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Enhancing Meaningful Work Through Meaning in Life: Mediating Effect of Prosocial Organizational and Individual Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to investigate the effect of meaning in life (MIL) on meaningful work (MW) and to examine the mediating role of prosocial organizational behavior (POB) and prosocial individual behavior (PIB). Data were obtained from employees (600) working in different sectors in Düzce city center. A mediation model was designed and tested employing bootstrapping technique. The results showed that MIL had significant effects on MW, POB, and PIB. The findings also demonstrated significant effects of POB and PIB on MW. Besides, the mediating roles of POB and PIB were confirmed. The current study highlights meaning in life, prosocial organizational and individual behaviors as key factors in understanding how employees' find their work meaningful. However, it should be noted that POB has a stronger mediating effect than PIB. Meaningful work, which is an antecedent of positive organizational outcomes, can be reinforced within the organization through prosocial behaviors.

Keywords: Meaningful work, meaning in life, prosocial organizational behavior.

JEL Classification Codes: D23, M10

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of work as a social activity that ensures the continuity of life has been one of the most central activities of life since the existence of humanity (Kapız, 2001). With the Industrial Revolution, work ceased to be an activity done at home and has become one of the basic elements of the modern workforce that provide mass production in factories (Kamber, 2014). Because most of us spend most of our time at work or doing work-related activities, it is difficult to separate work from other areas of life. The most important reason for this is that living and earning a living are closely linked (Örgev & Günalan: 2011).

Frankl (2009) defined the meaning of life as "a fundamental power inherent in human nature, an effort to make life meaningful or to find meaning". The meaningfulness of a person's life indicates that he has something he values and believes (Battista & Almond, 1973). People want to take part in jobs that satisfy them and add meaning to their lives (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000), and more and more people focus on the idea

that work can be meaningful and fulfilling (Dandona, 2013). In this respect, meaningful work means that the employee feels a purpose beyond his basic needs and materiality in his work and assigns a role to the work in terms of internal development (Göçen & Terzi, 2019). The presence of meaning in life transforms the individual into an employee with high self-efficacy in his career journey while reducing depression (Steger & Dik, 2009). According to a study, those who become incapable of working after an illness have also lost their identity because they see work as a part of their identity. Those who became able to work returned to a healthy life with the support of the social relations they established in the workplace (Rasmussen & Elverdam, 2008). While people can have a purposeless existential meaning without working, work itself provides the individual with short and long-term goals that can result in deep satisfaction (Frankl, 2009; Glaw et al, 2017). Therefore, work is an element that should be included in the process of making sense of life, rather than just a means of making a living. One of the main aims of this research is to understand the interaction between the meaning in life and the meaningful work.

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We make our lives meaningful through active participation in activities dedicated to achieving the good beyond ourselves (Levy, 2005). Voluntary helping another is related to having a great sense of purpose and meaning in life (Klein, 2017). Prosocial behaviors exhibited voluntarily to help others without expecting an external reward can be characterized by a tendency to protect, share and help others (Flouri & Sarmadi, 2016). Behaviors such as helping, comforting, sharing, and cooperating that connect individuals in society are described as the source of prosocial behaviors (Altıntaş & Bıçakçı, 2017). From a holistic perspective, work is an important element in defining a meaningful life. However, it is important to identify mediating variables in order to better understand this relationship. The mediating role of prosocial behaviors in the relationship between meaning in life and meaningful work has been examined, based on the importance of the individual acting by thinking of others in the meaning process.

The results obtained primarily make significant contributions to the "meaningful work" literature. However, there are also results supporting the contribution of prosocial behavior to positive organizational outcomes in the business world.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

MIL – MW

Questions like, "Who am I?", "What is the meaning of life?", "What am I living for", "Why am I here?" are perhaps the most ancient questions in human history. There is no clear answer to such questions and there is a strong belief that a life isolated from these questions should be questioned (Balcı & Ağ, 2019). Although the concept of the meaning of life is associated with Frankl, it has become one of the main topics of existential psychology.

Adler argued that the true meaning of life is to do useful work for others. He noted that the others who think only of themselves and never benefit society, simply say what can I do for my life and leave without a trace (Adler, 2003). Steger et al. (2008) studied the differences in the meaning of life in different cultures. As a result, he concluded that the meaning attributed to life by each culture differs, but the meaning of life is also important for the welfare of society.

