A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF AFFECTIVE WELL-BEING AMONG SME EMPLOYEES IN MALAYSIA

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Table of Contents

Abstract

It is essential for organisations to prioritise the affective well-being of their employees, considering the interplay between affective well-being, mental health, and positive organisational outcomes. Yet, the literature on affective well-being has been minimal and in need of more focused research. Similarly, meaning at work, an important construct in employees' well-being research, faces a dearth of research, especially meaning at work in SMEs. Given that previous studies have advocated for research focused on SMEs, as findings based on large organisations are not transferrable to smaller organisations (Heneman et al., 2000), this research focuses on SMEs. The minimal research on affective well-being among SMEs in Malaysia has formed the basis for a qualitative research design to be adopted, which is the empirical study 1. This study seeks to explore the affective well-being of SME employees. The absence of research on the meaning at work among SMEs, has formed the background for the conceptualisation of study 2. The study examines how participants define meaning at work, and how their respective organisations allow or does not allow them to have meaning at work. From the findings of empirical study 1 and study 1, a conceptual framework was devised, and the corresponding variables were tested in a quantitative design which is the empirical study 3.

For study 1, it aimed to explore and understand what about an organization that enables SMEs employees to feel positive and negative emotions in the workplace. In study 1, it was found that participants who experienced virtuousness in their organizations had more instances of experiencing positive affect at work. Conversely, participants who did not

experienced virtuousness in their organization or a lack thereof, were more likely to experience negative affect at work. Specifically, participants who experienced virtues such as trust, a compassionate and caring environment, altruism, integrity, forgiveness, and optimism had experienced more affective wellbeing at work. For study 2, this second qualitative study explored on what makes SME employees derive meaning at work. It sought to understand and explore what do employees perceive as meaning at work and how does an organization enables (or hinders) employees from achieving meaning at work. In this study, participants discussed on what and how do they perceive meaning at work. Participants spoke on this through sub themes such as fulfilment & personal development, being aligned to personal values, impact to organization and impact to society. Besides, participants also discussed on the association between experiencing meaning at work with affective wellbeing. Further, study 2 had found that instances of virtuousness allowed SME employees to experience meaning at work. Specifically, this is from the perspective of four themes namely; trust and altruism at work, doing "Good" work, doing "Good" in society and care and compassion. Lastly, in study 3, this quantitative study had found that all four hypothesis of this study is supported. Specifically, the hypothesis that 1) Organization virtuousness (OV) will significantly and positively predict job related affective wellbeing (JAWS), 2) OV will significantly and positively predict meaning at work (MW), 3) MW will significantly and positively predict JAWS and 4) MW will fully mediate the relationship between OV and JAWS are all supported. This quantitative study is essential as it confirms the conceptual framework derived from the first two qualitative studies of this thesis. In a nutshell, the mixed methods study of this

research has allowed the context of affective well-being among SME employees in Malaysia to be understood further, with its respective, practical, and theoretical implications.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Context of the Study

1.0 Chapter Overview

Chapter one presents the background and research context that led to the development of the study. Specifically, this chapter explores the key concepts in the study: affective well-being in the workplace, meaning at work, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), SMEs and the economy, challenges affecting SMEs, SMEs and affective well-being, and SME research in Malaysia. This chapter briefly discusses the significance of the three empirical studies in the thesis and justifies the theoretical contribution of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the Thesis: Affective Well-being in the Workplace

In recent decades, the psychological construct of subjective well-being has received significant attention from researchers and workplace professionals. This attention is justified based on the importance of well-being to an individual's quality of life and its transcending indicator of economic prosperity (Diener et al., 1999). Subjective well-being has three distinct components: Life Satisfaction (LS), Pleasant Affect (PA), and Unpleasant Affect (UA) (Diener et al., 1999). Although these constructs are interrelated, they are typically measured and analysed separately. While life satisfaction assesses an individual's self-evaluation of their quality of life, pleasant affect and unpleasant affect evaluate the positive and negative feelings of people's experiences. Despite the varying opinions on the distinct constructs, this study focuses on the affective state of individual experiences mainly due to the importance of emotional voyage in well-being and health.

The conceptualisation of affect as a component of well-being is traceable to subjective well-being's sub-opinion, which acknowledges the positive approach in evaluating well-being rather than an over-emphasis on negative experiences (Diener et al., 1999). In the past, research on well-being has concentrated mainly on the continuum of "positive – negative" experiences such as misery to elation (Diener et al, 1999, MacLeod & Byrne, 1996, Lyubomirsky, 2011). However, more recently, well-being research has focused on the individual's affective evaluation as a key component for conceptualising affective well-being as a form of happiness. In this regard, happiness and affective well-being are used interchangeably to understand how individuals have relatively more positive affect than negative ones (Hofmann et al., 2014).

Mental health research has also extensively discussed the importance of affective well-being. Keyes (2002) found links between mental health symptoms, a lack of hedonia, and positive functioning of affective well-being. Over 30 days, individuals with a high positive affect and a happy state were associated with a lower risk of mental distress. This finding suggests that an individual's affective state is an important indicator of health and well-being. Further, research into emotions and their association with happiness preceded research on affective well-being (Hosie & Sevastos, 2010). Such an argument points to the established link between one's emotions and experiences of happiness with affective well-being, whereby most studies typically measure it as the presence of a positive emotional state such as hopefulness, optimism, and contentment (Hosie & Sevastos, 2010). This is also similar to Diener et al. (2019)'s conceptualisation of happiness – as the presence of dispositional positive affect and absence of dispositional negative affect.

Based on the foregoing, affect is a measurable indicator of well-being, happiness, and mental health. Since employees spend more time at work than anywhere else (Muchinsky, 2000) and their emotions tend to underline their workplace attitudes and behaviour, examining the prominent role of affective or emotional state at work is a justifiable academic endeavour. This is especially relevant since emotions may underline employee's attitude and behaviour at work. Similarly, empirical social scientific studies have established connections between affective well-being at work and positive work outcomes. For instance, Zelenski et al. (2008) posit that employees with higher positive affect at both state and trait levels demonstrate higher productivity at work, thus suggesting the effectiveness of positive affect in influencing employee behaviour and future outcomes.

