

Meaning of Work and Well-Being at Work: A Bibliometric Analysis of Trends, Gaps and Future Directions

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Abstract. *As workplaces are facing more and more human challenges, the question of insuring employee well-being and creating working conditions that foster it is becoming crucial and has gained higher interest among researchers, as well as practitioners. The present study exposes a bibliometric analysis of the relevant scholarly literature review to examine the knowledge structure, key themes and emerging research trends about meaning of work, in relation to well-being at work, between 2013 and 2025, a period witnessing an expansion of the field of study. The research was conducted on the two well-known databases Scopus and Web of Science, leading to the analysis of a corpus of 956 peer-reviewed papers, using R Studio software and Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny packages. The analyses mainly concerned the scientific production evolution over time and space, the most relevant authors, the main themes and trends, and helped revealing the research gaps and future investigations. The results show a field in progressive emergence, a lack of an integrated framework, and the need of more contextualized approaches and deeper investigations of the links between the concepts studied.*

Keywords: meaning of work, well-being at work, bibliometric analysis, R software, trends, gaps.

Introduction

In an ever-changing work environment, instead of only concentrating on financial results, there is a growing emphasis on human, ethical, or even spiritual dimensions (Ohri & Dutta, 2025a). Particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic and the recurrent mental health issues that have resulted from it, creating a work climate that fosters employees' well-being has become a priority for organizations seeking a sustainable competitive advantage (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024).

In such a context, research on meaning and occupational well-being is growing significantly. For both concepts, the literature proposes a variety of models and frameworks. Creusier (2013) highlights the complexity of unifying knowledge of well-being, particularly because of semantic drift and divergent methodological approaches. Pignault & Houssemand (2021), for their part, bring to light the challenge of defining precisely the concept of meaning of work.

In addition, links between the two concepts are established by numerous authors. Despite this, shortcomings persist, especially the lack of a unified framework. Moreover, the multiplicity of measurement tools hinders research uniformity. To this is added the lack of an exhaustive synthesis of the literature about the articulation of both concepts; the existing review articles mainly concern related concepts, such as job satisfaction, employee engagement, or calling.

Given the importance of this field of study and the increased interest around it, and in light of the identified pitfalls, a key question emerges: What are the intellectual structures, evolutionary dynamics, gaps, and future research directions characterizing the research on the meaning of work and employee well-being?

In this regard, this bibliometric analysis represents a relevant methodological approach to mapping the conceptual organization of the field. Indeed, recognized for its ability to manage large data volumes and its potential for producing high impact publications, it has proven to be a rigorous quantitative method firmly established as a scientific specialty, and is becoming increasingly popular among researchers, for its scientific rigor and the reproducibility of its results (Donthu et al., 2021; Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015).

Thus, this work aims to conduct an integrated bibliometric review of the literature on meaning of work and employee well-being, in order to provide an overview of the scientific advances on the topic and to identify major trends, gaps, and relevant avenues for further research. To this end, the use of a data corpus grounded in a robust scientific framework proves to be a decisive step, hence the choice of Scopus and Web Of Science databases, considered as major references in the academic field (Aksnes & Sivertsen, 2019).

More precisely, in this study, we are seeking the following objectives:

- Analyze the evolution of publications by year and by country;
- Identify the most influent authors in the field of study;
- Determine the most relevant keywords and themes;
- Reveal literature gaps and possible research prospects.

Literature review

Ohri & Dutta (2025a) observed, in the literature, a shift from mechanist work models to more holistic approaches, extending to humanistic, ethical and spiritual dimensions. While the early studies focused on performance, satisfaction, and job design, contemporary research has paid greater attention to topics related to spirituality at work, work-life balance, and well-being at work.

Despite the growing enthusiasm for well-being at work, its definition remains ambiguous and elusive (Creusier, 2013). Indeed, well-being at work is a topic with ill-defined boundaries and with consensus emerging only regarding the duality of approaches that define it. In this vein, occupational well-being has been conceptualized by Boniwell & Chabanne (2017) as a combination of both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. The first, referring to subjective well-being at work, involves evaluating one's professional activity, including job satisfaction, as well as positive and negative affects (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011). The second, for its part, representing psychological well-being at work, is associated to realizing meaningful tasks that are consistent with one's values, in pursuit of optimal functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

It is in this second approach that the meaning of work occupies a central place, with the positive valence of a meaningful work reflecting a eudaimonic orientation (centered on growth and purpose) rather than a hedonic one (centered on pleasure) (Steger et al., 2012).

