Making Work Meaningful:
Theory, Research and Application in Positive Psychology and Organizational Behavior

Thematik: Work is a part of most human beings' lives. In Western and Eastern cultures, work is arguably necessary for survival. But can work function as more than merely a means to survive? Can work be meaningful? If so, what factors contribute to making work meaningful and satisfying versus meaningless and dissatisfying? How can individuals identify and pursue meaningful work? What are the costs and benefits to individuals, teams and organizations when motivation, engagement and alignment are low as compared to high? Can work be more than just a job or career—can work be a calling? Is the inquiry into and pursuit of one's work-related meaning and purpose a moral endeavor?

This applied course will explore the construct of 'meaningful work' from theoretical, philosophical and empirical perspectives. Students will be introduced to a basic understanding of Psychology, and more in-depth foundations and concepts within Positive Psychology, especially those that impact meaning and purpose, engagement, accomplishment and life satisfaction. The course will investigate the findings and implications of 'meaningful work' for individuals and organizations. The course will present opportunities for students to engage in evidence-based exercises that support the discovery of their signature strengths, motivations, hopes, task engagement and career alignment and calling. Case studies of high-achieving individuals, as well as organizations with employees who report high levels of employee satisfaction will be reviewed and analyzed. Information presented will come from research conducted in the fields of Positive Psychology, Social Psychology, Motivation Psychology and Organizational Behavior. Students will have opportunities to actively engage in discussions and scientific exercises intended to prompt critical thinking and a discovery into their idiosyncratic work "calling".

Lernziele und Kompetenzen: Upon course completion, students will be able to identify the major scientific findings related to subjective well-being and life satisfaction, especially regarding work and career. Students will possess knowledge about the factors and variables that contribute to high and low levels of subjective well-being, employee engagement, performance, and life and work satisfaction. Students will be equipped with a deeper understanding of the constructs of: meaning, purpose, engagement, meaningful work and life satisfaction. Students will have explored and become aware of their beliefs, values, needs, motivations, goals, and character strengths. They will have gained the practical experience of thinking critically about the self, culture, and the construct of Hope—and the dynamic and influential interplay these can yield in the creation or absence of meaningful work. They will have learned about the scientific method, as well as how to discuss and support their perspectives and anecdotal experiences, with others and in writing, using evidence from the research literature. Students will have gained the experience of applying evidence-based activities into their lives and tailoring them, to prompt critical thinking about their career choices and the pursuit of meaningful work—and perhaps, their work 'calling'.

Methode: The lecture will be held every other week for 4 class contact hours (meaning 4 times for 45 minutes). Each class period will allow time for lecture, in-class reading, short videos, discussion, and individual and group exercises.

Hinweise: Material will be provided by the professor. Excellent English required. Eighty percent attendance is mandatory. Credit will be earned through class participation and in-class exercises (25%) and one final exam (75%) comprised of open-ended/essay questions.

Disziplinäre Verortung und Literatur: This is a Social Science course (drawing from Psychology and sub-fields in Positive Psychology, Organizational Behavior, Motivation Psychology, and Social Psychology, as well as Philosophical perspectives).

Suggested literature comprises selected readings and journal articles (including but not limited to):

Amabile, T. M., Hill, K. G., Hennessey, B. A., & Tighe, E. M. (1994). The work preference inventory: Assessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66*(5), 950–967.

Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., Aaker, J. L., & Garbinsky E. N. (2013). Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 8*(6), 505-516.

Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2002). The pursuit of meaningfulness in life. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *The Handbook of Positive Psychology* (pp. 608–618). New York: Oxford University Press.

Berg, J. M., Grant, A. M., & Johnson, V. (2010a). When callings are calling: Crafting work and leisure in pursuit of unanswered occupational callings. *Organization Science, 21*, 973–994.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., & LeFevre, J. (1989). Optimal experience in work and leisure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56*(5), 815-822.

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92,* 1087-1101.

Harzer, C., & Ruch, W. (2012b). The application of signature character strengths and positive experiences at work. *Journal of Happiness Studies.*

Harzer, C., & Ruch, W. (2012a). When the job is a calling: The role of applying one's signature strengths at work. *Journal of Positive Psychology.*

Hone, L. C., Jarden, A., Duncan, S., & Schofield, G. M. (2015). Flourishing in New Zealand workers: Associations with lifestyle behaviors, physical health, psychosocial, and work-related indicators. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 57*(9), 973-983.

Hsee, C. K., & Hastie, R. (2006). Decision and experience: Why don't we choose what makes us happy? *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 10*, 1, 31-37.

Kahneman, D., Krueger, A. B., Schkade, D., & Stone, A. A. (2006). Would you be happier if you were richer? A focusing illusion. *Science, 312*(5782), 1908-1910.

Kiderra, I. (2008). Spreading the joy around: Researchers document the contagious power of happiness in social networks. *UCSD News Center.*

Locke, E. A. (2002). Setting goals for life and happiness. In *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Eds. Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S.). (pp. 299-312). New York: Oxford.

Maslow, A. (1954). A Theory of Human Motivation.
    Chapter 2 - A Theory of Human Motivation
    Chapter 11 - Self-Actualizing People: A Study of Psychological Health.
    From *The Unpublished Papers of Abraham Maslow.*

Peterson, C., Stephens, J. P., Park, N., Lee, F., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2010). Strengths of character and work. *Oxford handbook of positive psychology and work.* In Linley, P. A., Harrington, S., & Garcea, N. (Eds.). Oxford handbook of positive psychology and work (pp. 221-231). New York: Oxford University Press.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68-78.

Wrzesniewski, A., LoBuglio, N., Dutton, J. E., & Berg, J. M. (2013). Job crafting and cultivating positive meaning and identity in work. *Advances in positive organizational psychology, 1*(1), 281-302.

<u>Course Topics</u>

Week 1: *Introduction to Psychology, Social Psychology and Organizational Behavior*
and
Foundations of Positive Psychology: Definitions, Purpose, History and Measurement
Seligman's Theory of Well-being: 4 Pillars
Exploring Pillar #2: Meaning, Purpose and Engagement
Exploring Pillar #4: Meaningful Accomplishment

Week 2: *The Biological Basis of Happiness*
The Brain and the Body: Setpoints, Homeostasis, Physical Health and Happiness
Attention, Awareness, Consciousness and Free Will

Week 3: *The Individual as a Social and Emotional Being*
Cultural influences between populations, Money
Positive Emotions, Social Contagion and Elevation

Week 4: *Goals, Performance and Grit*
Roles of passion, learning, effort, perseverance, failure, success

Week 5: *Mindfulness and Intentions*

Week 6: *Beliefs, Values and Motivation*

Week 7: *Character Strengths and Virtues*: *task alignment, engagement and satisfaction at work and in life*

Week 8: *Curiosity, Inspiration, Creativity and Flow*

Week 9: *Orientations Towards Work: Can Your Work be a 'Calling'?*

Week 10: *Decision-making biases*
How Happiness and Satisfaction Change as People Grow

Week 11: *High Functioning Teams, Leaders and Organizations*

Week 12: *Stress, Burnout and Resilience*

Week 13: *Final Review of Course Material*
Preparation for Final Exam