

CRAFTING MEANING IN THE HYBRID ERA: HOW PERSONAL AND JOB-RELATED FACTORS SHAPE MEANING IN LIFE ACROSS FORMS OF WORK

Abstract

The pursuit of a meaning in life (MiL), characterised by coherence, significance, and purpose, has become particularly relevant in contemporary work contexts that are shaped by hybrid/remote work arrangements. Using a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), this study explores how different combinations of personal factors and work-related dynamics cultivate MiL among employees working on-site and hybrid/remotely across industries in Montenegro. The findings reveal that hybrid/remote workers report marginally higher levels of MiL compared to on-site workers. Furthermore, MiL emerges from modality-contingent alignments of personal and job-related dynamics, particularly the enriched job design (JD), resilience, IT/remote experience and training, and work/non-work interface in cultivating MiL across varied work arrangements. This contributes to the MiL literature by conceptualising MiL as a context-sensitive outcome of work-life synergies, and to the distributed work literature by revealing that flexible work arrangements can support existential fulfilment under the appropriate conditions.

Keywords: meaning in life, enriched job design, work/family border theory, hybrid/remote work, fsQCA

1 INTRODUCTION

The recent evolution of work structures, propelled by crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, has fundamentally altered the interface between work and personal life. This shift has heightened academic interest in how work conditions and individual characteristics contribute to MiL, rather than simply work-life balance. MiL refers to the subjective experience that one's life is coherent, purposeful, and significant and is widely acknowledged as a pivotal predictor linked to individuals' adaptive functioning and overall well-being (Martela and Steger, 2016; Delle Fave, 2020). Steger (2009) suggests that a sense of meaning serves as a psychological resource that enables individuals to navigate life's challenges and uncertainties with greater resilience and purpose. MiL is also considered essential for fostering engagement and motivation in the workplace, as it aligns individuals' personal values with their work, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and performance. Also, when work is experienced as fulfilling and socially useful, it contributes significantly to a sense of MiL (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 1997). Importantly, as organisational settings increasingly involve complex forms of work, such as hybrid/remote environments, understanding how individuals cultivate MiL within these contexts becomes crucial for designing supportive work structures that enhance employee well-being. Therefore, the search for meaning is not only fundamental to psychological functioning, but is also linked to various positive outcomes, such as higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and subjective well-being (Steger *et al.*, 2006).

Work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) and work-life spillover effects (Geurts and Demerouti, 2003) provide a foundational framework for understanding the reciprocal influence of work and personal domains, often through spillover effects. Work/family border theory helps explain boundary conditions, positing that individuals manage borders between professional and personal domains based on their permeability and flexibility, a process especially salient in hybrid/remote work where boundaries are blurred. Complementing this, the work-life spillover framework explains how experiences, in one domain (e.g., work) can transfer into another (e.g., personal life), producing either positive spillovers (enrichment, resource gain) or negative spillovers (strain, conflict; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). In the context of distributed work, such spillovers can shape how individuals experience and construct meaning in life. For instance, positive spillovers, such as increased autonomy, meaningful interactions, or skill development at work, can enhance MiL by reinforcing one's sense of purpose, coherence, and significance across life domains. Conversely, negative spillovers, such as role overload or constant connectivity, can fragment these experiences, undermining the pursuit of MiL. Thus, the effects of hybrid and remote work arrangements

on MiL are likely to depend on how individuals manage and experience these cross-domain flows of resources and demands.

While previous studies confirm that effective work-life management enhances well-being, they have not fully explored how specific combinations of personal and job-related factors, such as resilience, enriched job design, jointly promote a greater sense of purpose and fulfilment in life (cf., Eby et al., 2005). In occupational settings, MiL arises not just from meaningful work itself, but from integrating work experiences with personal goals and values (Rosso et al., 2010). However, most existing research adopts a variable-centered, additive approach, examining the independent effects of personal or job-related predictors of MiL using regression or SEM techniques. For instance, Steger (2012) found that work meaning and calling are positively associated with MiL using hierarchical regression. Similarly, Allan et al. (2016) show that job autonomy and coworker support predict meaningful work, which in turn predicts life satisfaction. These studies advance our understanding of key predictors but do not examine how interdependent combinations of resources shape MiL in different work contexts. This leaves unexamined the possibility that MiL may instead emerge from synergistic configurations of conditions that differ across work contexts. In today's distributed work environments, understanding which combinations of personal and job-related factors foster MiL, and under what form of work, is a critical yet underexplored question. This study addresses that gap by adopting a configurational perspective to examine how different alignments of resources jointly shape MiL across on-site and hybrid/remote work settings. Specifically we ask research question *Which configurations of personal and job-related resources are associated with high levels of meaning in life across different forms of work (on-site vs. hybrid/remote)?*

By addressing this question, the contributions of this study are threefold. *First*, we extend theoretical insights by integrating work/family border theory and work–life spillover effects into the extended Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). While border and spillover theories help explain how experiences cross the work–life divide, the JD-R model offers a structured framework for understanding how job and personal resources jointly shape psychological outcomes. Traditionally, the JD-R model focuses on how the interplay of job demands, job resources, and personal resources predicts work engagement and strain (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007; Bakker et al., 2011). We build on this by proposing that these same resources—when viewed through a broader lens that includes the personal non-work domain—also play a critical role in enabling MiL. Specifically, we argue that MiL represents a higher-order existential outcome that emerges

not only from job-related conditions but from the synergistic alignment of work and personal resources across modalities. This extends the scope of the extended JD-R model beyond workplace well-being to account for how distributed work structures shape deeper life experiences such as purpose, coherence, and significance.

Second, we demonstrate that personal and job-related resources do not merely exert additive or independent effects on outcomes such as MiL. Instead, using a configurational approach enabled by fsQCA, we show that these resources often operate synergistically, forming distinct modality-contingent combinations that are conducive to MiL. This conjunctural perspective highlights that no single resource is universally necessary, but that MiL emerges from the alignment of multiple conditions that vary depending on whether individuals work on-site or in hybrid/remote settings.

Third, we establish that the efficacy of these resource configurations in promoting MiL is contingent on the form of work, whether individuals work on-site or in hybrid/remote arrangements. Put differently, the same combination of personal and job-related resources may foster MiL in one form of work but not in another, highlighting the importance of contextual boundary conditions. This configurational insight refines the JD-R model by demonstrating that the effectiveness of job demands, job resources, and personal resources is not universal, but shaped by structural context. Specifically, the form of work acts as a contextual layer that conditions how these resources interact to support or inhibit MiL. In doing so, we move beyond additive models and offer a more nuanced understanding of how distributed forms of work influence the emergence of existentially meaningful outcomes.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptualising Meaning in life: Definitions and sources

The concept of MiL has been explored across psychology, philosophy, and organizational behavior, with most definitions centering on three elements: coherence (life makes sense), purpose (motivational goals), and significance (life matters to self and others) (Steger *et al.*, 2006; King and Hicks, 2021). Steger (2009) defines MiL as the extent to which individuals comprehend and find purpose in life, while King *et al.* (2006) describe it as the perception that life transcends the trivial and chaotic. In work contexts, MiL is a broad existential construct, distinct from meaningful work or job satisfaction. While meaningful work focuses on fulfilment within the work role, MiL spans life domains (Rosso *et al.*, 2010; Martela and Steger, 2016)—an important distinction in distributed work settings where life-work boundaries blur.