Furthermore, compared to other indicators such as job satisfaction, quality of work life, and life satisfaction, positive affect has been shown to have the most potent predictive effect on employees' productivity. In Oswald et al. (2015), participants whose moods were induced to experience positive affect demonstrated a higher productivity rate. This finding suggests that an affective or positive emotional state has a causal effect on one's performance. Similarly, Hosie et al. (2002) found that affective well-being predicts supervisor and employee self–reported work performance ratings. However, although emotion remains crucial in explaining employee behaviour, this does not seem to always be the case at work (Muchinsky, 2000). In the book entitled The Organization Man, the author William Whyte spoke in regard to how individuals in business should be governed by objectivity (Muchinsky, 2000). This statement signals how emotions are often seen as unnecessary parts of employee experience within

organisations and perceived as less essential components of work (Muchinsky, 2000). Therefore, more attention needs to be given to the range of employee affective experience as a strategy for optimising employee behaviour and performance (Kansky & Diener, 2017).

Prior to Muchinsky's study, Warr (1990) developed a scale on affective well-being at work. Warr (1990) suggested affective well-being through three key axes i) displeased – pleased, ii) depression – enthusiasm, and iii) anxiety – contentment with the varying state of work conditions. This scale echoes Briner's (1997) viewpoint on workplace affective well-being as being the same as happiness experienced at work. According to Briner (1997), the multidimensional nature of affective well-being allows the concept to capture the complexities, subtlety and changes in employees' emotions, which are common experiences in the workplace.

The most recent exploration of affective well-being is presented by Van Katwyk et al. (2000), who extended Warr's (1990) and Muchinsky's (2000) argument through the development of a job-related affective well-being scale. The study highlights two distinct clusters of affective phrases captured from employees' experience and related to work that mostly represents positive or negative affect. Thus, for some time, the only available scales in the organisational research literature for measuring affective well-being were those provided by Van Katwyk et al. (2000) and Warr's (1990). Since then, Hosie and Sevastos (2010) have reasoned that job-related affective well-being is the closest expression of workplace happiness. This position explains why these two terms are used interchangeably among organisational researchers. Employees who show positive emotions are expected to demonstrate these attributes stably over

time (Hosie & Sevastos, 2010), further justifying the significance of investigating workplace affect.

Despite the importance of emotional experience to employees' function at work, research on the subject matter still wanes (Muchinsky, 2000). Individual emotions are often neglected and not at the centre, or a primary focus, especially in organisational research (Muchinsky, 2000). Related empirical studies tend to be skewed to constructs such as job satisfaction and stress to describe employee emotions. In contrast, the interplay between emotion and affect is relegated to the background. This situation presents a gap that the present study addresses by analysing employee affective well-being in a work setting, not just as a by–product of previous literature or human cognition. Developing knowledge around this area will support organisations in designing proactive interventions and strategies, especially in relation to specific human resource practices that can improve employee affective well-being at work.

Given the prominent role of employees' affective experience in influencing positive work outcomes, the dearth of research on employee affective experience at work needs to be addressed. Moreover, the limitation of previous research to examine affective well-being as a singular variable (most studies combine it as part of the larger construct of subjective well-being and psychological well-being) denotes the importance of exploring this line of work. Doing so will help future research to establish a sound knowledge of the factors influencing specific mechanisms (such as mediators and moderators) and related outcomes to employees' affective experience at work, which is still limited.

1.2   Background of the Thesis: Meaning at Work

Workers in most jobs care about more than their salary, with consulting firms like a Great Place to Work advising organisations to create corporate cultures which are motivating (Cassar & Meier, 2018). A way to motivate employees is by allowing them to engage in meaningful work (Carton, 2018). Philosophically, the search for meaning is a crucial aspect of human experience (Tablan, 2019). Meaning at work refers to the level of importance that employees perceive their work possesses (Tablan, 2019). It construes a state of contentment where employees feel energetic, purposeful, and fascinated about their work (Salleh et al., 2020). In other words, meaningful work is a way of thriving at work (Salleh et al., 2020). Developing meaningfulness at work is an ongoing and fluid process that is influenced by factors such as job characteristics, individuals themselves, and the work environment (Salleh et al., 2020). In terms of its utility, when employees feel meaningful at work, their co-workers, the organisations, and society benefits (Salleh et al., 2020).

Kelly Consulting's (2009) survey of 100,000 employees working in North America, Europe, and the Asia Pacific region highlights the importance of meaning at work. The survey reports that half of the respondents were willing to accept lower pay for work they deemed meaningful. In this regard, employees would appreciate if their careers and work meant something meaningful, as opposed to just being a means to earn a paycheck or to pass their time (Sˇverko & VizekVidovic´, 1995). This standpoint is not surprising, considering the popularity of seminars, coaching sessions, and books geared towards helping people find meaning and purpose in their work (Steger et al., 2012).

Work environments are increasingly moving towards flexible work approaches, technologic advancement, and decentralisation. These diverse environments causes a huge challenge for organisations to strike a balance between a focus on profit and initiatives of organisational support (Allvin et al., 2011). Organisations that are not proactive amidst such changes may be detached from their employees. Organisational detachment typically manifests in low employee engagement and commitment towards the organisation (Bakker et al., 2008). In Germany, Gallup (2012) found that 86% of employees reported low or no work engagement in their organisations. Low work engagement is of great concern as it negatively affects the national economy (Gallup, 2012). From the employees' perspective, a lack of commitment and engagement results in meaninglessness at work (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). Given the importance of understanding meaning at work, it is surprising that there is a shortage in the literature on meaning at work in SMEs. This gap is of concern given that SMEs have their unique context, which differs in theory and practice from large organisations.

Further discussion on the nature, scope and employee relations in SMEs is presented in the subsequent sections. The empirical chapter of this thesis covers meaning at work among SME employees. Given that there is no literature on meaning at work (both qualitative and quantitative) on SME employees, this forms the basis for empirical chapter 2, which explores meaning at work among SME employees. Next, the definition and context of SMEs is discussed below.

1.3   Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs): Scope and Definition

The European Commission defines small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as companies or organisations with less than 250 employees (European Commission, n.d., Williams & Snow, 2012). The Commission further stipulates that a company is considered an SME if it records an annual turnover of up to 50 million Euros and a balance sheet that does not exceed 43 million Euros (European Commission). In 2007, there were 4.7 million registered businesses in the United Kingdom, out of which 99% were small and medium-sized businesses, collectively accounting for an annual turnover of 1,440 billion pounds (Williams & Snow, 2012).

