meaningful work provide initial indications that the relationship might be moderated by leadership style, team culture, co-worker relationships, person-organization value fit, or the cultural background of employees (Lysova et al., 2019). Another potential mediator of the relationship of purpose and meaningful work, particularly meaning making through work, could be work centrality. 'People who consider work as a central life interest

have a strong identification with work in the sense that they believe the work role to be an important and central part of their lives' (Hirschfeld and Feild, 2000, p. 790) and might therefore neglect their private life as a source of meaning. Overall, more research is needed to understand which personal characteristics or organizational factors are able to reduce the negative or bolster the positive association of perceived organizational purpose with wellbeing.

The cross-sectional empirical approach we used in the third study shows some limitations in addition to its strength of allowing us to generate a large and highly representative sample of participants. For example, systematic error variance in the form of common method bias may occur (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We took several steps to mitigate this limitation. As recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003), we included some reverse-coded items and presented the scales in randomized order. Additionally, we assured participants of anonymity and emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers to reduce the impact of social desirability. Moreover, we integrated our questions into a larger questionnaire to reduce the likelihood that respondents would be able to guess the objective of the study and to motivate their answers to be consistent (Mohr and Spekman, 1994). Another limitation of a cross-sectional design is missing proof of causality. Despite detailed theoretical considerations supporting our hypotheses, alternative directions between perceived organizational purpose, meaningful work, and employee wellbeing might be possible. For instance, employees who consider work activities to be especially meaningful could intentionally choose employers with a higher organizational purpose. Individuals who face higher levels of work-life conflict could rate their work as meaningful to reduce the negative effects of high workloads by emotionally upgrading their work activities or to reduce their cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). To further address the direction of causality, future research could apply qualitative or longitudinal study designs.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to investigate the potential outcomes of a missing fit between a publicly stated and actually perceived organizational purpose, which could also be referred to as the marketing-action gap. Given the current organizational purpose hype, a growing number of organizations seem to formulate ambitious purpose statements without changing the organizational strategy or investing in organizational incorporation. For example, data by Wry show that organizations that signed the Business Roundtable purpose statement contributed far less to society and far more to their shareholders during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to their competitors that did not publicly commit to a higher organizational purpose (Useem, 2020). In fact, the signers of the statement had approximately 20 per cent more layoffs during the crisis, donated less to society, and offered less aid, such as customer discounts (Useem, 2020). Additionally, Bebchuk and Tallarita's (2020) study suggests that the purpose 'statement is largely a rhetorical public relations move rather than the harbinger of meaningful change' (p. 98). Accordingly, it would be interesting to examine if and how the stated versus the perceived organizational purpose and their fit affect organizational outcomes, such as performance, financial profit, or employee motivation and wellbeing.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

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