Family Recognition as a Source of Meaningful Work

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In recent years, there has been a growing body of research on meaningful work, which refers to the experience of work being significant and having a more positive meaning, and its potential sources (Bailey et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2019; Rosso et al., 2010). However, most studies focus on its sources in the *work* context, with little attention to the sources in the *non-work* context, such as family (for review, see Bailey et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2019). This is problematic given that the value of work is often embedded in various social contexts including relationships outside of work, and family often constitutes a crucial part of such non-work social networks (Lysova et al., 2015).

To better understand the relevance of family to meaningful work, we introduce a new antecedent of meaningful work – *family recognition* – the extent to which family members recognise and appreciate one's work. Here, we draw on the interpersonal sensemaking theory, which suggests that people draw information about the worth of their work through the social cues they receive (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). While the theory has usually been applied to the sources of meaningful work in the *work* context, we argue that it is also of relevance to those in the *non-work* domain. The work-family interface literature also offers important insights into this, showing how one's work and family can enrich and enhance each other (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014).

We further argue that this relationship between family recognition and meaningful work is mediated by self-esteem and family motivation (Figure 1). Regarding self-esteem, when family appraises one's work highly, such work-related appraisal from significant others may translate into their own beliefs in self-worth or self-esteem (i.e., transference effect; Murray et al., 2000; Shah, 2003), which is an important mechanism leading to the experience of meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010). Regarding family motivation, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) provides a useful framework, suggesting that people might try to reciprocate the

recognition they receive from their family by increasing their family motivation, defined as "the desire to expend effort to benefit one's family" (Menges et al., 2017, p. 697). High family motivation will then lead them to perceive their work as a self-transcendence task (that goes beyond the *ego* and benefits others, such as *family members*), thereby promoting the experience of meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010).

To empirically test the mediated relationship outlined above, we first developed a new scale for family recognition. By referring to conceptually relevant concepts such as 'employee recognition' or 'social prestige of work' (Adler & Kraus, 1985; Montani et al., 2020), five items were selected (e.g., 'my family appreciates and respects my work') and validated through 200 Prolific participants. Next, we designed a three-wave longitudinal study for hypothesis testing. Based on the data collected so far (N = 713), Bayesian structural equation modelling showed that the relationship between family recognition and meaningful work was significant and positive (coefficient = 0.571, 90% CI = 0.501, 0.653), and this relationship was mediated by self-esteem as hypothesised (indirect effect = 0.056, 90% CI = 0.027, 0.089). However, the mediation effect of family motivation was not found (indirect effect = 0.002, 90% CI = -0.011, 0.016) as the relationship between family motivation and meaningful work was not significant. As a supplementary analysis, we also examined the moderating effect of intrinsic motivation on the (insignificant) indirect effect of family recognition through family motivation. The results showed a significant interaction effect (coefficient = -0.053, 90% CI = -0.093, -0.016): when intrinsic motivation was high, the indirect effect was insignificant, while when intrinsic motivation was low, the indirect effect was significantly positive. This indicates that family recognition and the resulting family motivation can function as complementary to low intrinsic motivation.

This study contributes to the meaningful work literature in several ways. First, our

findings demonstrate that family recognition, through enhanced self-esteem, serves as an important relational source of meaningful work (e.g., Lysova et al., 2022; Robertson et al., 2020), responding to the calls for research on its non-work antecedents (Rosso et al., 2010). Second, our study extends limited research that bridges the two separate streams of literature (meaningful work and the work-family interface) (e.g., Lysova, 2019; Oelberger, 2019), showing that one way our family enriches our work is through the increased perception of meaningful work.

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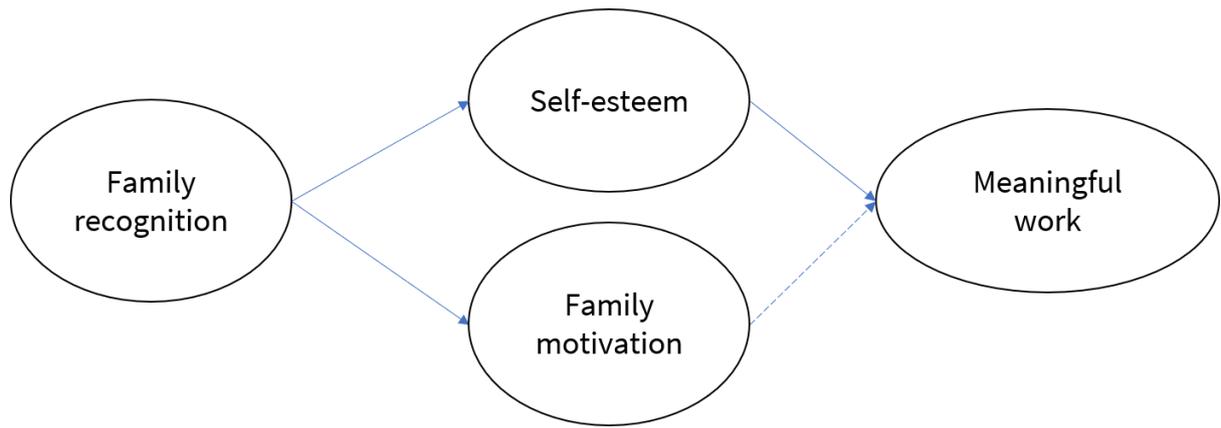
Figure 1. Research model