Three basic theories of meaning of life can be mentioned: Becker's theory of terror management, which addresses the issue sociologically, Synder's theory of meaning as control, and Frankl's logotherapy, an existential humanistic psychologist. The theoretical background of the meaning in life variable used in the study is logotherapy. Logotherapy's mission is to help individuals find meaning in their lives. Frankl's (2009) logotherapy is an analytical process that helps people become aware of their hidden logos (meaning) in their existence, and the search for meaning is inevitable for a natural, productive, and healthy life. Frankl (2009) asserts three main criteria that are inevitable and essential for logotherapy:

1. a person should create meaning for his life by doing a work or creating a work, that is, he should succeed.

2. people should do something to give meaning and purpose to their lives.

3. Even if a person experiences unavoidable pain throughout his life, he should strive to make his life meaningful.

While people are chasing a gain with which they can continue their lives, on the other hand, they need to give meaning to their livies to satisfy their inner world and live in accordance with that meaning (Örgev & Günalan, 2011). It is wrong to interpret meaningful work as what it means or says to the individuals (Steger, 2012). Meaningful work involves seeking an answer to questions such as "Why am I doing this job, why am I in this job?" (Göçen & Terzi, 2019). Many people (70%) continue to search for the meaning of their work intensively (Holbeche & Springett, 2009). Working for people is perceived as having a purpose, gaining a sense of achievement, and expressing oneself, while not working can leave people aimless and deprived of opportunities to contribute (Morse & Weiss (1955). People who find meaning in their lives also find meaning in their work (Steger & Dik, 2009) and see their work as one of the instruments that will enable them to realize their life's purpose (Balcı & Ağ, 2019).

MIL – POB & MIL – PIB

Humans are creatures with unlimited needs in terms of their characteristics. Finding meaning in life is a personal need. Exhibiting positive social behavior and the expectation of seeing positive social behavior from other people around us is a social need. Personality and values play an important role in prosocial behavior. These behaviors are not limited to a particular social environment. The individual can exhibit prosocial behaviors without expecting anything in return in his business life, where he spends a significant part of his time (Öcal & Sarnıç, 2017). POB is the behavior of an

organization member to enhance the well-being of a person, group, or organization as part of his or her job (Lee, 2001).

İşbaşı (2000) stated that prosocial behaviors are divided into two categories: with organizational functionality and without organizational functionality. Prosocial behaviors with organizational functionality can be characterized as the behavior of employees to constantly improve the organization in which they work, to work with their colleagues as a whole, and be aware of their responsibilities within the organization. Prosocial behaviors with organizational functionality are also divided into two areas, namely defined-role behaviors and extra-role behaviors. İşbaşı (2000) explains defined-role behavior as exhibiting behaviors that are included in the role definition, while extra-role behaviors are not included in the role definition.

The defined-role behavior relates to the core tasks such as duties, responsibilities, and activities that the individual performs in the organization (Zhu, 2013). Defined-role behaviors refer to expected behaviors related to job performance that is defined by the individual in the work environment (Katz, 1964). Extra-role behaviors are defined as "behaviors exhibited by employees according to their desires that have positive or negative effects on the organization in various ways" (Çetin & Fıkırkoca, 2010). It is important for organizational efficiency that employees help their colleagues and exhibit similar extra-role behaviors (Moorman et al., 1993). Extra-role behaviors have a more positive effect than defined role behaviors. Defined-role behaviors depend on the individual's primary roles, whereas extra-role behaviors are behaviors that the individual performs voluntarily and without coercion. Extra-role behaviors have three main characteristics. 1-Roles are not predetermined. 2-Reward systems are not predetermined. 3- There is no penalty for not doing it (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

People who engage in prosocial behaviors such as spending money to help others and volunteering, experience more meaning in their lives (Klein, 2017). Helping others can increase self-worth because prosocial behavior is generally valued and appreciated (Klein et al., 2015). Establishing social relationships with others is an important predictor of individuals perceptions of meaningfulness (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2016). Having a purpose in life is associated with positive social behaviors (Shek et al., 1994). Chang et al. (2021) point out that there are positive relationships between the search for meaning in life and experienced meaning and prosocial behaviors. Studies have found that maintaining attention

to the needs of others or reducing self-importance is beneficial for promoting prosocial behaviors (Dambrun and Ricard, 2011; Dou et al., 2018). Grant (2012) also supports the idea that employees who are empowered by meaning also perceive a significant prosocial effect.