To define meaning of work, the literature identifies three approaches discussed by various authors, that Morin & Forest (2007) categorized into three principal definitions. The first explores the concept from the perspective of interpretation and signification that the individual gives to their work. The second links it to purpose, as well as the value and importance perceived by the individual in their work. The third refers it to the level of congruence “fit” between their behavior at work and their values.

Despite this diversity of approaches, all authors agree on the “multidimensional” nature of meaning of work. Arnoux-Nicolas et al. (2017) explain this variety by the non-universal nature of the construction of the meaning of work and its dependence on intercultural differences, thus reflecting values specific to the society to which the individual belongs.

Concerning the link between meaning and well-being, the study of Abord De Chatillon & Richard (2015) validates the SLAC model (meaning, link, activity, and comfort), considering it as a dynamic process in which the four dimensions create together the conditions of occupational well-being, both hedonic and eudaimonic. They call for future work to examine more closely how these dimensions interact to favor well-being at work and to develop a measurement tool assessing the dimensions mentioned.

In this light, Bhoir & Sinha (2024) point out, in the literature, that employees who perceive HRM practices favorably tend to report higher levels of well-being, with the meaningfulness of the task being explicitly identified as a dimension of well-being- oriented HRM practices.

The bibliometric study of Ohri & Dutta (2025b) on workplace spirituality and work–life integration confirms this link, highlighting meaning of work and well-being at work as crucial and strongly related thematic groups, placing them at the heart of the intellectual structure of the field. The concept of meaning of work emerged as a major theme of the literature, being the most frequently occurring author keyword: « The idea of meaningful work is main of these themes. It connects with ideas like well-being, burnout, job satisfaction, and work-life balance, and it is the basis for a more human-centred approach to work. Spirituality, engagement, and purpose keep coming up because more and more people want workplaces that match their values and make them feel good about themselves » (Ohri & Dutta, 2025b).

Previous studies, such as the systematic literature review and meta-analysis of Nielsen et al. (2017), classified resources aimed at improving employee well-being and performance into four categories, according to the IGLO model at the individual, group, leader, and organizational levels. At the individual level, psychological capital and job crafting have been studied most frequently. At the group level, social support among colleagues has been explored more often. At the leader level, a good leader-member exchange and transformational leadership have been studied most often. and at the organizational level, autonomy and HRM practices have received the most attention. The study empirically validates that all the resources mentioned are effective levers to improve both well-being and performance, mobilizing the JD-R model. Nevertheless, the authors note that organizational resources are the most studied among the four ones. They invite future studies to focus on how resources can have a simultaneous effect on both well-being and performance.

However, Loon et al. (2019) emphasize that employee well-being and organizational performance are not always symbiotic. Indeed, numerous HRM practices aiming at improving both outcomes conflict and contradict each other, also affecting the meaning of work, considered in the literature as an essential component of occupational well-being, and more specifically the eudaimonic one. They observe the adoption of a contingent approach in the literature, favoring one

of the outcomes over the other, and propose managing this paradox by adopting an integrated framework that allows their coexistence, through sensemaking.

In their systematic review on perceived organizational purpose (POP), Jasinenko & Steuber (2023) define it as the individual perception of the organization's authentic aspiration to contribute positively to society. They note the interchangeable use of this concept with that of meaning of work in some previous studies, or at least a conceptual similarity between the two in other papers. In their research, they demonstrate that these are two distinct concepts, though strongly connected. However, they point out that some research suggest that POP does not lead systematically to meaningful work. They also stress that the field of meaning of work is more firmly established, considering it to be adjacent to that of POP, which is still emerging and likely to develop more effectively by learning from the former.