Due to its universal yet variable nature, MiL has multiple pathways (Steger *et al.*, 2006; Delle Fave, 2020), prompting research into diverse predictors. “Meaningfulness is not necessarily inherent in life, but can be derived or created” (Steger and Dik, 2009, p. 288). MiL is shaped by personal traits (e.g., resilience, spirituality), relational dynamics (e.g., supportive colleagues), emotions (e.g., awe, gratitude), and contextual features (e.g., autonomy, task significance, value alignment). These sources are described as “surprisingly ubiquitous” because they often emerge from routine experiences rather than extraordinary events (King *et al.*, 2016; Ward and King, 2017; Romney *et al.*, 2024).

At work, these daily cues enable individuals to build coherence, purpose, and significance. This underscores MiL as dynamic and emergent, actively shaped by engagement with work environments and personal capacities. Although originally rooted in existential philosophy, research increasingly examines how workplace conditions and personal resources jointly influence MiL (Baumeister *et al.*, 2013). Given the time spent at work, scholars now ask how work contributes to broader life meaning. Dik *et al.* (2013) argue that work can foster meaning in life, yet the organisational factors supporting this process remain underexplored (Allan *et al.*, 2016; Ward and King, 2017; King and Hicks, 2021).

2.2 Personal attributes: Inner capacities that shape meaning

“MiL is rooted in personal resources” (Lasota and Mróz, 2021, p. 3). These are individuals’ positive self-evaluations and internal strengths that enhance control over their environment and well-being (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2003). Three key resources—growth mindset, resilience, and spiritual capital—have emerged as predictors of MiL by enabling constructive responses to challenges. Growth mindset, defined as “the feeling of continuing personal development and realising one’s potential” (Dierendonck and Mohan, 2006, p. 233), reflects the belief that abilities can grow through effort (Dweck, 2006). This fosters persistence, openness to learning, and job crafting, promoting work satisfaction and meaning. Individuals with this mindset see work as a developmental opportunity, enhancing purpose. Zhao *et al.* (2023) found that growth mindset predicts MiL, mediated by self-efficacy.

Resilience, the capacity to recover from adversity and adapt to uncertainty (Luthans *et al.*, 2007), also predicts MiL (Çolak *et al.*, 2021; Lasota and Mróz, 2021). Resilient individuals reinterpret stress as opportunity and maintain coherence under pressure (Coutu, 2002; Du *et al.*, 2017; Yıldırım *et al.*, 2020). This fosters job satisfaction and sustains purpose (Ryff and Singer, 2003), though the mechanisms remain underexplored (Miao and Cao, 2024). Spiritual capital—encompassing values, purpose, and transcendence (Zohar and

Marshall, 2004)—offers existential resourcefulness. It is shaped by belief systems, relational engagement, and meaning derived from work and life (Baker *et al.*, 2011). It includes inner values and connectedness (Milliman *et al.*, 2003), contributing to perceived significance. Together, these personal resources not only predict MiL but also shape how individuals experience work, manage boundaries, and interpret challenges with purpose.

2.3 Work-related factors: Contextual pathways to MiL

Work-related factors play a central role in shaping MiL. According to the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), job characteristics and contextual resources can enable or hinder existential experiences. While MiL can arise internally, it often unfolds through interaction (Steger, 2017). This study focuses on three key domains of work-related influence: enriched job design, ICT-related resources, and work–nonwork boundary management. These not only shape meaningful work but also spill over into broader life meaning.

Job design is foundational for meaningful experiences. The Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) defines enriched JD as involving autonomy, skill variety, task significance, and feedback—factors that support psychological growth (Parker and Grote, 2022). When job features align with personal capabilities, they foster job satisfaction and a sense of contribution, enhancing MiL (Steger and Dik, 2009; Rosso *et al.*, 2010). Employees with strong person–job fit are more likely to perceive their work as meaningful (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Maharaj and Schlechter, 2007; Cameron and Spreitzer, 2012). Lamovšek *et al.* (2023) find that enriched JD, especially when aligned with formal structures and adaptive traits, improves work–life balance. Likewise, person–job fit reinforces identity expression and coherence (Edwards and Shipp, 2007; Fuhrer and Cova, 2023).

In hybrid/remote settings, ICT skills and remote experience are vital resources. Digital preparedness enhances autonomy, reduces technostress, and supports self-determination (Ryan and Deci, 2000), helping employees manage their roles and maintain balance (Allen, Golden and Shockley, 2015). ICT facilitates flexible work (Raghuram *et al.*, 2019), but can blur work-life boundaries (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007a). IT/technology training acts as both a technical and psychological resource, enhancing efficacy and reducing overload (Day *et al.*, 2012). From a JD-R lens, it offsets digital demands, promoting autonomy and competence—key to meaningful work and MiL (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

WNI and psychological detachment represent boundary management capacities. A healthy interface, marked by low conflict and high enrichment, fosters role harmony and

supports coherent life narratives (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Heine et al., 2006). Psychological detachment—mentally disengaging from work during time off—is essential for stress recovery and existential renewal (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007; Sonnentag, 2018). Detachment facilitates meaning making by enabling identity integration and mental clarity. Conversely, blurred boundaries deplete self-regulatory resources and inhibit reflection. Effective transitions are vital for preserving identity and continuity across domains (Baumeister and Vohs, 2002).

In sum, enriched JD, ICT resources, and boundary management are core contextual pathways through which individuals construct MiL. These shape how employees engage with work, navigate roles, and integrate their experiences into coherent, meaningful life stories. This study investigates how these dynamics, in combination with personal resources, form distinct configurations that foster or hinder MiL across different work arrangements.

2.4 Synergistic effects across forms of work

Contemporary work spans diverse arrangements—from traditional on-site to hybrid and remote—collectively termed distributed work. Lamovšek et al. (2023) define this as “a multidimensional work context shaped by the physical, technological, and organizational distribution of work across space and time,” marked by boundary permeability, mediated interaction, and increased worker agency (p. 3). Unlike earlier views focused on geographic dispersion, distributed work reflects a systemic transformation shaped by digital infrastructures and evolving work-life boundaries. Each form of distributed work introduces unique relational and psychological dynamics that influence the construction of MiL. Rather than emerging from isolated factors, MiL results from synergistic interactions between intrapersonal capacities and structural affordances embedded in specific work modalities. For instance, Lamovšek et al. (2025) show that effective task performance depends on configurations of design elements—such as autonomy, digital clarity, and interdependence—tailored to the work form.