POB - MW

Work is one of the ways adults make a living for themselves and others (Dirkx, 1995). Schaefer and Darling (1996) describe work as a way to serve others. Meaning at work implies a relationship between the person and the organization or workplace, in terms of commitment, loyalty, and dedication (Chalofsky, 2003). Fulfilling the need to do a meaningful work is related to the individual's goal of contributing to society (Jaeger, 1994). People who indicate their work is meaningful and serves a greater social or common good are psychologically better adjusted and also have desirable characteristics for organizations (Arnold et al., 2007). In this sense, work serves to create and sustain value and meaning beyond economic productivity (Yeoman, 2014).

Prosocial behaviors cover such elements as empathy, sympathy, compassion, interest, consolation, mutual aid, sharing, cooperation, volunteering, and donating (Trommsdorff et al., 2007). Expressing a problem in the workplace is based on the employee's thinking of the organization or colleagues rather than himself (Goldman & Fordyce, 1983). Employees who tend to exhibit prosocial organizational behavior tend to use their time, energy, and other personal resources for the good of the organization in ways that may sacrifice some of their interests (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). On the other hand, prosocial individual behaviors also increase among people who show increased concern for others and empathy skills (Mcneely & Meglino, 1994). Prosocial altruistic behavior in the organization contributes to employees finding their work more meaningful and motivated (Vural et al., 2021). In this context, prosocial behaviors that benefit the organization appear to be a variable that affects employee's efforts to make work meaningful.

MIL – POB & PIB – MW

People search for meaning throughout their lives is considered an important factor in their development and well-being (Seligman et al., 2005). In addition, an individual's effort to find meaning in life positively affects pleasure and life satisfaction at work (Steger et al., 2006). Allan et al. (2016) mention a negative relationship between job stress and the existence of meaning in life
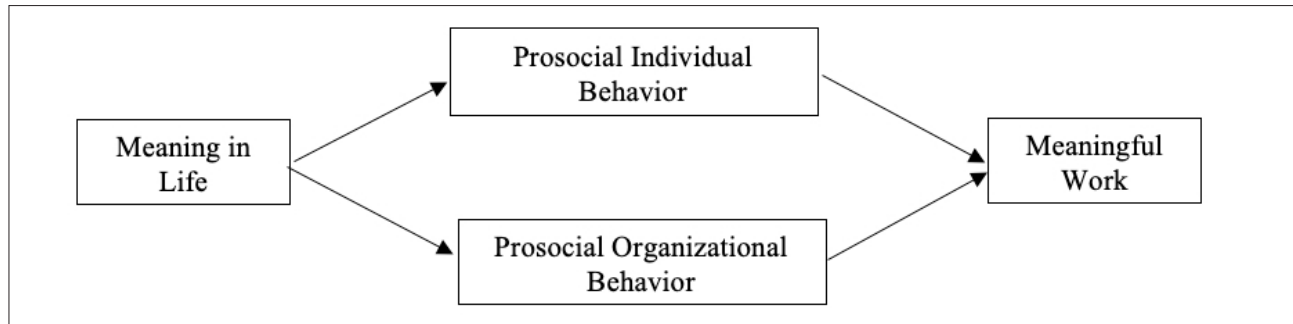
Figure 1. Conceptual Model

while noting that this relationship is positive for those who are searching for meaning. Steger et al. (2009) argue that the two dimensions they propose for meaningful work also apply to the general meaning of life. These are purpose (highly motivating, long-term goals that people are committed to and passionate about) and understanding (the ability to find pattern, consistency, and importance in many events and experiences in their lives). Fully meaningful work includes both components and relies on satisfying relationships within the workplace and a clearly understood sense of identity (Steger & Dik, 2010).

According to a widely held view, altruistic and prosocial behaviors result from positive experiences and processes, whereas antisocial behaviors are often based on negative conditions and life experiences (Volldhardt, 2009). In this context, prosocial behaviors appear as desirable behaviors in both social and business lives. Although prosocial behavior seems to have a short-term cost to the individual, it can be beneficial to both the individual and the organization in the long run (Joireman et al., 2006). Prosocial behavior in the workplace occurs voluntarily and optionally because it is not disclosed based on an employment contract (Borman & Motowidlow, 1993). People may engage in prosocial behavior simply because it serves their interests and/or they feel morally obligated to do so, or because they sincerely care about potential beneficiaries (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009).

