

Decent Work Based on Psychology of Working Theory: Literature Review and Research Prospects

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Abstract. Decent work is of great significance to the satisfaction of employees' basic needs, the promotion of sustainable competitive advantages of organizations, and the construction of harmonious labor relations. Psychology of Working Theory uses decent work as the core variable to build a theoretical model, which has attracted the attention of scholars from all over the world. This article aims to report the results of a literature review of research concerning decent work. The study displays the antecedents and outcomes of decent work including mediators and moderators that have been tested. Also, the study categorize the theories, methods, and contexts of the reviewed studies. The study identifies the possible gaps and potential research directions. The findings can be helpful to further research in decent work as well as help managers understand this important concept.

Keywords: Decent work; psychology of working theory; sustainable development goals.

1. Introduction

Globalization has strengthened economic exchanges among countries, promoted global economic growth rates and labor productivity, but at the same time, capital flows have triggered fierce international competition, which has had a significant impact on the traditional labor world pattern, especially labor relations in developing countries. With the emergence of new business forms and new economy represented by 'Internet plus', new forms of employment such as flexible employment have emerged, and the labor market structure has changed. In addition, the repeated epidemic situation and the ever-changing international situation, as well as the deteriorating internal and external environment and the pressure of transformation and upgrading, are the current situation faced by many enterprises. In the process of pursuing maximum benefits, it is not uncommon for employers to ignore the rights and interests of workers, which hinders the growth of employee income, increases labor intensity, and even forces them to have lower wages, transfer jobs, and become technically unemployed. The income gap among residents continues to widen, and many ordinary workers have not shared the fruits of economic development. At the same time, with the dramatic changes in society and the great abundance of material resources, the work values of workers have also undergone tremendous changes, manifested in a significant increase in their awareness of rights protection. In addition to the demand for legitimate labor rights, many employees are increasingly concerned about a safe and comfortable working environment, physical health, a sense of respect, and the improvement of their personal employability. When the need for employee growth is inconsistent with the goals and development of the enterprise, the conflict between labor and capital will be further exacerbated, highlighting the issue of labor relations in the enterprise. The sharp topics of income inequality, '996', 'death from overwork', and employment discrimination continue to heat up, while the call for the pursuit of 'dignity' in labor is also constantly rising. These phenomena are driving enterprises, governments, and social organizations to take substantive measures in the field of labor relations.

With the development of globalization, labor issues frequently arise in various fields of society. In 1999, Juan Somavia, Director General of the International Labor Organization (ILO), declared that the primary goal of the ILO is to promote decent and productive work opportunities for both men and women under conditions of freedom, equality, safety, and protection of personal dignity. Decent work

requires the protection of workers' personal interests, strengthening and reflecting social protection centered on human dignity, and promoting the comprehensive development of workers. Since then, Decent Work has entered people's field of vision as another expression, policy goal, and research perspective of employment quality, and has received widespread attention from scholars.

Due to considerations of real-world issues and changes, research on decent work in recent years has attracted scholars' interest and attention from a micro level perspective. The Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) provides a psychological perspective, greatly enriching the research content of decent work. Based on previous views, Duffy et al. proposed PWT and established a research model with decent work as the main variable.^[1] Exploring the impact mechanism of decent work from a psychological perspective is still an emerging research field, and PWT has been discussed in multiple countries. The literature indicates that the concept of decent work is subject to change over time^[2], causing adjustments in the associated mechanisms governing labor. Moreover, the limited understanding of how research on decent work has evolved raises concerns, as an unclear development path may impede progress in the labor market. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the developmental trajectory of decent work literature and explore its evolving trends to better understand its development. This study looks to answer the following questions.

2. Review of individual-level decent work

2.1. Theoretical background of individual-level decent work: Psychology of working theory

Duffy (2016) constructed PWT based on the ILO definition of decent work, with decent work as the core variable. PWT mainly explains the concepts and definitions of decent work and related variables in ensuring the realization of decent work, and describes how decent work brings satisfaction and happiness.