In addition, the study empirically supports anterior conceptual works suggesting positive associations of POP and MOW, with well-being and job satisfaction. Nonetheless, it explored the hypothesis of a negative risk, drawing on existing literature on MOW, which indicates that perceiving too strong a purpose or a meaning can lead to higher levels of Work-Life Conflict (WLC), which in turn reduces overall well-being and job satisfaction. They invite future research to explore the mechanisms underlying these ambivalent relationships.

But despite deploying numerous qualitative and quantitative research on HRM practices and well-being at work, Bhoir & Sinha (2024) deplore an academic field that is insufficiently theorized and poorly understood.

Thus, the main literature reviews consulted agree that MOW is a fundamental predictor of well-being at work, mainly in its eudaimonic aspect. For the most part, they invite further research to explore the mechanisms underlying the relationships studied. And in spite of the scientific effervescence of this field of research, it remains fragmented and characterized by significant theoretical and methodological diversity. Furthermore, no bibliometric mapping has yet been carried out specifically on these two concepts to structure the body of work.

In this respect, our bibliometric analysis highlights the intellectual structure of the field, identifies the most influent authors and countries, and outlines the trends, gaps and research perspectives. We present the methodology used in the following section.

Methodology

As part of this research aimed at conducting a bibliometric analysis of the literature review, and in the interests of exhaustiveness and scientific relevance, the data were extracted from two recognized databases, Scopus and Web Of Science, on 18 October 2025.

To this end, our research strategy consisted of a combination of chosen keywords, related to meaning of work and well-being.

At first, an initial query was applied to both databases, including only a few synonyms related to the two concepts studied. After several rounds of reviewing the literature, and with the aim of ensuring more comprehensive coverage of our research topic, we were able to expand the synonyms and related concepts, by diagonally reading several articles. For that, Boolean operators and truncation we used, according to the norms associated with each database. This led us to the following query, before applying any filters, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. List of keywords included in the query

Database	Query
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY(("meaning* of work" OR "work meaning*" OR "meaningful work" OR "job meaning*" OR "sensemaking" OR "purpose of work" OR "work purpose" OR "calling of work" OR "calling at work" OR "work identity" OR "identity of work" OR "sense of work") AND ("well-being at work" OR "psychological well-being at work" OR "psychological wellbeing at work" OR "employee well-being" OR "employee wellbeing" OR "well-being" OR "wellbeing" OR "quality of work life" OR "job satisfaction" OR flourishing OR "occupational mental health" OR "mental health at work" OR "psychological health at work" OR "intrinsic motivation" OR "work stress" OR "work engagement"))
Web Of Science	TS= ("meaning* of work" OR "work meaning*" OR "meaningful work" OR "job meaning*" OR "sensemaking" OR "purpose of work" OR "work purpose" OR "calling of work" OR "calling at work" OR "work identity" OR "identity of work" OR "sense of work") AND TS= ("well-being at work" OR "psychological well-being at work" OR "psychological wellbeing at work" OR "employee well-being" OR "employee wellbeing" OR "well-being" OR "wellbeing" OR "quality of work life" OR "job satisfaction" OR flourishing OR "occupational mental health" OR "mental health at work" OR "psychological health at work" OR "intrinsic motivation" OR "work stress" OR "work engagement")

Source: Authors' own research contribution.

This query resulted in 1332 documents in Scopus and 1204 in Web Of Science, for a total of 2536 documents published between 1975 and 2025, representing the gross results before merging and removing duplicates.

In a second step, the inclusion criteria related to research areas, publication period, language, and document type were applied.

Thus, the selected research areas concerned:

On Scopus: « Subject area » covering Social Sciences – Business, Management and Accounting – Psychology – Economics, Econometrics and Finance.

On Web of Science: « Research area » covering Business Economics – Psychology – Social Sciences Other topics.

This inclusion from different fields makes sure that the topic is fully covered. Indeed, our field of research is at the heart of management sciences, but is also rooted in psychology and social sciences, as a review of literature reveals that these disciplines are also connected to the professional context.

