Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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“Our Quest for a great place to work: Meaning in and at Work through the Fit Perspective”

Peter B. Gustavson School of Business

Monday, August 27, 2018
9:00 A.M.
Clearihue Building
Room B017

Supervisory Committee:
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Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Linda Welling, Department of Economics, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Our work and the organization in which we work play significant roles in many of our lives. Yet, theoretically grounded understanding of when is it that the relationships with our work and that with our work environment make a great place to work is almost non-existent. So far the organizations which feature in the Fortune Best Companies to Work For, or the Forbes the Happiest Companies to Work For, or the Glassdoor Best Places to Work, etc., are considered as proxies for great places to work. However, the characterizations of these workplaces are fragmented, idiosyncratic, and confounding. They cover a wide span of factors (e.g., pride, job satisfaction, flexibility, inspiring leadership, camaraderie, trust, work-life balance, etc.), without a theoretical understanding, limiting the generalizability and the usefulness of such characterizations.

In my dissertation I addressed these shortcomings through the fit perspective and through the mechanism of meaning in and at work. I proposed the Meaning-through-Fit model of great places to work, underpinned mainly by identity theory (Stryker & Berke, 2000), and hypothesized that the employees’ perception of a great place to work is built and sustained by meaning in work (from the relationship with the work itself) based on the underlying person-work fit, and meaning at work (from the relationship with the work environment) based on the underlying person-supervisor, the person-group, and the person-organization fits.

I tested the model through three Studies using a mixed methods approach. In Study 1, I conducted 26 semi-structured interviews to assess the face validity of the proposed model and to obtain inputs for the survey instrument and for the scenario descriptions to be used in Study 2. In Study 2, I tested the hypotheses with the help of quantitative data gathered through a three-wave Main Survey with participants from MTurk (N=481), after two Pilot Surveys (N=95 and 247), each with a different set of diverse participants. I confirmed the results through a Scenario Analysis with participants from MTurk (N=399). Out of the seven critical variables in the proposed model, I developed scales to measure three variables (employees’ perception of a great place to work, meaning at work, and person-group fit), and refined the scales to measure four variables (person-work fit, person-supervisor fit, person-organization fit, and meaning in work) with the help of data from Study 1, Pilot Surveys 1 and 2, and existing literature. In Study 3, I conducted 45 structured interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of the findings from Study 2.
The quantitative data gathered in Study 2 provides partial support to the proposed model, indicating that meaning in work partially mediated the relationship between person-work fit and employees’ perception of a great place to work, and meaning at work partially mediated the relationship between person-organization fit and employees’ perception of a great place to work. The data also indicates that meaning at work is the more significant predictor compared to meaning in work. Among the fits, person-organization fit matters the most. Study 3 provides interesting insights and explanations about the findings of Study 2. The Meaning-through-Fit model of great places to work sidesteps the differences among the employees in the understanding of and expectations from a great places to work, offers increased generalizability and a pathway to managers/leaders to build great places to work from the employees’ perspective, and contributes theoretically and empirically to Positive Organizational Scholarship.

**Keywords**: Great workplaces, Meaning-through-Fit model, meaning in work, meaning at work, mixed methods, identity theory