PWT considers social environment as an important factor and proposes several testable hypotheses to clearly describe the entire process. Firstly, background constraints are a precursor to work volition and career adaptability. Marginalization means that individuals or groups in society are in a disadvantaged or even lower position, which is a major obstacle to obtaining decent work, and social identity is one of the forms of marginalization; Economic constraints are another obstacle to obtaining decent work, as limited economic resources can limit individuals' ability to achieve professional and academic success, as well as affect their subjective experience of social identity, thereby hindering the realization of decent work. Secondly, in addition to the direct impact of external environmental factors on decent work, two psychological resources (namely work volition and career adaptability) predict the accessibility of decent work. These two variables are both internal psychological attributes of individuals, which are influenced by environmental factors and have plasticity. They exist as mediating variables in theoretical models. Thirdly, the correlation between situational constraints and psychological resources is moderated by proactive personality, critical awareness, social support, and economic conditions. Fourthly, obtaining a decent job can predict career related outcomes and happiness by meeting basic human needs, including survival needs, social connection needs, and self-determination needs. The theoretical model of PWT is shown in Figure 1.

Since the publication of this theory, research with PWT as the core proposition has rapidly developed, especially with the development and improvement of DWS, some of its core hypotheses have been validated. The PWT theoretical model with decent work as the core has been studied in multiple countries and regions and has been consistently tested. In the future, the study of the impact mechanism of decent work perception become a research hotspot in this field.