Although previous studies (Steger & Dik, 2009; Balcı & Ağ, 2019) have shown that meaning in life positively affects perceptions of meaningful work, the nature of the relationship between ML and MW remains to be explored. To better understand the relationship between these two variables, an attemp was made to examine the mediating effect of POB and PIB. As a result, the two hypotheses are expressed as follows:

H1: The effect of meaning in life on meaningful work is positively mediated by prosocial organizational behavior.

H2: The effect of meaning in life on meaningful work is positively mediated by prosocial individual behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data collection and Participants' Characteristics

Data were obtained from employees working in Düzce city center. Since the variables cover all employees, no specific sector was specified. The number of samples (n=600) representing the population was reached and the data was obtained using the convenience sampling method. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request. Necessary permissions were obtained from Düzce University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on 04.06.2020 for the study. All data were obtained on a voluntary basis from the participants.

The survey instrument was pre-tested in a pilot study with 100 employees from different sectors. The scale items were evaluated by the participants in terms of clarity and necessary adjustments were made based on their feedback.

Data was collected via online survey links sent to participants. A total of 648 questionnaires were collected, 600 questionnaires were included in the analysis by subtracting 48 of the questionnaires for different reasons (such as studying in a city other than the sample or being retired etc.).

73% of the employees participating in the survey are male and 55.8% single. Looking at educational level of the participants, the majority (52%) have a bachelor's degree. Participants from many different occupational groups, including engineers, salespeople, accountants, teachers and civil servants were included in the survey.

Measures

A 37-item questionnaire was used to measure the constructs of meaning in life, meaningful work, and prosocial organizational behavior. The five-point scale was used to rate agreement or disagreement with the items in the questionnaire on a scale of 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree.

Meaning in life (ML) was measured with a five-item scale adapted from the instrument developed by Steger et al. (2006). The scale was translated from English to Turkish by Boyraz, Lightsey, and Can (2013). The original scale consists of two sub-dimensions: Existence and search for meaning in life. In this study, existence of meaning in life dimension was used (α = 0.82).

Meaningful work (MW) was measured with a five-item scale adapted from the instrument developed by Göçen & Terzi (2019). The original scale consists of six sub-dimensions: meaningful work, search for meaning, work relations, humility, transcendence, and meaning leadership at work. In this study, the meaningful work dimension was used (α = 0.84).

Prosocial behaviors (POB & PIB) were measured with an eleven-item scale adapted from the instrument developed by McNeely & Meglino (1994). The scale was translated from English to Turkish by Şentürk and Altunok (2023). The scale was adapted to the Turkish language by complying all processes (Seçer, 2018) in the scale adaptation phase. The original scale consists of three sub-dimensions: role-prescribed prosocial behavior, prosocial organizational behavior, and prosocial individual behavior. In this study, the prosocial organizational and prosocial individual behaviors dimensions were used (α = .90, .85).

CONSTRUCT VALIDITY

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is used in more than one discipline, especially in social sciences, health sciences, economics, marketing, behavioral sciences, and educational sciences (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2006). It is a multivariate statistical method based on the identification of observable and unobservable variables in a specific theoretical causal relationship model (Byrne, 2010).

A data control process was followed to convert the data into the appropriate format. First of all, the missing data was checked and it was confirmed that there was no missing data. Then, the normal distribution condition was evaluated over the kurtosis and skewness values. Since the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were not suitable for a sample of 600 people, kurtosis and skewness values were used (Kim, 2013). For the analysis of kurtosis and skewness values, Curran et al.'s (1996) threshold values (Skewness ±3, Kurtosis ±7) were taken into account. It was determined that the values of all items were within the threshold value range. Therefore, the normal distribution condition is satisfied.

Construct validity was tested via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The fit indices of the CFA model ([x^2/df] = 3.560, [GFI] = .908, [CFI] = .937, [TLI] = .927, [RMSEA] = .065) demonsrated a good fit. The factor loading values (between .65 and .92.) were above the accepted threshold (.60) and this result verifies the convergent validity (Yang et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2022).