For the publication period, we based our assessment on the analysis of results provided by the two databases in order to determine the relevance of the starting year to be used, in terms of number of publications and recency. We noticed an increase in publications towards 2013, with a maximum of 10 publications per year prior to that date and a minimum of 13 from that year onwards. This increase in scientific output coincides with the emergence of articles of one of the most identified prolific authors in this field of research – Duffy – (and Allan), who also promoted the concept of calling, linking it closely to the meaning of work, and their impact on satisfaction.

Concerning the language of publication, we selected English and French, given that nearly 99% of published documents in each of both databases are in English and the remaining 1% is distributed between French, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, and Russian, representing only 7 French articles in Scopus and 3 in WOS. This linguistic bias reflects the predominance of English-language scientific production, a phenomenon widely observed phenomenon in the literature, as the most visible research is generally published in English. This implies a potential underrepresentation French-language scientific debates on the topic.

Regarding document type, we mainly selected journal articles that have been published and accepted for publication (in press), as well as review and correction articles, given their greater scientific rigor compared to conference papers or book chapters. Thus, the type of documents selected are:

In Scopus: article, review and erratum.

In Web Of Science: article, early access, review article and correction.

After applying all those filters, we obtained 704 papers in Scopus and 674 in WOS, for a total of 1383 documents.

Finally, by using R software and after exporting data under CSV format from Scopus and Plaintext from WOS, we merged both databases and found 427 duplicates that we removed, resulting in a final corpus of 956 documents. We then analyzed the selected articles using R software through the packages Biblometrix and Biblioshiny.

This enabled us to visualize a series of bibliometric results that highlighted the main trends of research in this field, knowledge gaps, and possible avenues for future research.

Results and discussions

In this section, we present the main findings of the bibliometric analysis conducted on the 956 articles, generated using the Biblioshiny package of R software, before discussing them.

Key information about the data

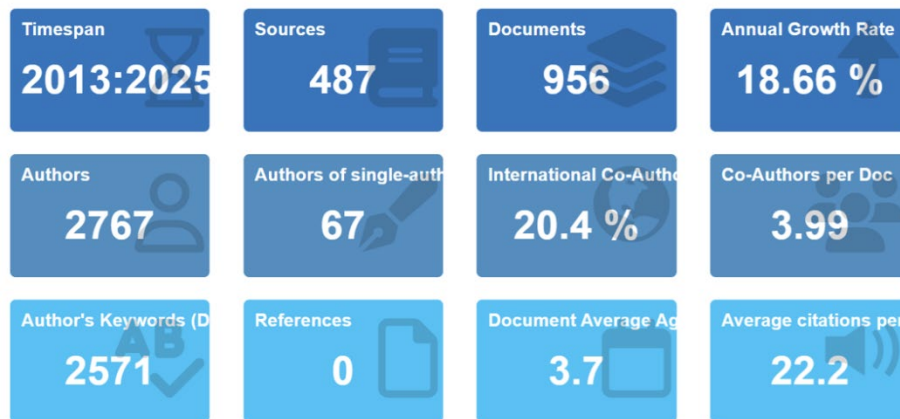


Figure 1. Key information about the data

Source: Authors' own research results extracted from Biblioshiny.

The bibliometric data, covering a period from 2013 to 2025, yield a total of 956 documents authored by 2767 researchers publishing in 487 distinct sources. The number of single-authored articles is 67, while the average number of co-authors per document is nearly 4.

The salient data indicate an average of 22.2 citations per document, and an annual publication growth rate of 18.66%, reflecting a sustained expansion of research on well-being and meaning of work. Moreover, the average document age of 3.7 years over a nearly 13 years period indicates the predominance of recent publications in the corpus (figure 1).