In Malaysia, no consensus definition of SMEs was postulated before 2005 (Chin & Lim, 2018). This absence of agreement led researchers and practitioners to define SMEs based on quantitative indicators such as employee number and fixed capital (Chin & Lim, 2018). However, the growing importance of SMEs in the Malaysian economic landscape resulted in the Bank Negara Malaysia (National Bank of Malaysia) proposing an official definition of SMEs from the 1st of January, 2014 (Malaysia, 2013). The proposed definition was to standardise terminological usage and determine SMEs' eligibility criteria for government assistance and exclusions (Malaysia, 2013). An SME is defined as any organisation with a sales turnover that does not exceed RM50 million or full-time employees not more than 200 workers in the manufacturing sector (Malaysia, 2013). For the services and other sectors, the defining criteria of SMEs include sales turnover that does not exceed RM20 million or full-time employees should not exceed 75 workers (Malaysia, 2013). A business will be considered an SME if it meets either criterion (sales turnover

or full-time employees), whichever is lower (Malaysia, 2013). However, since it is difficult to determine the SMEs sales turnover in Malaysia (this information is not publicly available), most researchers rely on the number of employees to determine a company's status as an SME: see June et al. (2013), Chelliah et al. (2010), and Abdullah et al. (2007).

1.3.1   SMEs and the Economy

SMEs are regarded as the pillars of the economy as they represent a pivotal source of economic growth in industrialised countries and developing economies (Robu, 2013). They account for 95% to 99% of business organisations that drive economic growth (Robu, 2013). Specifically, SMEs contribute more than 55% to the GDP and over 65% of total employment in high-income countries; more than 95% of total employment and approximately 70% of GDP in middle-income countries; over 60% of GDP and over 70% of total employment in low-income countries (Senturk, 2010). A country's economy benefits from the presence of SMEs as they promote competitiveness and contribute to the influx of new products into the market (Robu, 2013). Hence, a nation's economic strength depends on its ability to initiate and sustain conducive environments for SMEs to flourish (Robu, 2013).

SMEs have become increasingly essential in Malaysia since the late 1990s (Chin & Lim, 2018). A milestone in demonstrating the importance of SMEs to the Malaysian economy was the establishment of the National SME Development Council (NSDC) in 2004 (Chin & Lim, 2018). Since then, greater emphasis has been placed on SMEs, especially with the launch of the New Economic Model in 2010 (Chin & Lim, 2018) and the recognition of SMEs as

the backbone of the Malaysian economy. The twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021-2025) illustrates this renewed emphasis through its proposal to restore the growth momentum of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Malaysia (Malaysia, 2021). The importance of MSMEs to the economy is well demonstrated, with MSMEs contributing 38.2% (512.8 billion) to the nation's GDP and 13.5% (117.8 billion) to Malaysia's total exports in 2020 (Malaysia, 2021).

In the twelfth Malaysian plan, a higher target of 45% GDP contribution and 25% contribution of MSMEs to total exports was set as a benchmark (Malaysia, 2021). As of December 2020, there were 1,151,239 establishments categorised as MSMEs, accounting for 97.2% of total registered companies (Malaysia, 2021). From this figure, 85.8% were from the services sector, 7.4% from construction, 5.1% from manufacturing, 1.7% from agriculture and 0.3% from mining and quarrying (Malaysia, 2021). In terms of employment, the number increased to 7.2 million in 2020 compared to 6.5 million in 2015 (Malaysia, 2021). SMEs in Malaysia play a significant economic and social role, evident in increased job opportunities, decreased unemployment, increased competition, productivity and economic growth (Razak et al., 2018).

1.3.2 The Role and Challenges of SMEs Today

Due to SMEs' flexible and dynamic operating nature, they are sources of new ideas and discoveries (Yilmaz, 2004, as cited in Senturk, 2010). SMEs are generally swift in decision-making and proactive in adapting to changes (Yilmaz, 2004, as cited in Senturk, 2010). Some scholars have also viewed SMEs as being essential compared to large companies; they perceive "small as

beautiful" due to SMEs' agile nature of quick adjudication, reasonable costing, and cheaper production (Senturk, 2010). Also, in developing countries, the importance of SMEs is evident due to their role as sources of national income, platforms for entrepreneurship and outlets for increased employment (Senturk, 2010).

While there has been a significant growth of SMEs, especially after the European Commission recognised SMEs as economic pillars, there are some peculiarities. Firstly, SMEs have restricted human capital, thus posing a challenge to developing and retaining employees (Tarmann, 2017). Similarly, they have an increased employee turnover rate (Tarmann, 2017). Santander UK found that job seekers were disinterested in working in SMEs as only 18% of respondents expressed interest in working for a start-up (Powney, 2018). One of the reasons behind their sentiment was that SMEs offered lower job security and progression opportunities compared to larger companies (Powney, 2018).

SMEs also experienced unprecedented challenges and negative impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Lu et al., 2020). Lu et al.'s (2020) study on SMEs in Sichuan, China, found that SMEs faced challenges such as the inability to resume work due to a shortage of epidemic mitigation materials, disrupted supply chains and decreased market demand (Lu et al., 2020). SMEs also faced cash flow risks as payment for fixed expenditures continued without significant revenue inflow (Lu et al., 2020). Hence, such economic pressures might cause organisations to desist from investing in their employees. Unsurprisingly, employees were left with no choice but to leave their organisations, thus depleting the long-term competitive advantage of SMEs (Pan & Lin, 2022). Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, many organisations had to adjust to new ways of

working, especially remote work (Russo et al., 2021). This unprecedented work situation, the high uncertainty surrounding SMEs, and the need to adapt to a new environment exacerbated employees' stress and anxiety and affected their ability to work effectively (Russo et al., 2021).

Employees in SMEs also face additional challenges with globalisation. Idris et al. (2011) argue that globalisation increases employee expectations to work harder and deal with emotional demands. Higher job demands have led SME employees to suffer from psychological health problems and, in some extreme cases, mortality (Idris et al., 2011). Globalisation also leads to burnout and lower job satisfaction (Idris et al., 2011). This is due to the increased job demands surrounding the SME landscape, such as role conflict, exhaustion, and cynicism (Idris et al., 2011). Besides, the pressure from globalised competition has reduced organisational job resources such as decision authority, supervisory support, and co-worker support.

Globalisation challenges negatively impact the psychological condition of SME employees in developing countries, which is evident given the increased ill health and burnout reported in globalised regions (Idris et al., 2011). This sentiment is echoed by Rubio-Andrés et al. (2021), who argued that the expansion and digitalisation of economies had challenged SMEs to compete in increasingly turbulent environments (Rubio-Andrés et al., 2021). Existing literature points to how the uncertainties surrounding the external environment and economic challenges would influence small and large firms differently (Lai et al., 2016). In particular, smaller firms are more vulnerable to recession, given their unique characteristics of resource poverty, weak financing options and decreased control over external stimuli. Such a circumstance has led existing

literature to acknowledge the importance of considering firm size in understanding management's decisions on practices of people management and employment relations (Lai et al., 2016).