The discriminant validity was confirmed by comparing the value with the correlations. According to the results of the analysis, the value was significantly larger than the correlations between the construct pairs and accordingly the discriminant validity criterion proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was satisfied.

The convergent validity was examined by calculating CR and AVE. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) AVE value must be greater than 0.5 and CR value must be greater than 0.70, and the condition CR > AVE must be met to ensure convergent validity. AVE and CR values were above the recommended thresholds (Yang et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2022).

Common method bias (CMB) is a situation encountered when survey participants are asked to fill in surveys on dependent and independent variables. Harman's single-

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the constructs and $\sqrt{AVE}$

	Mean	SD	ML	POB	MW	PIB
1. Meaning in Life	3.87	.92	**.802**			
2. Prosocial Organizational Behavior	4.18	.76	.432**	**.781**		
3. Meaningful Work	3.78	.88	.384**	.582**	**.716**	
4. Prosocial Individual Behavior	3.98	.91	.271**	.565**	.373**	**.781**

Note. **p < 0.01. The √AVE for the construct is presented in bold.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Analysis

Variable	Loadings	CR	AVE	α
Meaning in life	.883	.877	.644	.885
	.871			
	.752			
	.687			
Prosocial Organizational Behavior	.844	.904	.611	.900
	.834			
	.826			
	.761			
	.744			
	.667			
Meaningful Work	.792	.880	.513	.872
	.750			
	.736			
	.706			
	.693			
	.677			
	.651			
Prosocial Individual Behavior	.620	.860	..611	.853
	.697			
	.848			
	.925			

factor approach was used to examine CMB (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). In this technique, researchers include all scale items in the exploratory factor analysis and examine the unrotated factor solution to obtain the number of factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 that explain the total variance. The assumption here is that a single component will explain more than 50% of the covariance between items and criterion constructs if CMB is present (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Rodríguez-Ardura & Meseguer-Artola, 2020). An unrotated factor analysis using the eigenvalue-greater-than-one criterion revealed three different factors that accounted for 59 percent of the variance. The first factor captured 41 percent of the variance in the data. Since a single factor did not emerge and the first factor did not account for %50 of the variance, CMB does not appear to be a problem.

RESULTS

Baron and Kenny (1986) state that some conditions to talk about the mediation effect. These conditions include relations between dependent, independent and mediator variables. The model developed by Baron and Kenny (1986) for mediation analysis has been subject to criticism recently (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007; Gürbüz, 2019; Hayes & Rockwood, 2017; Hayes, 2018). Gürbüz (2019, 57-58) deals with the first three steps of Baron and Kenny (1986) in analysis of mediation, but emphasizes that the insignificance of these steps does not eliminate the mediation effect.

The mediation effect was tested with the bootstrap technique. In the bootstrap technique, a new observation set different from each other is created by renewing the observations in the original data set, and statistical calculations are made with this new data set. In this method, more reliable results are obtained by correcting the bias and skewness related to the distribution. This technique was used because of reporting bias-corrected and accelerated confidence interval values (Gürbüz, 2019:56-57).

The findings support the prerequisites stated by Baron and Kenny (1986). In this context, the meaning in life in the ML-POB-MW equation has a significant effect on meaningful work (β = .366, 95%CI [.295, .437], t = 10.168, p < .01) and prosocial organizational behavior (β = .357, 95%CI [.297, .417], t = 11,698, p < .01). Besides prosocial
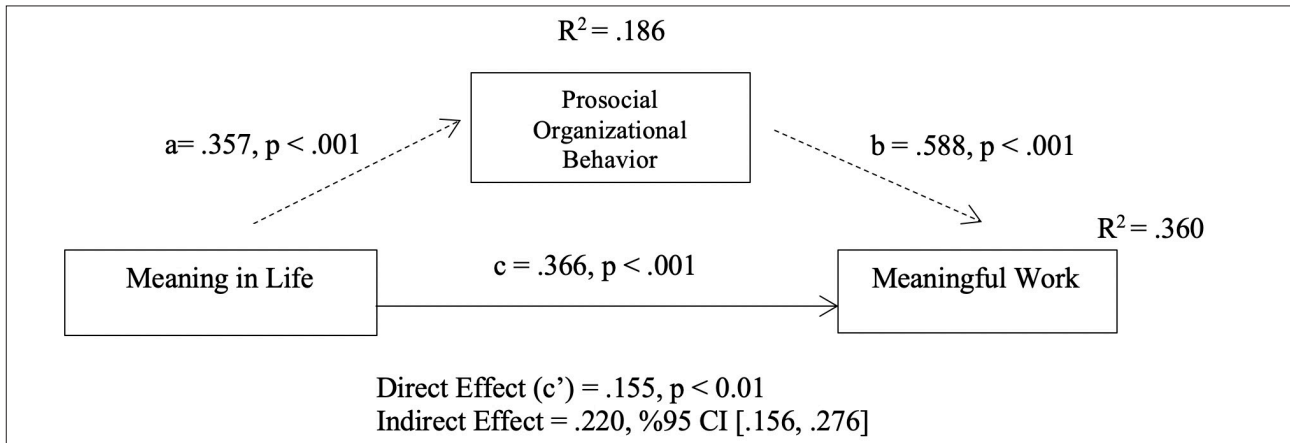
$R^2 = .186$