Annual scientific production

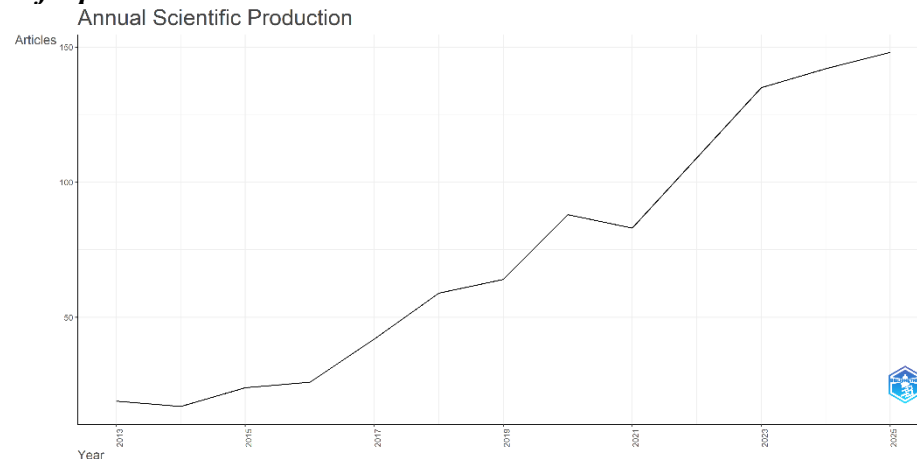


Figure 2. Annual scientific production

Source: Authors' own research results extracted from Biblioshiny.

The bibliometric analysis reflects a persistent progress of research on occupational well-being and meaning of work (figure 2). Publications have intensified in recent years, particularly after 2021, exceeding the threshold of 100. This is justified by the post – COVID-19 global context, recognizing the crucial importance of mental health and placing greater emphasis on HRM practices that promote employee well-being (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). Ohri & Dutta (2025b) highlight a constantly evolving professional environment, characterized by hybrid working models, where individuals have higher expectations and are constantly in search of meaning. They emphasize the shift towards more human-centered organization models.

Although incomplete, the current year already counts more article than previous years (148 articles, compared to 142 in 2024), confirming the sustainable momentum of our research topic.

Influent authors

This section identifies the most influential authors in the field, based on the number of their publications, their H-index, and their total number of their citations (TC: total citations).

Table 2. Most relevant authors

Authors	Articles	Articles Fractionalized
ALLAN B	18	5,658333333
DUFFY R	17	4,641666667
AUTIN K	8	2,291666667
CHEN	8	1,446428571
DOUGLASS R	8	1,858333333
KIM M	7	2,783333333
ROTHMANN S	7	2,45
DIK B	6	1,95
MARTELA F	6	2,7
WANG	6	0,783333333

Source: Authors' own research results extracted from Biblioshiny.

Table 3. Authors' local impact by H-index

Author	H_index	TC	PY_start
ALLAN B	16	1539	2013
DUFFY R	15	1671	2013
AUTIN K	8	851	2013
DOUGLASS R	8	856	2014
DIK B	6	729	2013
HOCHWARTER W	5	79	2014
KIM M	5	302	2018
MARTELA F	5	408	2018
ROTHMANN S	5	205	2013
ALFES K	4	243	2013

Source: Authors' own research results extracted from Biblioshiny.

Regarding the most influential authors in the field, Allan B. and Duffy R. are not only the most prolific authors (with 18 and 17 publications, respectively), but also those with the most significant H-index (16 and 15, respectively), with a total number of citations of 1539 and 1671, respectively. They also lead in terms of “fractionalized articles,” with averages of 5.66 and 4.64 articles, respectively.

Other authors also stand out for their relatively high number of articles, H-index, and citations, such as Autin K., Douglass R., Dik B., Kim., Martela F., and Rothmann S., although they lag far behind the top two, as shown in Tables 2 and 3 above.

We also note that the majority of authors published their first article in 2013 (PY-start: publication year start), which justified our choice of the 2013-2025 analysis period, as already explained in the previous “Methodology” section.

Scientific production by country

Country scientific production shows the geographic distribution of research activity on the given subject, based on the number of the publications per country.