Accordingly, MiL is a context-sensitive outcome shaped by the interplay of personal identity and structural features, consistent with work/family border theory (Clark, 2000), spillover theory (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006), and the extended JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Personal resources like resilience, growth mindset, and spiritual capital provide individuals with emotional and cognitive tools for interpreting experiences (Dweck, 2006; King and Boyatzis, 2015; Lasota and Mróz, 2021), while work resources—such as

enriched job design, digital preparedness, and boundary conditions—offer the contextual scaffolding through which meaning is enacted (Rosso et al., 2010; Tarafdar et al., 2019). These elements do not operate additively but combine in equifinal, context-dependent ways to support or constrain MiL. This aligns with configurational approaches in organisational research (Misangyi et al., 2017; Lamovšek et al., 2025) and empirical findings from fsQCA, which demonstrate how unique resource bundles enable outcomes like task performance and existential fulfilment. Thus, understanding MiL requires not just identifying predictors but theorising their interaction within specific contexts—an approach we adopt through a neo-configurational lens (Ragin, 2008).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling, measures, and data collection

Data were collected in Montenegro in March 2023 using a purposive sampling strategy, with participants recruited via convenience sampling methods, applying snowball sampling to target working professionals across gender, age, forms of and work settings in relation to the organisational context and job variables under study. The primary units of analysis were working professionals, whose responses were used in the fsQCA analysis: 269 working remotely or hybrid and 946 working onsite. Their birth years ranges from 1954 to 2003; 55% of the respondents were male and 45% female. They work in various industries, including administration, finance, information technology, construction, and manufacturing. *Growth mindset* was measured with a three-item scale developed by Dweck (2006): $\alpha=0.87$. *Resilience* was assessed using 4 items from (Braun et al., 2017): $\alpha=.092$. *Spiritual capital* was measured with 5 items from a scale by Makkar and Singh (2021): $\alpha=0.67$. *Person-job fit* was measured using 5 items from a scale by Lauver and Kristof-Brown (2001): $\alpha=0.79$. *Enriched JD* was assessed with 57 items from the work design questionnaire developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006): $\alpha=0.90$. *IT/remote experience and training* was measured with a five-item scale by Staples et al. (1998): $\alpha=0.75$. *Work-Nonwork Interface* was measured with a five-item scale by Bogaerts et al. (2018): $\alpha=0.68$. *Detachment from work during non-work time* was measured with a three-item scale by Park et al. (2011): $\alpha=0.71$. *Meaningful Life* was assessed using a four-item scale developed by Steger et al. (2006): $\alpha=0.85$.

3.2 Analytical strategy: fsQCA

FsQCA is a method for exploring complex causal relationships and interdependencies based on set theory and Boolean algebra (Fiss, 2007) that is increasingly utilised in

organisational psychology (Cangialosi, 2023). FsQCA moves beyond the net effects of individual variables to assess how combinations of conditions work together to produce an outcome. It operationalises the configurational approach which posits that outcomes result not from single variables but from interdependent combinations of conditions that are sufficient for an outcome (Fiss, 2011). This approach embraces *conjunctural causation* (conditions interact rather than act independently, depending on their co-occurrence with other conditions), *equifinality* (potentially equivalent multiple paths to the same outcome), and *causal asymmetry* (presence and absence of conditions have different effects based on their interaction with other conditions) (Ragin, 2008; Fiss, 2011; Misangyi et al., 2017). It also emphasises that any factor that is positively related to an outcome in each combination can be irrelevant or inversely relevant in another configuration (Woodside, 2013). Therefore, fsQCA is particularly suitable for this study, given the configurational nature of the studied research question.

3.3 Data calibration

The first step in the analysis is data calibration, which transforms raw Likert-scale data (e.g., 1–5) into fuzzy-set scores ranging from 0 (full non-membership) to 1 (full membership). Data were calibrated using the direct method in the fsQCA 4.1 software (Ragin and Davey, 2022). Following established guidelines for continuous variables (Pappas and Woodside, 2021), the calibration thresholds were defined using the data's distributional properties. The thresholds for full membership, the crossover point, and full non-membership were set at the 90th, 50th and 10th percentiles, respectively, for each condition (Table 1). This approach ensures that the calibration is systematic and grounded in the empirical data.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Necessary and Sufficient condition analysis

We conducted a necessity analysis to determine if any single condition was consistently necessary for the presence or absence of MiL. Table 2 indicates that no single condition (nor its negation) achieved the established consistency threshold for necessity (≥ 0.90) (Hauff *et al.*, 2021). This held true for both the presence and absence of MiL, which demonstrates that MiL is not contingent on any "silver bullet" condition. Rather, it emerges from specific combinations of conditions.

Next, we conducted a sufficiency analysis to identify configurations of causal conditions sufficient for producing the outcome. Two separate truth tables for on-site and

hybrid/remote were constructed. Each truth table listed all logically possible combinations of the eight causal conditions ($2^8=256$ rows) and the empirical outcome associated with each combination (see Tables 3 and 4). To prepare the truth tables for logical minimisation, we used two standard criteria. First, we set a frequency threshold to ensure that the analysis was based on a sufficient number of empirical cases for each configuration. This threshold was set to 4 for the on-site sample and 2 for the hybrid/remote sample, reflecting differences in sample sizes and conventional practices in organisational QCA studies. Second, we set consistency cutoffs of 0.87 for the on-site sample and 0.85 for the hybrid/remote sample, in line with methodological guidelines that recommend a minimum consistency of 0.80 for a configuration to be considered a sufficient pathway (Fiss, 2011). Only configurations that met both the frequency and consistency thresholds were included in the final analysis.

Separate sufficiency analyses were conducted for the on-site and hybrid/remote datasets. Following the standard fsQCA procedure, the algorithm generates complex, parsimonious, and intermediate solutions; this study reports the intermediate solutions, which are preferred for their balance of detail and explanatory power. The analysis of on-site workers revealed eight sufficient pathways to achieving MiL (Table 5).

Table 5. Configurations leading to MIL in On-site work

Factor/ Configs	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
Growth mindset	⊖		⊖	○	○	⊖	⊖	⊖
Resilience	●	●	●	⊗	⊗	●	●	●
Spiritual capital	⊖	○	○	⊖	○	○	⊖	
Person-job fit		○	⊖	⊖	○	○	○	○
Enriched job design	●	●	⊗	⊗	●	●	●	●
IT/remote experience and training	○	○	⊖	⊖	⊖	○	○	○
Work-Nonwork Interface	⊖	○	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖		○
Detachment from work during non-work time	⊖	⊖	⊖	○	○	○	⊖	⊖
Raw coverage	.160	.210	.132	.134	.134	.154	.180	.191
Unique coverage	.004	.034	.030	.018	.015	.020	.000	0
Consistency	.898	.919	.874	.895	.933	.935	.879	.891
Overall solution coverage	.378							
Overall solution consistency	.852							

NB: Presence (● for core, ○ for peripheral), Absence (⊗ for core, ⊖ for peripheral), and blank cells for non-binding conditions

This finding demonstrates *equifinality*, as multiple distinct combinations of conditions lead to MiL. Each of these eight configurations has a consistency score of 0.86 or higher, indicating that each is a reliable pathway to MiL. The overall solution parameters confirm the robustness of the findings for both samples. The on-site solution had an overall consistency of 0.85 and a coverage of 0.38. The hybrid/remote solution (Table 6) had a slightly higher overall consistency of 0.86 and a comparable coverage of 0.38. High overall consistency scores affirm that the models are reliable, while the substantial coverage scores indicate that the identified pathways account for a large proportion of cases exhibiting a meaningful life in each group.