a= .357, p < .001

Prosocial Organizational Behavior

b = .588, p < .001

$R^2 = .360$

Meaning in Life

c = .366, p < .001

Meaningful Work

Direct Effect (c') = .155, p < 0.01
Indirect Effect = .220, %95 CI [.156, .276]

Figure 2. Mediation regression analysis (ML-POB-MW)

$R^2 = .074$

a= .269, p < .001

Prosocial Individual Behavior

b = .279, p < .001

$R^2 = .225$

Meaning in Life

c = .366, p < .001

Meaningful Work

Direct Effect (c') = .291, p < 0.01
Indirect Effect = .075, %95 CI [.042, .114]

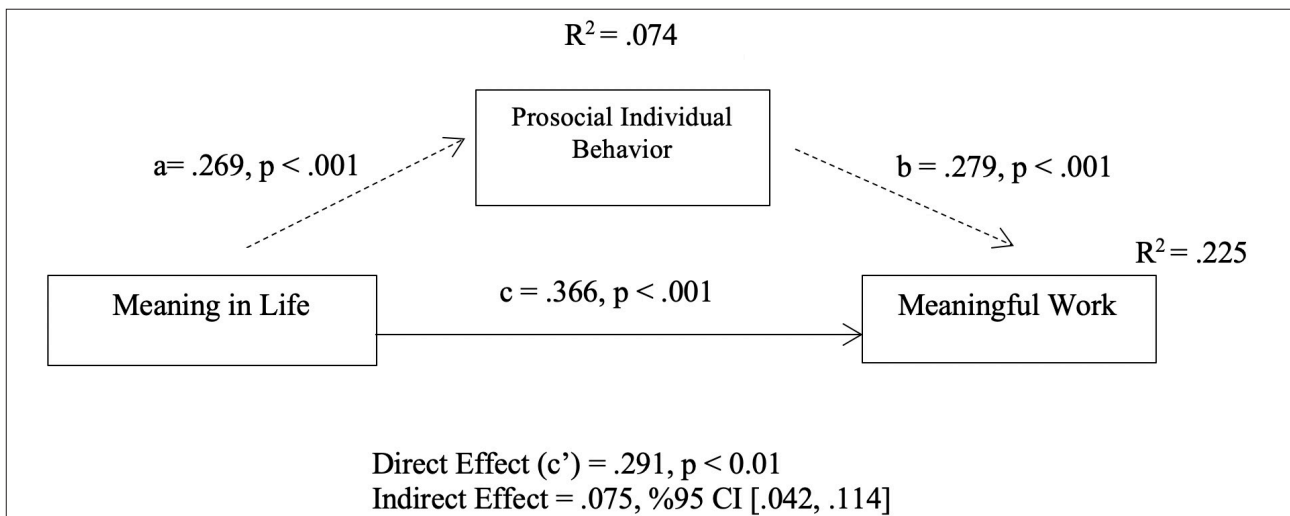**Figure 3.** Mediation regression analysis (ML-PIB-MW)

organizational behavior has a significant effect on meaningfull work (β = .588, 95%CI [.506, .670], t = 14.087, p < .01).