Country Scientific Production

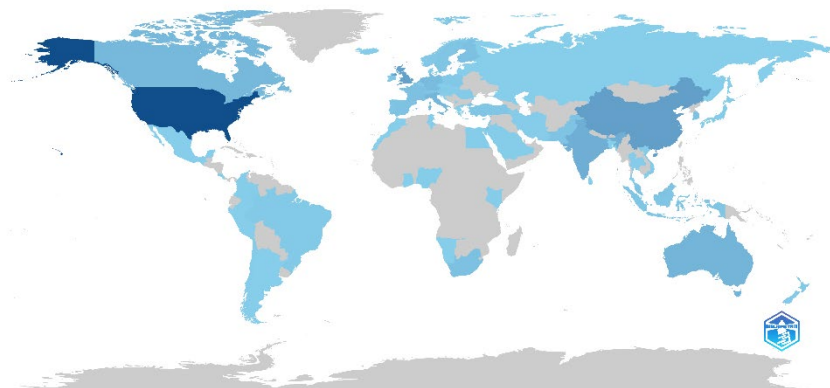


Figure 3. Country scientific production

Source: Authors' own research results extracted from Biblioshiny.

Table 5. Occurrences of words

Words	Occurrences
meaningful work	290
job-satisfaction	161
work engagement	160
Performance	151
job satisfaction	126
Engagement	104
Work	85
Sensemaking	84
mediating role	79
Satisfaction	79
Model	77
Burnout	73
Impact	73
Leadership	73
Motivation	72
well-being	64

Source: Authors' own research results extracted from Biblioshiny.

As shown in figure 4 and table 5, the most frequent keywords are meaningful work, followed by job satisfaction, and to a less extent well-being, with other concepts related to organizational behavior emerging, such as work engagement, motivation, work, leadership, highlighting the managerial perspective of many studies.

It is worth noting that the concept of well-being has been mobilized in several ways, that we took into account while writing our research query, namely “wellbeing”, or “well-being”, and being alternatively associated with employees, work, or specified as psychological. By summing up the occurrences of all those expressions, we found a total of 123, which lifts this concept to 5th place. Even (job) satisfaction and meaning of work are expressed in different ways, but that does not change their ranking.

It is relevant to highlight that job satisfaction is an integral part of one of well-being types; the subjective one: « 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) » (Jasinenko & Steuber, 2023).

Moreover, the frequent use of terms such as “moderating effect”, “model”, and “impact” reveals the interest shown in the literature in exploring the intermediate mechanisms that underlie the links between the central concepts of our research topic. Indeed, several moderating and, above all, mediating variables have been employed to explain the relationships between various concepts, including organizational and managerial support, and even the meaning of work itself, with other concepts, namely calling, career success, stress, motivation, or performance.

Thematic map

The thematic map illustrates the thematic evolution of research on meaning of work and well-being. It was generated using the Biblioshiny interface of the Bibliometrix package in R, under the “Conceptual structure – Thematic map” function. It is based on a co-word analysis of authors’ keywords to identify clusters of related terms, representing different research themes. These themes are then positioned according to two dimensions: their centrality and their density. Centrality on the x-axis, reflects the degree of relevance of the themes within the field, while density on y-axis, represents their maturity degree. On this basis, the matrix categorizes themes into four quadrants: basic, motor, niche, and emerging or declining themes.