Table 6. Configurations leading to MIL in Hybrid/remote work mode

Factor/ Configs	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
Growth mindset	○	○	⊖	○	⊖	○	⊖
Resilience	⊖	⊖	○	○	○	○	○
Spiritual capital	○	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	○	○
Person-job fit	○	⊖	⊖	⊖	○	○	○
Enriched job design	●	●	●	⊗	●	●	●
IT/remote experience and training		⊗	⊗	●	●	●	●
Work-Nonwork Interface	●	⊗	⊗	●	●	●	●
Detachment from work during non-work time	○	○	○	⊖	⊖	⊖	○
Raw coverage	.177	.138	.120	.135	.155	.152	.180
Unique coverage	.049	.009	.030	.028	.031	.022	.000
Consistency	.932	.863	.874	.902	.942	.948	.879
Overall solution coverage	.384						
Overall solution consistency	.858						

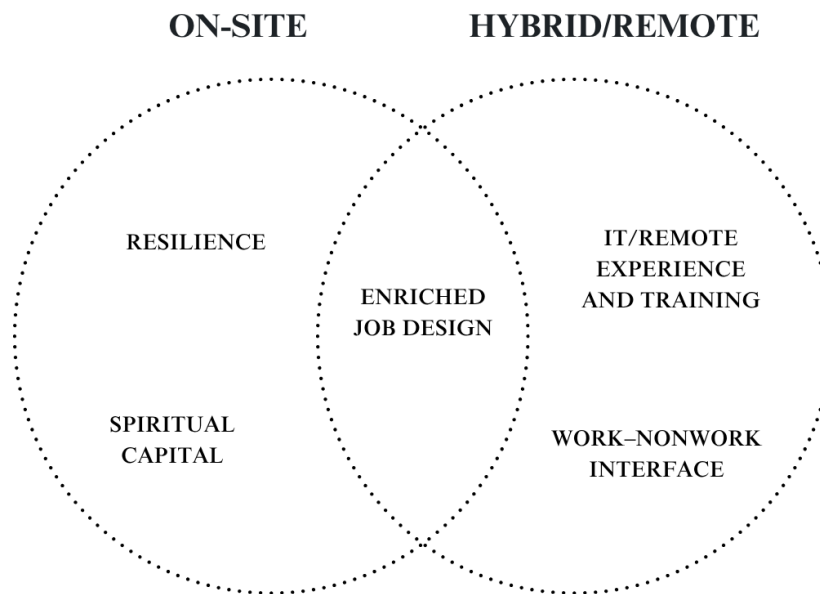
NB: Presence (● for core, ○ for peripheral), Absence (⊗ for core, ⊖ for peripheral), and blank cells for non-binding conditions

The analyses also distinguished between core conditions that appear in both parsimonious and intermediate solutions and have a strong relationship with the outcome and peripheral conditions that only appear in the intermediate solution and reflect context-dependent or reinforcing factors (Fiss, 2011). The results highlight that *resilience* and *enriched JD* consistently emerged as core conditions in on-site work and *enriched JD*, *IT/remote experience and training*, and *WNI* are core predictors for hybrid/remote modes;

however, none of these factors are independently sufficient to achieve MiL. Their effect is realised only through their combination with other peripheral conditions.

Figure 1 displays a conceptual Venn-style framework that visually differentiates the conditions that support MiL by resource type (personal vs. contextual) and form of work (on-site vs. hybrid/remote).

Figure 1. Key configurations and underlying variables leading to high MiL by form of work



The framework shows that while the balance of relevant conditions shifts depending on forms of work, enriched job design consistently emerges as a core condition across all configurations, reinforcing its universal relevance as a foundational structural resource for cultivating MiL. Interestingly, hybrid/remote workers in our sample reported slightly higher levels of MiL than their on-site counterparts. This suggests that when adequately supported with enriched JD, digital competence, and boundary management, flexible work structures may amplify workers' sense of purpose, coherence, and life integration. Rather than viewing hybrid/remote work as a threat to existential fulfilment, these findings highlight its potential to *enhance* it; provided organisations invest in the right structural and psychological resources to scaffold meaningful experiences in hybrid/remote form of work.

4.2 Predictive validity and robustness checks

To ensure that the resultant configurations are not merely sample-specific or methodologically contingent, a robust assessment of their predictive validity was conducted, following the best-practice guidelines of Pappas and Woodside (2021). This procedure evaluates how well a configuration derived from one dataset can predict the outcome in a

separate, "holdout" dataset. For this test, we randomly split our datasets into a subsample (for model/configuration development) and a holdout sample (for validation) and ran the original standard fsQCA procedure on the subsample for both forms of work. We then modelled the resultant configurations in the subsample into fuzzy sets as new variables, using the functions `fuzzyand(x,...)` and `fuzzynot(x)`. Then, we plotted the new variables (M1– on-site and M3 hybrid/remote) against the outcome and assessed the consistency and coverage scores displayed in the plot (Table 7 and Table 8). The scores of *consistency* (0.929 and 0.835) and *coverage* (0.268 and 0.397) indicate a strong predictive validity, meaning the models can reliably predict the outcome in new data across forms of work.

We conducted extra robustness checks to ensure that the configurations are stable and not sensitive to parameter variations (Greckhamer *et al.*, 2018). Varying frequency and consistency values is one of the common robustness checks in fsQCA. Conducting the same analysis on the on-site dataset with a consistency cutoff of 0.85 yielded an overall solution consistency of 0.820 with a coverage of 0.420. Furthermore, adjusting consistency values of 0.80 on the hybrid/remote dataset generated an overall consistency of 0.816 and coverage of 0.417, which are quite similar to our results (on-site: 0.852, 0.378) and (hybrid/remote: 0.858 and 0.384), respectively. Another check is applying a frequency threshold of 5 cases for the on-site data, which generated an overall consistency of .888 and coverage of 0.254. The similar results indicate the validity and robustness of the findings.