In the ML-PIB-MW equation, the meaning in life has a significant effect on prosocial individual behavior (β = .269, 95%CI [.192, .346], t = 6.896, p < .01). Besides, prosocial individual behavior has a significant effect on meaningful work (β = .279, 95%CI [.208, .349], t = 7.755, p < .01). Although the Baron and Kenny (1986) steps are not based on the mediating effect, it has been determined that the steps are provided.

According to the results of the mediation analysis, prosocial organizational behavior (β = .220, %95CI [.156, .276]) and prosocial individual behavior (β = .075, %95CI [.042, .114]) mediate the effect of meaning in life on meaningful work. Since the lower and upper confidence intervals (CI) values obtained by using the percentile bootstrap confidence intervals do not include 0, it can be stated that the mediation effects are significant.

DISCUSSION

This research examines the impact of the meaning of life on meaningful work and the mediating role of prosocial organizational and individual behaviors in this interaction from the perspective of employees.

The search for meaning and the alternative answers to this search can affect the whole life. The search for meaning does not progress alone but also triggers the search for purpose. Therefore, having a meaning and purpose in life is important for individual development and well-being (Seligman et al., 2005). The aforementioned quest is related to the individual's uniqueness. In this context, Socrates finds the meaning of life in living it wisely, having self-awareness and self-knowledge (Socrates, 2014). To understand is to grasp the essence of something in its entirety, to find something of ourselves in it, and to discover our awareness outside of ourselves (Kartopu, 2006). At this point, it is understood that meaning affects the whole life, and the need to investigate the concept

of meaning in work, which covers an important part of life, felt more clearly. The meaning given to work, which covers an important part of life, is fed from many sources. Rosso et al. (2010) while pointing out the self, other persons, the work context, and spiritual life as the source of meaning at work, highlighted the mechanisms that will make work meaningful as authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, cultural and interpersonal sensemaking.

Findings from the research confirm the interaction between meaning obtained in life and meaning obtained at work. The research findings obtained are consistent with the studies in the literature (Steger & Dik, 2009; Balcı & Ağ, 2019). Morse and Weiss (1955) state that not working can leave people aimless and deprived of opportunities to contribute to work and society. This interaction reveals that the choice of job is to be made much more carefully and is an important decision that affects the whole life. Even if today's world defines work from a materialistic point of view, it is much more valuable in terms of the time it covers in human life. It is important to make sense of the work in terms of acquiring an existential purpose and maintaining life on this plane. Therefore, work is a process that needs to be handled with a holistic perspective for people.

It has been confirmed that the relationship between meaning in life and work is enhanced through prosocial organizational and individual behaviors. As everything is known with its opposite, the value of meaning will be clearer when it is considered over meaninglessness. Gürses and Kuruçay (2018) list the problems caused by meaninglessness as alienation, suicide, hopelessness, insecurity, addiction, unhappiness, conflict, and corruption of values. Amabile and Kramer (2012) state that top managers routinely undermine creativity, productivity, and commitment if they do not take into account the meaning that employees give to their jobs. Accordingly, behaviors that will strengthen and support the meaning attributed to their work by the employees will primarily eliminate the negative consequences for the organization. Afterward, it will enable the employees to realize their strengths and reflect them to the work. It is understood that prosocial organizational and individual behaviors are important tools that support the meaning of life in gaining meaning in the workplace. The findings support the idea that prosocial organizational behavior is a more powerful mediator than prosocial individual behavior. In this direction, the need to address the work-life meaningfulness balance with a more holistic perspective arises. Rather than individual approaches, practices reinforcing prosocial behaviors that will encompass the whole of the organization and become a part of the culture gain importance.

Managerial Implications

This study has valuable implications. All stakeholders in the organization have important contributions to the meaning-making processes. The process of gaining meaning also includes work, which covers an important part of the individual's living space. Providing support to the meaning-making processes is important for the interests of the organization, and it should not only be under the responsibility of the managers but also the support of the employees to each other should be emphasized in the organizational policies. It is an attitude that every organization desires that its employees prioritize the organization before themselves. Creating the organizational culture and climate that will enable this to happen can be achieved by the managers highlighting and valuing the prosocial behaviors within the organization. With this awareness, managers should empower employees to give innovative ideas for the organization, act protectively, and support their colleagues. Besides, ensuring the participation of all employees institutionally in the internal and external charitable support processes of the organization is important for the acceptance and prevalence of prosocial behaviors within the organization.

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