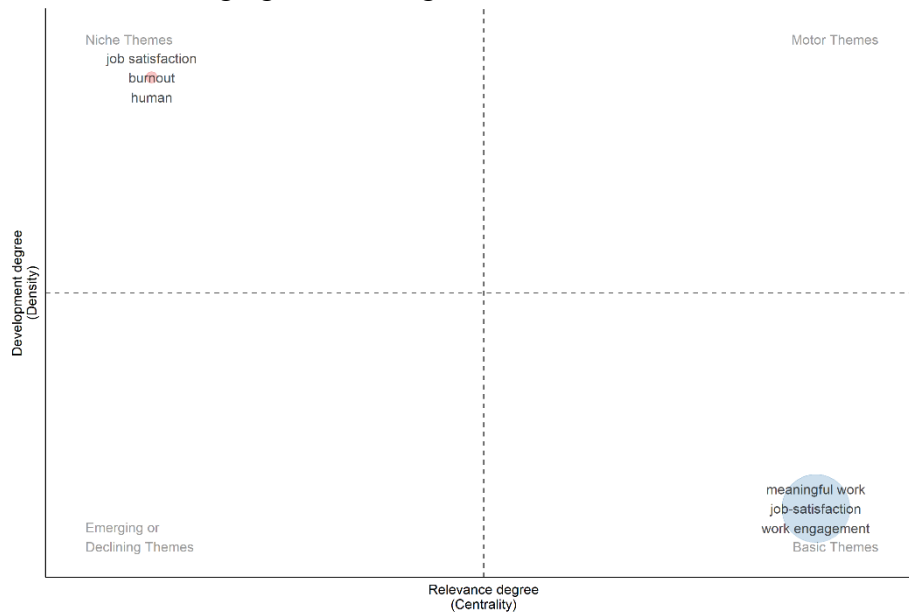


Figure 5. Thematic map

Source: Authors’ own research results extracted from Biblioshiny.

In our thematic map, represented in the figure 5 above, it seems that the field mainly contains basic themes, meaning key topics that remain underdeveloped, namely meaningful work, job satisfaction, and work engagement. It also covers niche themes, that is, well-developed topics but weakly connected to the central theme, such as job satisfaction, burnout, human.

The simultaneous apparition of job satisfaction in both quadrants could reflect conceptual heterogeneity and different uses of the concept, depending on how it is related to the meaning of work (sometimes as a result and sometimes as an explanatory variable of meaning).

We also observe the absence of well-established motor themes, as well as emerging or declining ones.

This suggests significant potential in this field, which is still in the consolidation phase and lacks a comprehensive theoretical framework, given the peripheral cluster observed. Indeed, these results are consistent with our literature review, which highlights a disparate research landscape and the absence of an integrated theoretical framework to unify the work.

Overall, this bibliometric analysis, particularly through the thematic map and word cloud, reveals meaning of work and well-being as central and strongly connected conceptual cores, but insufficiently developed given the low density that appears in the thematic map. Well-being at work, despite its significant importance and centrality in this field, is not always addressed directly.

In fact, it is largely referred to through related concepts, such as job satisfaction, work engagement, commitment, motivation, and even burnout, rather than a comprehensive and integrated construct. This corroborates the findings of our literature review, which highlights the strong link between the two concepts, but also the fragmentation of knowledge in this field of research.

Furthermore, the limited consideration given to cultural diversity appears to be a major shortcoming, favoring the Anglo-Saxon environment over other contexts.

In addition, it seems crucial to investigate more deeply certain variables that may better explain the intermediate mechanisms in play, such as leadership and HRM practices, and which could yield more comprehensive and unified explanatory models.

Conclusion

This study presents a bibliometric analysis mapping the research landscape of the literature on meaning of work and well-being at work between 2013 and 2025, based on a dataset of 956 articles extracted from Scopus and Web Of Science databases and analyzed using the packages Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny of R software.

The results reveal significant progress in the field of research but a still heterogeneous landscape marked by a diversity of theoretical frameworks, and a dominance of Western contributions, presenting significant potential for development.

By providing a comprehensive bibliometric analysis, the present study represents a contribution to a better understanding of the intellectual structure and evolution of this research area.

From an academic perspective, the findings highlight the lack of theoretical integration in the field, hindering the cumulative development of knowledge. In addition, the strong presence of Western studies calls into question the generalizability of existing findings.

From a managerial perspective, the results emphasize the importance of fostering meaningful work in order to enhance employee well-being. To this end, Human resource management practices should focus more on job design, recognition, and supportive leadership. This can contribute not only to an improved well-being but also to higher levels of engagement and sustainable organizational performance.

Despite its contributions, this study presents several limitations. The main ones arise from the choice of the Scopus and WOS databases which, although legitimate, favor English-language literature, leading to a language bias and an underrepresentation of local publications. Moreover, the results rely on the selected keywords, leading to an eventual selection bias. A further limitation concerns quantitative nature of the bibliometric approach, which does not allow for an in-depth analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of the studies.

For future research, the study opens up prospects for strengthening the links between currently disconnected themes, by exploring mechanisms underlying the links between the central concepts of our study. It also indicates opportunities to contextualize these works in non-Western organizational and cultural contexts.

Finally, combining bibliometric analyses with qualitative and empirical approaches would provide a deeper understanding of this research area.

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