5 DISCUSSION

This study examined how personal attributes and work-related dynamics combine to foster MiL across on-site and hybrid/remote work arrangements. Using fsQCA, it identified distinct equifinal pathways to MiL, reflecting its complex and configurational nature (Fiss, 2011). Findings show that the cultivation of MiL varies with work structure and demands, emphasising how work form shapes the relevance of resource configurations (spillover effects; Geurts and Demerouti, 2003). Work modality functions as a “structuring condition,” influencing not only the availability of resources but also their combinatorial logic. No single factor guarantees MiL; rather, it emerges from specific alignments of personal and contextual resources tailored to each modality’s challenges and affordances. Both settings exhibit multiple sufficient configurations, confirming that MiL can be achieved through varied pathways. Therefore:

Proposition 1: *There is no single predictor necessary or sufficient for meaning in life; rather, multiple distinct configurations of personal and work-related conditions demonstrate equifinality across on-site and hybrid/remote forms of work.*

Configurations of MiL for on-site workers

In on-site settings, where spatial and temporal boundaries are more clearly defined, MiL primarily arises from the combination of resilience and enriched job design (JD), though neither is sufficient alone. This reflects a psychological–structural alignment in which personal adaptability is matched by job roles offering autonomy, task significance, and growth opportunities. This aligns with research showing MiL is strongest when work structures support the enactment of personal strengths and values (Rosso et al., 2010; Martela and Pessi, 2018).

On-site environments are typically more structured and hierarchical than hybrid ones, demanding stronger individual coping mechanisms. Resilience, in such settings, is linked to greater well-being and life satisfaction (Luthans *et al.*, 2007; Robertson *et al.*, 2015). Since autonomy over time and space is limited, enrichment must come from job content itself rather than flexible arrangements. This reinforces findings that job complexity, autonomy, and skill variety are key to meaningful work (Oldham and Hackman, 2010).

Configurations C1 and C2 demonstrate that resilience and enriched JD can foster MiL even without growth mindset, spiritual capital, WNI, or detachment. These resources appear compensatory: where detachment or cognitive orientation is absent, structural and psychological factors fill the gap. In C3–C5, MiL persists despite lacking IT training or strong person–job fit, provided resilience and enriched JD are present. This supports the role of resilience in reconstructing purpose and adapting to stress (Park et al., 2010; Kuntz et al., 2017), and in enabling positive reframing and behavioural flexibility (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004).

Together, resilience and enriched JD interact synergistically: the former sustains MiL under strain, while the latter provides its foundation. Configurations C5–C8, which lack growth mindset and detachment but include resilience and enriched JD, reinforce the view that structural and psychological resources are more pivotal than cognitive traits in on-site work. Resilience enables workers to derive meaning from job features like autonomy and task significance, especially in structured environments with limited flexibility. These resources help buffer stress and maintain fulfilment by reinforcing the separation between work and life. Thus,

Proposition 2: *Enriched job design and personal resilience are core predictors of meaning in life for on-site workers.*

Configurations of MiL for hybrid/remote workers

Hybrid/remote configurations generally reported higher levels of MiL, primarily supported by a triad of core conditions: enriched JD, IT/remote experience and training, and WNI. These are essential for managing the technological and boundary-spanning demands of flexible work. Beyond technical utility, they enable individuals to navigate spatial and temporal boundaries, preserving autonomy and identity coherence in less structured environments. This supports border theory and the extended JD–R model, which highlight the role of digital competence and boundary management in distributed work (Wang *et al.*, 2021). Without such competence, work becomes fragmented and frustrating, undermining MiL. WNI plays a heightened role in hybrid settings, where role blurring and spillover risks are greater (Derks *et al.*, 2015). Effective WNI—facilitated through autonomy or organisational support—enhances balance and contributes to MiL by enabling coherent life narratives (Kreiner, 2006; Allen *et al.*, 2014). Configurations C1 and C2 combine enriched JD, WNI, growth mindset, and detachment, yet lack resilience—suggesting structural and boundary supports can compensate for psychological resources.

IT/remote training was especially prominent in C4–C6, underscoring its value in navigating digital workspaces. Digitally competent individuals experience fewer remote work challenges and higher engagement (Vargas-Llave *et al.*, 2020). Configurations C5–C7 emphasise enriched JD, IT training, and WNI, with varying levels of detachment and growth mindset, highlighting the centrality of structural and relational supports in hybrid contexts. Notably, spiritual capital was absent from several configurations, yet MiL was still present indicating that other resources can compensate. The consistent presence of WNI in C1 and C4–C7 reinforces the need for careful boundary management in flexible work to prevent conflict and burnout (Allen *et al.*, 2014; Kossek *et al.*, 2021). Ultimately, while personal adaptability and continuous learning matter for MiL, they are most effective when supported by enriched JD, digital competence, and strong boundary management (Yeager and Dweck, 2012; Akkermans *et al.*, 2020). So,

Proposition 3: *For hybrid/remote workers, enriched job design, IT/remote training, and a strong work/non-work interface form a core configuration for creating a sense of meaning in life.*

The centrality of Enriched JD

Enriched JD is a core condition in nearly all configurations (except C4), underscoring its pivotal role in fostering MiL—especially in flexible work arrangements. More than a job resource, it serves as a foundation for meaningful experience by enhancing autonomy and task variety, regardless of work setting. This aligns with the job characteristics model, which emphasises the motivational and identity-forming value of enriched tasks (Oldham and Hackman, 2010). In hybrid/remote contexts, enriched JD is especially vital. It helps offset disengagement linked to reduced in-person interaction (Choudhury et al., 2021) and counters the spillover effects of work into personal life. A fulfilling job design is thus essential to sustain well-being and support MiL in digitally mediated work environments. Therefore,

Proposition 4: *Enriched job design is consistently powerful in creating a sense of meaning in life, only when combined with either personal resources (in on-site work) or boundary/technical resources (in hybrid/remote work).*

The periphery role of conditions across forms of work

This study reveals that while core conditions for MiL vary by work modality, peripheral conditions play a nuanced, compensatory role—refining the causal mechanisms that foster MiL. In on-site contexts, factors such as growth mindset, spiritual capital, IT/remote experience, person–job fit, WNI, and psychological detachment function at the margins. Though beneficial, these are not universally necessary in structured, co-located settings, where employees primarily derive MiL from enriched job design and resilience. Growth mindset is often absent where job enrichment and resilience are present, suggesting structural and personal strengths can compensate for its lack. Still, it may reinforce resilience or help frame poor person–job fit as a growth opportunity (Dweck, 2006). Spiritual capital operates as a latent, context-sensitive resource, supporting individuals facing role strain or value misalignment, though its expression may be constrained by workplace norms (Benefiel et al., 2014).

Person–job fit enhances the impact of core resources like enriched JD, whereas misalignment can undermine MiL, even with high resilience. The peripheral role of IT

experience reflects the reduced digital demands of on-site work. Similarly, WNI and detachment are less pivotal due to clearer spatial and temporal boundaries (Clark, 2000). While helpful for some, WNI is not universally critical (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009), and detachment acts as a buffer against burnout rather than a core enabler of MiL in this context.