Given that SMEs are critical stakeholders in wealth and employment creation, the need for them to stay relevant and competitive in a globalised world cannot be overstated. Consequently, SMEs need to focus on workplace well-being (Rubio-Andrés et al., 2021), specifically affective well-being, to retain their existing employees. Fostering better workplace well-being is crucial for talent retention and establishing a competitive SME landscape (Rubio-Andrés et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further compounded the challenges in ensuring SME employees' affective well-being, as it posed additional risks to SMEs, such as closure (Lee, 2021), rising costs, scarcity of employee skills, labour, and talents (SME, 2022). These indices constitute a viable impetus for social scientific research to understudy the SME landscape and adapt accordingly.

1.3.3 Existing Affective Well-being Research and Current Organisational Practices in SMEs

Rubio-Andrés et al. (2021) and Chaiprasit and Santidhiraku (2011) have echoed the significance of safeguarding positive affect at work in SMEs, considering the limitations of capital and technology. These limitations may negatively impact employees' affect at work, the organisation's structural stability, and existing resources. Nevertheless, Chaiprasit and Santidhiraku (2011) noted that promoting affective well-being at work does not require extensive monetary resolution. They argue that it can be achieved through

simple interventions such as building a more friendly work environment for employees. Although SMEs' importance is indisputable, there has been a dearth of research and consideration to their human resource practices (Heneman et al., 2000), with even recent scholars alluding that it has not reached the stage of maturity (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021).

The current SME landscape lacks requisite resources that can improve affective well-being. This inherent lack of information and research on SMEs is worrying and problematic for theory, research, and practice. The shortfall may not be unconnected to the fact that most management theories are developed and tested on large organisations. As a result, little is known about theoretical applicability to smaller or medium-sized firms (Heneman et al., 2000). Prior studies have used firm size as a control variable (Buallay et al. 2017) but not as a crucial contextual element to be studied (Heneman et al., 2000). This notion was further supported by Henry et al. (1995), as cited in Cassell et al. (2002), who posit that management theories focus on large firms, however, their economic importance has decreased over recent years. Perhaps, the reason for this decrease is the traditional viewpoint that SMEs are like large organisations, only differing in reduced revenue and employees (Welsh and White, 1981, as cited in Cassell et al., 2002).

Industrial organisational research tends to focus on large organisations, managers, and supervisors (Murphy, 2007). Though this is an important focus area, it only accounts for a fraction of the world (Murphy, 2007). Given this narrow research focus, much of what we understand about organisational behaviour may not be as applicable as perceived (Murphy, 2007). A possible reason is that the nature of the employment relationship in Small and Medium-

sized Businesses (SMBs) is often informal and ad hoc, shaped by the firm's context of size and resource constraints (Lai et al., 2017). In this regard, the formalisation of employee management practices used for large organisations might not apply to an SME context (Lai et al., 2017).

Murphy (2007) outlines some reasons behind the lack of focus on small businesses. Firstly, access to the population is a challenge as small companies have limited time and resources to employ consultants, sending employees to conferences, or supporting employees by sponsoring their graduate degrees, all of which allow limited contact with organisational psychologists (Murphy, 2007). Secondly, there is not enough complexity in terms of employees, participants, variety of divisions, and job titles synonymous with larger organisations (Murphy, 2007). Nevertheless, small businesses are underrepresented in organisational research, which is a cause for concern (Murphy, 2007).

Glendon et al. (2007) recommended that psychologists extend their research beyond the more comfortable and tempting contexts of larger organisations to smaller organisations. An extension of this nature would allow for a more holistic and representative sample of today's workforce. Organisational psychology researchers were also tasked to move away from quantitative biases and consider adopting qualitative methodologies, especially in under-researched areas (Glendon et al., 2007). For example, they could adopt more qualitative approaches in studying small organisations (Glendon et al., 2007). Researchers are called to identify relationships between predictor and explanatory variables and consider the unique conditions under which those relationships occur (Glendon et al., 2007). For example, relationships in large

organisations might differ or may not be sustained in smaller organisations (Glendon et al., 2007).

Specifically, research on stress, health and well-being in general does not seem to consider the size of an organisation, particularly SMEs (Brotherton et al., 2009, Johnson, 2011). Research on well-being in SMEs has been minimal, and scholars have argued that more research must be done on SMEs. This is because findings based on large-scale organisations are often not transferrable to the context of SMEs (Heneman et al., 2000). Professor Dame Carol Black, a prolific academic, reiterated the importance of prioritising employee well-being in SMEs because one in four employees in the United Kingdom has mental health issues (Smith, 2017). If left unchecked, this trend may have far-reaching consequences for the survival of SMEs (Smith, 2017). These consequences may manifest in weak employee engagement, low productivity, and high employee turnover (Smith, 2017). An AXA PPP Healthcare survey found that 82% of SMEs do not have a health and well-being strategy (Scott, 2019). In addition, the survey gathered that a quarter of SME employees had experienced job-related stress, 46% had continued working when unwell, while 27% had to continue sending and receiving emails outside of working hours (Scott, 2019). Hence, given that these well-being issues are exclusively in the context of SMEs, more research and focus is warranted. Specifically, research should focus on cultivating a workplace with healthy affective well-being to ensure positive outcomes for SMEs.

Furthermore, other salient issues that affect the well-being of employees in SMEs include: a lack of support in a disagreement with one's superiors, reduced opportunities for training, and decreased social network among

employees (Johnson, 2011). SMEs might also be understaffed, which increases the likelihood of employees' exposure to stress. Compared to large organisations stacked with different departments, SMEs do not have the luxury of such variety and dynamism (Johnson, 2011). SMEs also face unprecedented challenges given the growing competition in the global market, spurred by the fourth industrial revolution, and the economic consequences of the recent pandemic. SME owners also have higher stakes, as most risk losing everything if the business fails (Johnson, 2011). This could therefore decrease the focus of SMEs in prioritising the well-being of their employees when the need for survival seems more imminent.