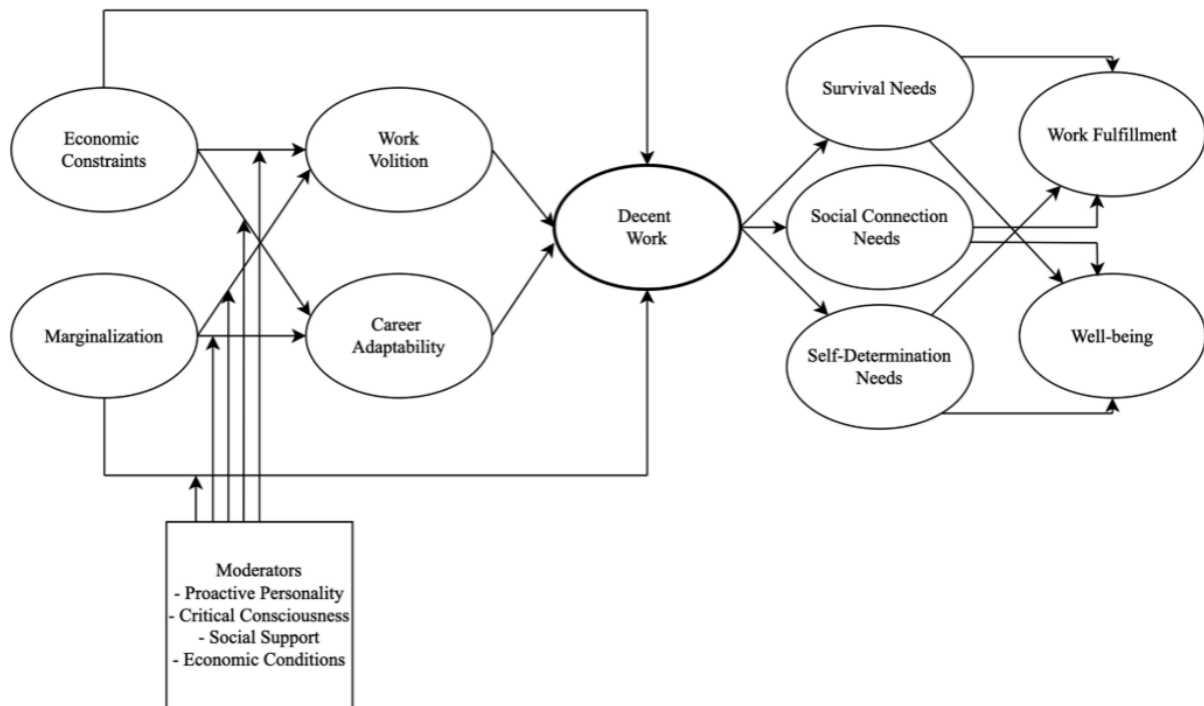


Fig. 1 Predictors and Outcomes of Decent Work Based on PWT

2.2. Concept, measure and research in organization of individual-level Decent work

Scholars' research on decent work has also undergone a shift in perspective. The initial definition of decent work by ILO (1999) emphasizes that countries should enact relevant laws and regulations to protect workers' labor rights and promote the healthy development of humanity. With the development of the times and the changing demands of workers, ILO (2015) has redefined decent work, emphasizing the protection of workers' dignity and equal rights at the work level from a meso enterprise perspective^[3]. With the continuous development of the new economy and new business models, workers' pursuit of the meaning of work has become increasingly strong. Scholars emphasize that the definition of decent work needs to start from the individual's perception. Duffy et al. (2016) believe that decent work describes five job characteristics: (1) a physically and mentally safe working environment, (2) adequate compensation, (3) sufficient rest and leisure time, (4) organizational values consistent with family and community values, and (5) access to healthcare^[1].

Regarding the measurement of decent work, Egger (2002) developed measurement indicators for decent work earlier, which are divided into four dimensions, laying the foundation for the development of measurement dimensions for decent work. However, the calculation method is complex and the promotion is low. As research deepens, scholars have begun to focus on the individual level. Based on relevant theories, scholars have developed different dimensions of the decent work perception scale. Duffy (2017) developed the Decent Work Scale (DWS) based on the ILO definition of decent work, dividing it into five dimensions^[4]. Huang et al. (2022) demonstrated through their research that DWS has excellent psychological measurement characteristics in terms of reliability and validity among Chinese employees, demonstrating that DWS still has high reliability and validity in cross-cultural environments^[5].

There is an increasing amount of research on decent work. Regarding the antecedents of decent work, scholars have first conducted empirical studies on the level of decent work worldwide and found that decent work is related to economic level; By shifting the definition of decent work towards the perspective of employees' self-value, Duffy et al. (2020) validated the predictive effects of economic constraints, marginalization experiences, work volition, and career adaptability on decent work^[6]. In addition, scholars at home and abroad have discussed the mechanism of decent work from different perspectives. Previous studies have shown that decent work has a strong predictive effect on

subjective perceptions of relevant individuals, such as work motivation, dedication, psychological capital, organizational self-esteem, job satisfaction, job burnout, etc^[7-9]. Some scholars have also paid attention to the physiological impact of decent work on employees, such as Di Fabio (2021) and Duffy (2021), who found that people with decent work are less likely to feel work fatigue because their survival needs can be basically met, they are more likely to adopt a healthy lifestyle, and thus behave healthier, allowing employees to better engage in work^[10,11].

3. Discussion of findings

Previous studies have discussed and explored decent work from three perspectives: safety, fairness, and self-value. Essentially, the shift in research perspective is mainly due to changes in the needs of workers. With the continuous improvement of laws and regulations, enterprises have begun to pay attention to the establishment of employer brands, and workers have also begun to pay attention to the meaning and value of work itself. The improvement of national level decent work should be based on the realization of micro level decent work. Therefore, research on individual level decent work is the trend of future research.

4. Summary

Although decent work has been an important topic that attracted the attention of many institutions since 1999, individual-level decent work is still a new and research worthy topic. Duffy et al.(2016) proposed Psychology of Working Theory from the perspective of occupational psychology, and identified decent work as the core variable from the micro personal perception perspective. This article mainly explores the research process of decent work from the perspective of PWT, including its concept, dimensions, and related research progress. The PWT model states that the ultimate goal of individual work is to obtain decent work, which is influenced by social and cultural environment, personal psychological traits, and other factors. However, decent work directly affects individuals' basic needs satisfaction, thereby affecting their work quality, physical and mental health, and happiness. Existing research mostly focuses on the connotation, evaluation indicators, and empirical and comparative studies at the national level of decent work. Additionally, the findings of this study would contribute to the attainment of the SDGs of the UN since the 8th of these goals is directly related to decent work.^[3]

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