Proposition 5a: *In on-site work environments, the peripheral conditions—growth mindset, spiritual capital, IT/remote experience and training, person–job fit, work–nonwork interface, and detachment from work—collectively exert a supportive but non-essential influence on the experience of meaning in life, as core job and psychological resources serve as the dominant enablers.*

In hybrid/remote contexts, personal resources such as growth mindset, resilience, spiritual capital, person–job fit, and detachment from work function peripherally, suggesting that structural job features exert greater influence on MiL than internal dispositions. Enriched job design, digital competence, and boundary management emerge as central, overshadowing personal factors. Resilience, while core in on-site settings, becomes less critical here—possibly due to the autonomy and flexibility hybrid work provides—though it may still buffer against isolation and boundary ambiguity (Toscano and Zappalà, 2020).

Under the JD–R model, growth mindset supports engagement and resilience in response to job demands (Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2010), particularly in autonomous environments where self-directedness is vital (Wang *et al.*, 2021). It also enhances the value of structural supports like enriched JD and WNI, helping individuals use IT training not only to meet technical demands but also to reinforce efficacy and control—key pathways to MiL.

Detachment from work, though generally beneficial (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015), varied across configurations. Its importance rises in hybrid contexts due to blurred work–life boundaries but is less essential in configurations already balanced by digital competence or WNI. This suggests its value depends on available boundary control—more inherent in structured settings.

The role of person–job fit also varied, underscoring its subjective and context-dependent nature. In hybrid work, where autonomy is high, person–job fit mediates the impact of IT training and WNI, aligning skills and boundaries with individual goals (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005). This reflects the evolving and individualised nature of meaning in flexible settings (Bailey and Madden, 2016). Spiritual capital appeared inconsistently, indicating it is not universally necessary for MiL. Its sporadic presence may reflect secular or

pluralistic work environments where meaning is often derived through autonomy, competence, and relatedness rather than spiritual orientation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, it can still moderate challenges—for instance, by helping individuals frame WNI difficulties as growth opportunities. By reinforcing coherence and purpose (Schnell, 2009), it enhances MiL in configurations where other supports are already in place (Grant et al., 2013). Therefore.

Proposition 5b: *In hybrid/remote work environments, peripheral conditions including growth mindset, resilience, spiritual capital, person–job fit, and detachment from work play a secondary yet facilitative role in cultivating meaning in life, with structural and contextual factors, namely enriched job design, digital readiness, and boundary management, forming the central pathway to meaning in life.*

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three interrelated theoretical contributions by revealing how MiL arises through distinct configurations of personal and work-related factors across work modalities. Drawing on work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) spillover theory (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006), and the extended JD–R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), it advances our understanding of how existential outcomes are shaped in contemporary work contexts. First, we integrate border and spillover theories into the JD–R model to conceptualise MiL as a higher-order existential outcome influenced not only by occupational experiences but also by their interaction with the non-work domain. While the JD–R model traditionally explains outcomes like engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007; Bakker et al., 2011), we propose that job and personal resources—when viewed cross-domain—also underpin MiL. Specifically, MiL emerges from the alignment of structural work factors (e.g., enriched job design, digital readiness, boundary management) and internal capacities (e.g., resilience, spiritual capital). This integration refines border theory by identifying resources needed to navigate varying border permeability across work forms: personal resources suffice in on-site contexts, while digital and boundary supports are essential in hybrid work. We also advance spillover theory by showing how resources generate positive spillover only under specific conditions.

Second, we use fsQCA to uncover configuration-specific pathways to MiL, showing that personal and work resources interact in conjunctural, context-dependent ways. This neo-configurational perspective (Fiss, 2011) reveals equifinality (multiple paths to MiL),

conjunctural causation (synergistic resource combinations), and causal asymmetry (a condition beneficial in one context may be irrelevant in another). For example, growth mindset is absent from on-site configurations but central in hybrid work; person–job fit supports MiL only in specific combinations. These findings challenge additive models and extend person–environment fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), showing that it is the role of fit within a broader resource constellation that shapes existential outcomes.

Third, we show that work form—on-site versus hybrid/remote—acts as a structuring condition moderating the effects of resources on MiL. A configuration effective in one setting may not work in another. For instance, resilience and enriched JD foster MiL on-site but require digital and boundary resources in hybrid contexts. These differences illustrate that work arrangements shape not only productivity but also meaning making. This extends the JD–R model by demonstrating that resource relevance is modality-dependent and operationalises contextual boundary conditions from border theory. It suggests that distributed work is not merely a logistical shift but a qualitatively distinct environment for constructing meaning. Organisations must therefore design differentiated, configuration-specific interventions to support flourishing across varied settings.

5.2 Practical Implications

This study provides actionable guidance for organisations seeking to foster MiL through tailored work design and HR practices. It highlights that enhancing MiL requires differentiated interventions based on work modality—on-site versus hybrid/remote—rather than uniform approaches. A core insight is the centrality of enriched job design across all settings. Job enrichment—via autonomy, skill variety, and task significance—should serve as a universal foundation for cultivating MiL. Yet, the pathways diverge by work form depending on the resources paired with enriched JD. For on-site workers in structured environments, MiL is most supported through personal resources, especially resilience. This can be strengthened via leadership development, coaching, psychological support, and identity-based interventions that build coherence and purpose. While enriched JD remains critical, it must be paired with adaptability and coping supports. Hybrid/remote workers, by contrast, benefit from enriched JD combined with contextual enablers—particularly IT/remote training, work–nonwork interface (WNI) support, and psychological detachment. Effective strategies include: 1) digital competence training, 2) boundary management

interventions (e.g., time segmentation, expectation setting), and 3) “right to disconnect” policies that limit spillover and protect recovery time.

This study reframes IT training as a psychological resource that fosters autonomy, efficacy, and identity in digital work. Similarly, WNI support—through flexible scheduling and manager role-modelling—is critical for constructing meaningful life narratives in less bounded work environments. Crucially, fsQCA findings confirm that no single factor ensures MiL. Rather, meaning emerges from specific, synergistic configurations of personal and structural resources. This calls for a systems-level HR approach that aligns interventions into coherent support structures. Ultimately, this study offers a roadmap for context-sensitive, configuration-based HR strategy. By recognising how work forms shape the relevance of personal and contextual factors, organisations can better promote well-being and existential fulfilment—advancing individual flourishing and strengthening engagement, retention, and commitment in a transforming work landscape.