Compared to large organisations, SME owners and managers contend with a paucity of time and resources which hinders them from attending seminars on workplace well-being (Brotherton et al., 2009). Perhaps more concerning, the well-being advice offered at these seminars might not be deemed relevant to SME owners as it is tailored to large-scale organisations (Brotherton et al., 2009). Also, SME owners were found to want to take on every task and opportunity, thus resulting in less role clarity, burnout, and well-being problems (Brotherton et al., 2009). The proximity of SME employees fosters high-quality interactions. Hence, SMEs are well-positioned to take advantage of group-level interactions within an organisation (Brotherton et al., 2009). Therefore, scholarly research on SMEs focusing on this population's growing affective well-being problems is deemed necessary.

Besides contextual limitations, empirical limitations on affective well-being also exist within SMEs. As discussed, there is a lack of research on affective well-being at work in SMEs. Past research has looked at psychological

well-being; such as Maziriri et al. (2019) who found that perceived organisational support, career goal development, and empowering leadership positively predicted psychological well-being among South African SME employees. The study reiterated the importance of contextualising research on SMEs and recommended that future research should investigate other factors that predict the psychological well-being of SME employees. Nevertheless, research on the affective well-being of SME employees is still lacking. Instead, some studies on SMEs have focused on variables such as health and presenteeism. For example, Holt and Powell (2015) found that SMEs in Greater Manchester, UK had a higher likelihood of sickness presenteeism because employees with acute illnesses were present at work. Employees diagnosed with the common cold still had to go to work as the company could not afford the paid cover for their absence, especially during busy periods (Holt & Powell, 2015). This could be due to SMEs having smaller-scale employees compared to large organisations, hence, presenting challenges for employees to be absent from work. However, their presence at work increases the likelihood of reinfection and transmission of diseases to other employees (Holt & Powell, 2015), which could lead to more adverse health consequences.

Without a doubt, the well-being of employees is a crucial management issue, yet, as many as four-fifths of SME employers do not have appropriate well-being strategies in place (Scott, 2019). A possible reason most SME owners cannot have a proper well-being strategy is that current research and industry guidelines are often catered to large-scale organisations (Brotherton, et al., 2009). Therefore, the thesis aims to study and understand the affective well-being of SME employees. Specifically, with a general lack of research

surrounding this topic, this study aims to establish a greater understanding of what constitutes and may affect the affective well-being of SME employees in Malaysia.

1.3.4   SME Research in Malaysia

SMEs have an essential role in Malaysia's economy and are regarded as the pillars of the nation's industrial development (Saleh & Ndubisi, 2006). Their importance to the nation's economy has been evident since the late 1990s when Malaysian SMEs showed resilience amid the 1998-1999 Asian Financial Crisis compared to large organisations (Chin & Lim, 2018). To further illustrate their relevance, Malaysian SMEs employ 70% of the nation's workforce ("Finding", 2021). Previous research on Malaysian SMEs has investigated their business mechanism and outcomes, such as factors influencing SME internationalisation (Senik et al., 2010), SME e-readiness (Ramayah et al., 2005), and SME business intelligence systems (Qushem et al., 2017). These studies acknowledge the pivotal role of SMEs in   Malaysia's economy and propose initiatives for positioning Malaysian SMEs for growth and development domestically and internationally (Saleh & Ndubisi, 2006, Senik et al.,2010).

However, research on Malaysian employees' well-being has been minimal, with most studies focusing on the well-being of SME entrepreneurs, such as Azmi (2020)'s qualitative study on SMEs business owner's well-being and Taghizadeh et al. (2017)'s study on exploratory and exploitative innovations and its association with SME entrepreneurs' wellbeing. This indicates that current studies are focused on SMEs and business outcomes, while research on employee wellbeing as an outcome is lacking. Given the importance of

employees' affective well-being and the importance of considering the unique contextual elements of SMEs, the present study addresses the waning research gap.

1.3.4.1 Malaysian Work Culture & Context

It is also crucial to consider the cultural context in which SMEs in Malaysia are based. Malaysia, as a nation which has a collectivistic culture differs from a Western population which is largely individualistic. Hence, this would have consequential implications in SMEs, especially with regards to affective wellbeing. Further, due to the increasingly competitive world of the global business workplace, it is essential to understand behaviors and relationships orientation of employees for a business to succed (Tajaddini & Mujtaba, 2009). More crucial, however, is to reflect upon the differences in cultures and context as a failure to do so can lead to a cultural misunderstanding especially when the workplace has individuals from different cultures (Tajaddini & Mujtaba, 2009). For instance, past research had emphasized the role of cultural forces in understanding leadership (Jogulu & Ferkins, 2016). This is as there is minimal research that explores the potential complexities of leadership through a sample, not from the Western population (Jogulu & Ferkins, 2016).

Employees from collectivistic cultures can be relatively ineffective with strangers, and prone in using avoidance relationships and behaviors at work (Tajaddini & Mujtaba, 2009). Hence, non-verbal communication is said to be more important than verbal with particular attention to be paid to types of communications such as tone of voice and one's body language (Tajaddini & Mujtaba, 2009). Negative and direct communication are often avoided to

prevent disharmony (Tajaddini & Mujtaba, 2009). Malaysian employees do not challenge or communicate dissatisfaction to authorities as they are focused on group harmony and conflict avoidance (Maakip et al. ,2015) with respect for authority in Malaysia is evident and highly official (Tajaddini & Mujtaba, 2009). A reason could be that Malaysia, as a culture with a high power distance; would have hierarchy and inequality between managers and employees (Tajaddini & Mujtaba, 2009).

Past research on the Malaysian work environment is that business is often "personal" as opposed to a transactional basis - specifically, the mode of communication at work is said to be rooted upon trust and relationship development, as opposed to information exchange (Kennedy 2002, Tajaddini and Mujtaba 2009, Lo et al. 2010 as cited in Jogulu & Ferkins, 2016). As business is often personal and rooted on trust and relationships, relationship development is hence crucial than as compared to a mere transactional knowledge exchange - this is also congruent with the cultural values in Malaysia such as "courtesy, tolerance, harmony and saving face", (Tajaddini & Mujtaba, 2009, p. 28). Lastly, Malaysians are also said to prefer freedom coupled with pragmatism, as individuals are inclined to adopt a more flexible and open-minded approach to innovative ideas (Tajaddini & Mujtaba, 2009).