6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this study offers valuable insights, several limitations merit attention and suggest directions for future research. First, its cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal studies are needed to trace how resource configurations evolve and how changes in work or personal trajectories affect MiL. Second, the data come solely from Montenegro, whose cultural, religious, and labour market contexts may shape expressions of personal and work-related resources—underscoring the need for cross-cultural comparison. Third, we did not examine how gender or generational factors might moderate pathways to MiL, which future studies should explore. Fourth, although our variables were theoretically grounded, factors like purpose-driven leadership, organisational culture, and psychological safety may also be influential. Finally, while fsQCA captures causal complexity well, it cannot reflect temporal or developmental processes. Calibration, thresholds, and truth table construction can affect results despite robustness checks, and findings remain sensitive to sample size and case distribution. Comparative analyses using methods such as structural equation modelling could enhance validity. These limitations point to the need for continued investigation into the multi-level determinants of MiL at work.

7 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that MiL arises not from personal or work resources alone, but at their intersection. Through a configurational lens, we identified distinct pathways where personal traits and work-related dynamics jointly contribute to MiL across work forms. A key insight is that the relative weight of personal versus contextual resources varies by work setting. In on-site environments, high-MiL configurations consistently included personal factors—especially resilience and spiritual capital—indicating that co-located settings prompt individuals to rely on internal strengths and existential frameworks. Conversely, hybrid/remote settings were more influenced by contextual enablers, particularly IT/remote training and a well-managed work–nonwork interface. These underscore the importance of digital competence and boundary regulation in fluid, asynchronous environments. Notably, enriched JD was the only core condition common to both modalities, confirming its foundational role in sustaining MiL. Hybrid/remote workers also reported slightly higher MiL, suggesting that when well-designed, flexible structures can enhance purpose, coherence, and integration. These findings call for organisations to move beyond generic well-being strategies and instead align role design, digital tools, and boundary management—integrating the JD–R model, work/family border theory, and spillover theory—to create work environments that foster not only productivity but existential fulfilment in a digitally fluid world.

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APPENDICES

Table 1. Calibration of thresholds and descriptives

Variable	Fully in (90 th)	Crossover (50 th)	Fully out (10 th)	Mean	SD	Min	Max
On-site							
Growth mindset	4.33	3.00	2.00	3.07	.985	1	5
Resilience	4.50	3.83	3.33	3.85	.483	2	5
Spiritual capital	4.50	3.75	3.00	3.723	.584	1	5
Person-job fit	5.00	4.40	3.60	4.31	.520	1.6	5
Enriched job design	4.13	3.64	3.11	3.64	.392	2.08	5
IT/remote experience and training	4.33	3.33	2.00	3.33	.959	1	5
Work-Nonwork Interface	4.66	4.00	3.00	3.82	.665	1	5
Detachment from work during non-work time	3.66	2.33	1.33	2.39	.814	1	5
Meaningful Life	5.00	4.00	3.00	3.99	.700	1	5
Hybrid/ Remote							
Growth mindset	4.33	3.00	1.66	3.04	1.064	1	5
Resilience	4.50	3.83	3.33	3.82	.466	1.33	4.83
Spiritual capital	4.75	4.00	2.75	3.81	.689	1.5	5
Person-job fit	5.00	4.40	3.80	4.37	.511	2.2	5
Enriched job design	4.17	3.75	3.29	3.74	.341	2.69	4.57
IT/remote experience and training	4.66	3.66	2.66	3.67	.799	1	5
Work-Nonwork Interface	4.66	4.00	3.00	3.91	.646	1	5
Detachment from work during non-work time	4.00	2.66	1.66	2.77	.901	1	5
Meaningful Life	5.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	.759	1	5

Table 2. Necessary condition analysis

Condition	On-site				Hybrid/Remote			
	Meaningful Life		~Meaningful Life		Meaningful Life		~Meaningful Life	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
Growth mindset	.634	.649	.628	.592	.635	.646	.630	.569
~ Growth mindset	.602	.638	.628	.612	.577	.638	.608	.596
Resilience	.677	.683	.652	.605	.620	.686	.599	.589
~ Resilience	.609	.656	.658	.652	.629	.639	.681	.614
Spiritual capital	.703	.742	.585	.568	.712	.818	.522	.532
~ Spiritual capital	.590	.607	.734	.695	.592	.583	.822	.717
Person-Job fit	.726	.707	.679	.608	.664	.696	.595	.553
~ Person-Job fit	.598	.669	.673	.693	.574	.615	.673	.640
Enriched job design	.701	.721	.590	.558	.680	.728	.567	.538
~ Enriched job design	.570	.602	.705	.685	.568	.597	.713	.664
IT/remote experience and training	.686	.655	.657	.577	.691	.692	.635	.564
~ IT/remote experience and training	.558	.638	.608	.641	.565	.636	.654	.652
Work-Nonwork Interface	.640	.723	.622	.646	.664	.709	.647	.612
~ Work-Nonwork Interface	.687	.664	.733	.652	.636	.670	.692	.646
Detachment from work during nonwork time	.616	.660	.657	.648	.619	.650	.637	.594
~ Detachment from work during nonwork time	.671	.680	.655	.611	.613	.656	.624	.592

Table 3. Truth table – On-site work mode

fGrowmind	fTraining	fPJFit	fWNI	fResilience	fDetachment	fSpiritcap	fEnriched	number	fMeaningful	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	5	1	0.939946	0.758972	0.765654
1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	4	1	0.933398	0.599827	0.611736
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	1	0.895752	0.365951	0.365952
0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	4	1	0.935071	0.623125	0.636759
0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	6	1	0.915818	0.640572	0.66206
0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	4	1	0.908281	0.435557	0.457231
0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	5	1	0.906592	0.320666	0.328018
0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	5	1	0.893421	0.45657	0.478728
0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	4	1	0.874563	0.363513	0.363513
0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	4	0	0.869181	0.222224	0.228694
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0.862088	0.252633	0.252632