Further, Malaysia, although culturally collectivistic also differs in some dimension with other Asian nations which is further explored in this section. In their study, it was found that Malaysia in general had higher scores in relation to trust and customer orientation as compared to other countries in Asia (Huff & Kelley, 2005). A possible reasoning for this is that the societal fabric in Malaysia is more heterogeneous compared to other Asian nations and the unique

circumstance of Malaysia needing to work together with other ethnic groups could have allowed for this (Huff & Kelley, 2005). Crucially, collectivist work culture can also function as a key resource for employees due to its alignment with values such as co – operation, group harmony, dependence, and empathy (Dousin et al., 2022). These values allow for a collegial understanding and social support which gives room for workplace flexibility (Dousin et al., 2022). For instance, willingness of colleagues to assist in taking over work shifts when required has allowed for the reduction of work pressure, and also work life balance conflict (Dousin et al., 2022).However, this resource could also turn negative by leading to work life balance conflict instead (Dousin et al., 2022). This is illustrated through an example by Dousin et al., (2022) p. 374; "whenever a colleague who is married with children needs to exchange shifts or be absent from work due to obligations at home, it will affect those at work who would need to stay behind and cover the shift". In a nutshell, culture is hence an essential element to consider especially in the context of Malaysia. Recognition must also be given to Malaysian employees regardless of first generation or the new working class as they have adjusted rapidly to the demands of industrialization and the consumption-oriented market; all while at the same time maintaining a dynamic set of relationship with a multi – ethnic community (Smith, 2014).

1.4   Thesis Structure and Flow of Empirical Chapters

The thesis begins in Chapter 1 with an introduction and contextualisation of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on the variables being studied. In Chapter 3, a discussion and elaboration of the theoretical framework

applied in this study is presented, while a discussion on the methodological framework is elaborated in Chapter 4. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present the three empirical chapters of this thesis. Finally, Chapter 8 details the general discussion, implications, and conclusion of the thesis.

1.5　　Summary of Empirical Chapters and Objectives

1.5.1　Summary and Objectives of Empirical Chapter 1

Study 1, a qualitative study, explored the organisational practices that enabled SME employees to feel positive and negative emotions in the workplace simultaneously. The study found that participants who experienced virtuousness in their organisations were more likely to experience positive affect at work. In contrast, participants who did not experience virtuousness in their organisation were more likely to experience negative affect at work. Specifically, the virtues of trust, compassion, care, altruism, integrity, forgiveness, and optimism were found to influence affective well-being of employees.

1.5.2　Summary and Objectives of Empirical Chapter 2

Study 2, a qualitative study, explored how SME employees define and understand meaning at work, and what makes SME employees derive meaning at work. The study highlights the sub-themes of meaning at work, which include fulfilment and personal development, alignment to personal values, and impacting the organisation and the society at large. Lastly, this study enunciated the findings by letting the participants speak on how instances of virtuousness experienced in the organisation (such as through the themes of Trust and

Altruism at Work, Doing "Good" Work, Doing "Good" in Society and Care and Compassion) has allowed employees to experience meaning at work.

Study 3, a quantitative study, investigated the four hypotheses outlined in this study. The four hypotheses were: (1) Organisation virtuousness (OV) will significantly and positively predict Job-related Affective Well-being Scale (JAWS), (2) OV will significantly and positively predict Meaning at Work (MW), (3) Meaning at Work will significantly and positively predict JAWS and (4) MW will fully mediate the relationship between OV and JAWS. All hypotheses were supported in this study.

1.6   Significance and Theoretical Contribution of the Thesis

This study has addressed the waning research gap and highlighted the importance of studying affective well-being in Malaysia. Given the lack of research on affective well-being among SMEs in Malaysia, this study has explored and investigated the affective well-being of SME employees through qualitative and quantitative studies. The study's findings have specifically addressed the lack of theories and research on Malaysian SMEs. Lastly, the study has lent support to the amplifying and buffering effect of virtuousness in the SME context.

1.7   Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter discussed the importance of understanding affective well-being in the workplace, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises. It proffered a general and Malaysian definition of the key terms in the study. The importance of SMEs to the economy, the various contextual

challenges affecting SMEs today, and the justification for studying SMEs and affective well-being in Malaysia were covered in detail. The subsequent chapter reviews the literature on the variables of this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0   Chapter Overview

This chapter opens with a review of existing literature on affective well-being at work. It defines and discusses SME and well-being related constructs and situates well-being research in Malaysia. It then outlines the conceptualisation and in-depth literature summary on the study's variables, including organisational virtuousness, meaning at work and their link with affective well-being.

2.1   Affective Well-being Overview and Definitions

Psychologists increasingly recognise the importance and influence of affect in the human experience (Hosie & Sevastos, 2010). This trend could be due to scholarly evidence such as the Affective State Theory, which links happiness to one's overall emotional state (Haybron, 2003). For centuries, philosophers have also pondered the genuine nature of happiness (Hosie & Sevastos, 2010). Hence, it is unsurprising that this fundamental and elusive construct of human meaning is a subject of interest to many researchers (Hosie & Sevastos, 2010). According to Dalai Lama happiness is associated with human affect thus: Ultimate happiness depends on eliminating our negative behaviours and mental states of anger, hatred, and greed. He argues that excessive levels of worry and anxiety serve no useful purpose and do nothing but undermine … happiness and interfere with [the] ability to accomplish goals. (Lama, 1999: 62, 263 as cited in Hosie & Sevastos 2010: 408).

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the literature on the role of affect as an indicator of strain and well-being in the workplace (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). In the past, job stress research had focused on a limited number of affect-related constructs, such as job dissatisfaction and work-induced anxiety (Van Katwyk et al., 2000), with a lack of research on positive and negative emotions in the work context (Pekrun & Frese, 1992). One of the early works on affective well-being is Warr (1990), which propounded a scale on affective well-being at work. Warr (1990) found three key axes that best represent affective well-being at work. The three axes were in a continuum of displeased – pleased, depression – enthusiasm, and anxiety – contentment with the varying state of work conditions. The robustness of affect at work has also been acknowledged by Briner (1997), who lent support by operationally defining happiness in the workplace as affective well-being. Briner (1997) argued that affective well-being is multidimensional and permits capturing complexities, subtleties, and changes, which are all essential in the changing nature of the workplace, thus leading many researchers to use happiness and affective well-being interchangeably.

Nevertheless, the field of organisational behaviour has not formally lent itself to affect at work, as the description of employees' emotions is still heavily skewed to psychological constructs like job satisfaction and stress at work. Previous studies have differentiated work stress from affective well-being and have argued that work affect is a consequence or product of occupational stress (Malik & Noreen, 2015, Van Katwyk et al., 2000). Previous studies on job satisfaction have argued that job satisfaction may not holistically and accurately assess the complete range of potential affective states (Van Katwyk et al., 2000).

A possible reason is that job satisfaction is considered a multi-faceted attitudinal and belief–based construct that could present a contaminated operationalisation of job affect (Van Katwyk et al., 2000), which necessitates more focused research on affect. Since individual emotions are often neglected in organisational research (Muchinsky, 2000), the need to study affective well-being in a work setting and not just as a by–product of human cognition is further justified.

2.2 Development of Affective Well-being at Work Measurement

Apart from the early work of Warr (1990), Van Katwyk et al. (2000) developed the Job-related Affective Well-being Scale (JAWS) to measure affect at work. The scale measures positive and negative emotional reactions to work using two distinct clusters of positive or negative affective phrases. JAWS fulfils the following three objectives (Van Katwyk et al., 2000); firstly, it measures pure affect compared to the belief-oriented or attitude-based scales commonly used in job satisfaction research. Secondly, it measures context-specific affect or specific affective state (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). This contrasts with the Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale (PANAS) (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988), which evaluates context-free emotions (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). Furthermore, JAWS's coverage of affective responses measures the impact of arousal and pleasurable perceptions, behaviours, and outcomes related to work (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). It also shows patterns of affective states in relation to the relative locations of experienced affect on the pleasure-arousal circumplex as opposed to just a focus on distinct states of emotion (Van Katwyk et al., 2000).

JAWS stands out for its utility in measuring a broad continuum of affective states and delineating negative or positive valenced responses (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). However, its proponents have suggested a more holistic consideration of JAWS in organisational research (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). Specifically, research that identifies relevant predictors and work outcomes of Job-related Affective Well-being (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). Since then, researchers like Hosie and Sevastos (2010) have argued that JAWS is the closest expression of workplace happiness. This explains why the two terms are used interchangeably among organisational researchers. Employees who show positive emotions are expected to show these attributes stably over time (Hosie & Sevastos); which further demonstrates the significance of investigating workplace affect.

2.3   Literature on Affect at Work

Enabling a positive work environment is important for improving employee affective well-being. Van den Heuvel et al. (2015) posit that employees' job crafting intervention (based on the Job Demands Resources model) enables them to stay motivated at work and increases their affective well-being. Thus, when participants craft their job, they can adjust their work climate and build more work resources (Van den Heuvel et al., 2015). In addition, they can craft goals geared towards achieving well-being at work and reflect on positive work-related events. Reflection of this nature triggers a central path of information processing, which increases integration and interpretation of the event, allowing for a renewed sense of meaning and gratitude (Van den Heuvel et al., 2015). This is consistent with previous studies, which found that

remembering past positive events allows one to experience positive affect (Strack et al. 1985). Van den Heuvel et al.'s (2015) study is also consistent with Tims et al. (2013), which found that employees who crafted their job resources showed a rise in structural and social resources that have a positive relationship to employee well-being (measured through increased engagement, job satisfaction and decrease burnout). Nevertheless, Van den Heuvel et al. (2015) differed from Tims et al. (2013) in that they conceptualised well-being as JAWS.

Other studies have also alluded to the usefulness and importance of positive emotions at work. Unal (2014) illustrated the positive relationship between leaders' self-enhancing humor and increased employee JAWS levels. This relationship is based on the role of positive emotions in helping individuals overcome negative thoughts and situations (Unal, 2014). For example, positive emotion could be established within the organisational context through good interpersonal relations formed under leader-member exchange. A systematic review of thirty years of research by Skakon et al. (2010) found that leaders' stress and their affective well-being are closely and negatively linked to employees' stress and affective well-being. Previous studies have also shown that positive leader behaviours such as support, empowerment, and consideration were linked with lower job stress and increased employee affective well-being (Skakon et al., 2010). Conversely, abusive behaviours were found to have an increased likelihood of negative employee outcomes (Skakon et al., 2010). In terms of leadership styles, it was found that transformational leadership styles were significantly linked with positive employee outcomes; however, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles were less regularly related to general employee outcomes (Skakon et al., 2010).

Another study of 213 knowledge workers by Hadadian and Sayadpour (2018) has also corroborated the influence of toxic leadership, quantitative workload, organisational constraints, and interpersonal conflicts on employees' job-related affective well-being. The study found that interpersonal conflicts, quantitative workload, and organisational constraints significantly mediated the relationship between toxic leadership and job-related affective well-being (Hadadian & Sayadpour, 2018). Furthermore, a misalignment between workload and employees' ability would increase job stress and negative emotions (Hadadian & Sayadpour, 2018). These conditions are induced by toxic leadership styles, which over time, result in significant employee stress and resistance at work (Hadadian & Sayadpour, 2018). In principle, toxic leaders create additional barriers for employees to perform which partly explains why toxic leadership styles are related to decreased well-being at work (Hadadian & Sayadpour, 2018). Furthermore, toxic leaders impair employee well-being by causing stress, negative emotions, and emotional fatigue (Hadadian & Sayadpour, 2018).

On a more holistic organisational and job–wide antecedent of affective well-being, Warr (1987, 2007) introduced a model in tandem with the theoretical model of JAWS termed *the Vitamin Model* (Mäkikangas et al., 2011). The Vitamin model describes the different features at work and the extent of influence that they exert on employees' affective well-being. The model comprises 12 features (termed vitamins) of a positive work environment that can increase employees' affective well-being. Six work features, namely opportunity for personal control, opportunity for skill use, externally generated goals, variety, environmental clarity, and contact with others, have a curvilinear

effect on affective well-being (Warr, 1987, 2007; Mäkikangas et al., 2011). In other words, a sufficient level of these factors is needed to maintain affective well-being; but after a certain amount is attained, an increase would have unfavourable consequences for employees' well-being (Mäkikangas et al., 2011).

Conversely, the remaining six factors, namely availability of money, physical security, valued social position, supportive supervision, equity and career outlook, have a constant influence on affective well-being (Warr, 1987, 2007, Mäkikangas et al., 2011). An adequate level of these elements is required to allow for well-being; however, even at high levels, it would not be detrimental to employee well-being (Warr, 1987, 2007, Mäkikangas et al., 2011). Other studies have used JAWS as an antecedent, such as Uncu et al.'s (2007) study of 274 Turkish general practitioners. They found that the physician's job-related negative emotional perceptions had a relationship with reactions of stress, anxiety, and depression (Uncu et al., 2007). The study identified the essence of job–related affective well-being to employees' healthy lifestyle and job satisfaction.