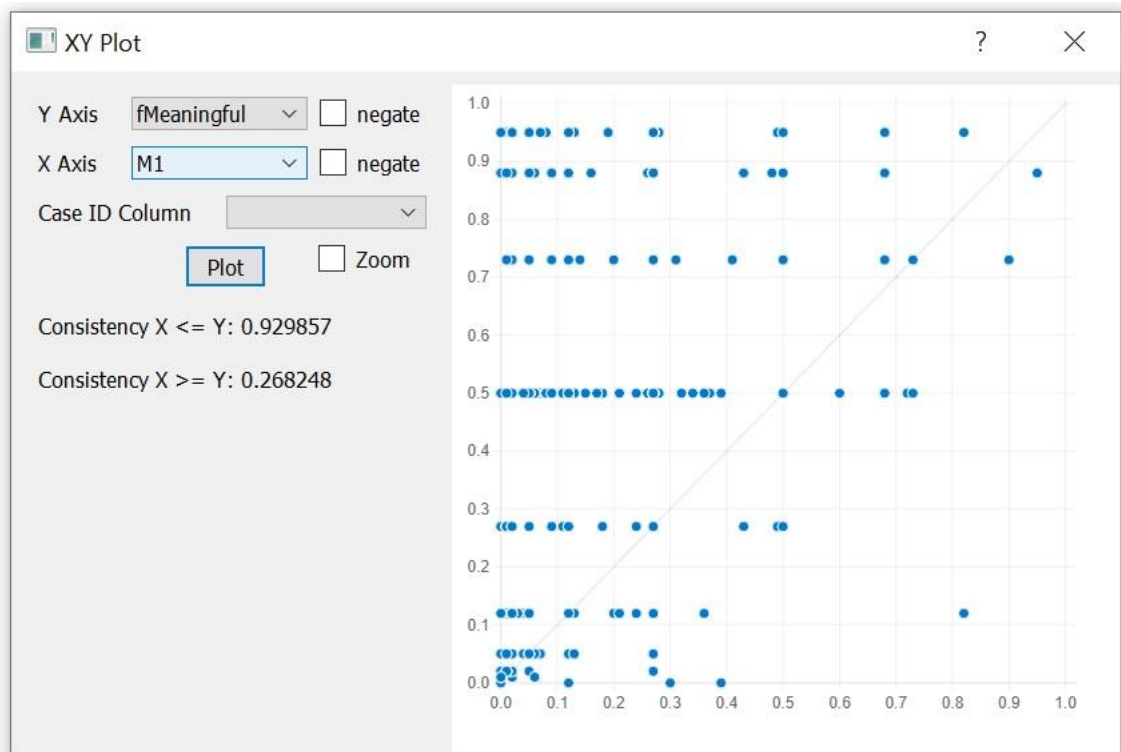
Table 4. Truth table – Hybrid/remote work mode

fGrowmind	fTraining	fPJFit	fWNI	fResilience	fDetach	fSpiritcap	fEnrichedJD	number	fMeaning	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	3	1	0.948517	0.773946	0.778419
0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	3	1	0.942748	0.723926	0.758029
1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	0.940452	0.776924	0.776923
1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	0.940099	0.695979	0.721355
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	0.906904	0.675465	0.675466
1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	0.902518	0.342766	0.383802
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	0.873946	0.464151	0.464151
0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	0.863385	0.258855	0.258855
1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0.827056	0.252189	0.260398
0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0.804723	0.134809	0.134809
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0.768938	0.162758	0.171262

Table 7. M1 Predictive validity - On-site

Model: fMeaningful = f(fGrowmind, fTraining, fPJFit, fWNI, fResilience, fDetachment, fSpiritcap, fEnriched)	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency
M1: fGrowmind*~fTraining*~fPJFit*~fWNI*fResilience*fDetachment*fSpiritcap*fEnriched	.141	.052	.914
M2: ~fGrowmind*fTraining*fPJFit*fWNI*fResilience*~fDetachment*fSpiritcap*fEnriched	.174	.053	.881
M3: ~fGrowmind*fTraining*fPJFit*~fWNI*fResilience*fDetachment*fSpiritcap*fEnriched	.158	.024	.904
Solution coverage	.264		
Solution consistency	.876		

Test of **M1** using the holdout sample data

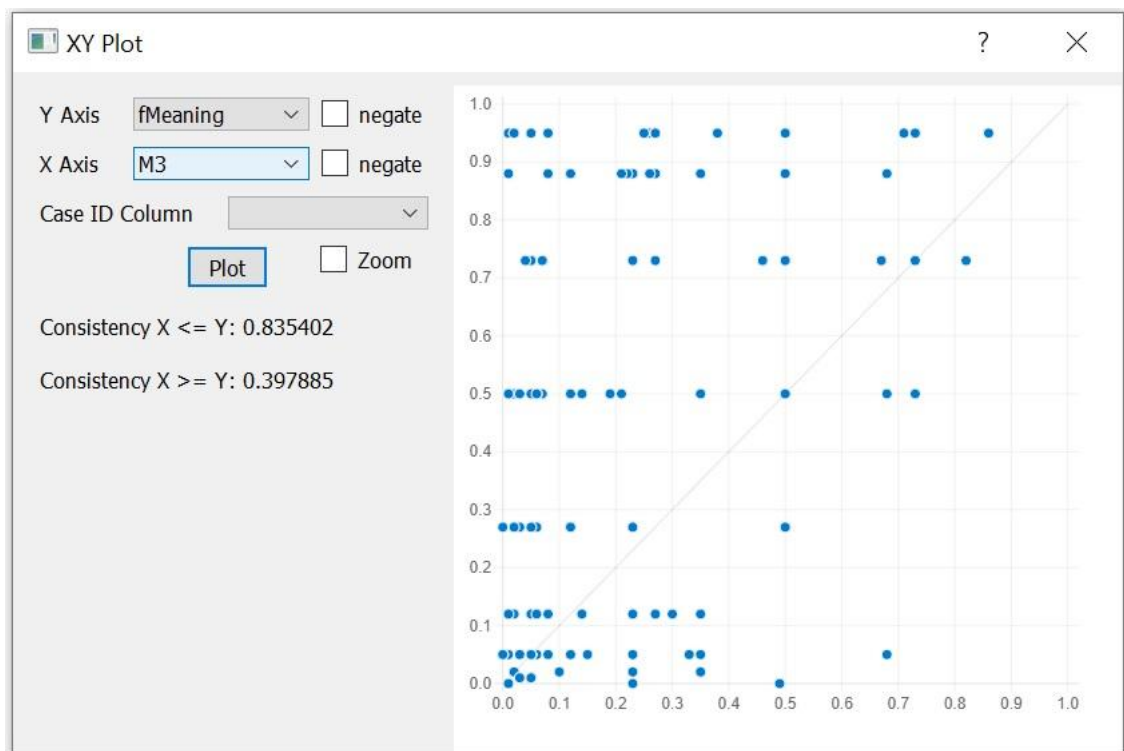


Meaningful=meaning in life, **Growmind**=growth mindset, **Training**=IT training, **JFit**=Person-job fit, **Spiritcap**=Spiritual capital, **Enriched**=Enriched job design, ~ =absence of predictor.

Table 8. M3 Predictive validity – Hybrid/Remote

Model: fMeaningful = f(fGrowmind, fTraining, fPJFit, fWNI, fResilience, fDetachment, fSpiritcap, fEnriched)	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency
M1: fGrowmind*~fTraining*~fPJFit*~fWNI*fResilience*fDetachment*fSpiritcap*fEnriched	.141	.052	.914
M2: ~fGrowmind*fTraining*fPJFit*fWNI*fResilience*~fDetachment*fSpiritcap*fEnriched	.174	.053	.881
M3: ~fGrowmind*fTraining*fPJFit*~fWNI*fResilience*fDetachment*fSpiritcap*fEnriched	.158	.024	.904
Solution coverage	.264		
Solution consistency	.876		

Test of **M1** using the holdout sample data



Meaningful=meaning in life, **Growmind**=growth mindset, **Training**=IT training, **JFit**=Person-job fit, **Spiritcap**=Spiritual capital, **Enriched**=Enriched job design, ~ =absence of predictor.