2.4   Contributing Factors of Employee Affective Well-being in SMEs

As discussed in chapter 1, there is a dearth of research on the affective well-being of SME employees. The few studies in extant literature that have explored well-being in SMEs have done so outside the scope of affective well-being. Given the close and sometimes interchangeable association between well-being and affective well-being, this thesis deems it essential and insightful to review the existing literature on well-being and SMEs. Koon & Ho (2020)

conceptualised well-being through three sub-constructs: life, workplace, and psychology, while Maziriri et al.'s (2019) study measured well-being through an adaptation of the World Health Organisation's Well-being Index (Zeng et al., 2014). In Rubio-Andrés et al.'s (2021) study, workplace well-being was measured by motivation and work absenteeism. Other studies, such as Martin (2021) and Galabova and McKie (2013), adopted a qualitative research design; with a focus on health and well-being among SMEs (Martin, 2021) and SME managers' perception of human capital and well-being (Galabova and McKie, 2013).

Using data from 150 full-time SME employees, Koon and Ho (2020) found that workplace well-being mediates the relationship between perceived authentic leadership and work engagement. (Koon & Ho, 2020). The study measured and operationally defined well-being through three sub-constructs: life, workplace, and psychology. Furthermore, the study conceptualised well-being based on a relational paradigm whereby employees' persistent negative experience of compromising their well-being led to an increased negative outcome (Koon & Ho, 2020). However, employees who viewed their supervisor's leadership more positively and did not view their well-being as compromised were more engaged (Koon & Ho, 2020).

Specifically, a congruent perception of employees on their supervisor's leadership and their own well-being can affect their work engagement (Koon & Ho, 2020). The choice of SMEs in their study was because SME employees are said to have higher levels of ownership because of a high-quality interpersonal leadership with their supervisors compared to larger firms, as found in a qualitative study with senior managers of SMEs (Galabova & McKie, 2013,

Koon & Ho, 2020). This good quality of interpersonal relationships is said to elevate the noble characteristics of leaders who are authentic such as self-awareness, trustworthiness, and concern, which allows for employee well-being and worker engagement (Koon & Ho, 2020).

In Maziriri et al. (2019)'s study, perceived organisational support, career goal development, and empowering leadership positively predicted psychological well-being among South African SME employees. Their conceptualisation of well-being was adapted from the World Health Organisation's well-being index (Zeng et al., 2014). The study reiterated the importance of contextualising research on SMEs and recommended that future research investigate other factors that predict the affective well-being of SME employees.

Rubio-Andrés et al. (2021) found a significant mediating effect of well-being between high-performance work systems and financial performance. High-performance systems are work practices adopted to allow for a more participatory organisation of work aimed at fostering high performance among employees (Appelbaum, 2002). The study measured well-being by motivation and work absenteeism and found a positive relationship between well-being and SMEs' financial performance (Rubio-Andrés et al., 2021). It further suggests that employee well-being helps build a reputation for the company and social value in SMEs, consequently increasing financial performance (Rubio-Andrés et al., 2021). In addition to conceptualising well-being with motivation and absenteeism, the study recommends measuring well-being through other indicators, allowing a deeper and more robust analysis (Rubio-Andrés et al., 2021).

Other studies on SMEs and well-being that have adopted a qualitative research design include Martin (2021), which explored the potential facilitators and barriers to the health and well-being of SME employees. The study's participants of SME employees, managers, and owners were markedly different from those in preceding studies. Martin (2021) argues that SMEs are more vulnerable to stress due to their size, and their lack of external resources exacerbates negative situations, including limited mental health support, funding, and counselling (Martin, 2021). Findings from this study highlight relationships as one of the key themes in the SMEs landscape that makes or mars tension and workplace conflict (Martin, 2021). Their findings also highlighted the role of openness and honesty within SMEs. Further, they argued for its complexity, as it relies on the personal nature and motivation of the owners or a specific group of individuals in management (Martin, 2021). Regardless of these indices, enhancing well-being is pivotal to SME employees' productivity and affective well-being (Martin, 2021).

Additionally, a qualitative study of 42 SME senior managers conducted in Bulgaria, Finland, and Scotland has highlighted the need for better human capital and well-being empowerment of employees (Galabova and McKie 2013). The study found that a lack of capacity and resources overburdened SME employees and diminished the boundaries between work and their personal lives (Galabova & McKie, 2013). The study also pointed out that conditions such as heavy workloads, tight deadlines, and requirements to be in close interactions with customers often result in SME employees encountering high levels of stress, which is detrimental to their affective well-being (Galabova & McKie, 2013).

On a positive note, Galabova and McKie (2013) identified key strengths of SME work environments, including 1) diversity and challenge of tasks, 2) ability to communicate with a diverse range of people and 3) chances for learning and personal development that may help employees to thrive in the setting. This includes a positive work climate such as friendly subordinates, greater freedom and of a lesser hierarchy which can help their employee to flourish as an SME manager illustrated, "…If you have a good idea, you can go and talk to the Managing Director, who sits on the desk next to you. And, if it is a really good idea, it can be implemented next week…" (Galabova & McKie, 2013, p.13). These characteristics help SME employees compensate for the lack of career growth and promote well-being by getting the right support from the organisation through the team, manager, or company directly or indirectly (Galabova & McKie, 2013).

Other studies on SMEs have investigated positive job outcomes. Lindstrom et al. (2000), a survey of Finnish SMEs, found that small enterprises with under ten employees reported increased supervisory support, job control, work climate and appreciation of work. Job satisfaction was mainly related to high job control and appreciation of one's work. In contrast, negative job constructs such as a high physical workload, low job control and low appreciation were related to negative work capacity, sickness, and absenteeism (Lindstrom et al., 2000). Aligned with this finding is another study Gallato et al. (2012), which found symmetries between organisational commitment, leadership, and organisational culture with better employee well-being (in the form of satisfaction) among 100 SME employees in Malaysia.

Other studies have investigated work-life balance as a well-being construct. Malik et al. (2010) developed a toolkit to guide UK SMEs in managing their work-life balance policies and practices using a multi-method approach. Characteristics such as unpaid work commitments, work-personal life struggles, and high-pressure work environments have led SME employees to struggle with maintaining a healthy work-life balance (Malik et al., 2010). The study found a mismatch between the SME employers' focus on profit and the employees' expectations for quality of working life. This mismatch results in a shortage of well-being benefits accruable to SME employees (Malik et al., 2010).

There have also been studies on the well-being of SME entrepreneurs, such as Azmi (2020)'s qualitative study on SME business owners and Taghizadeh et al. (2017)'s study on exploratory and exploitative innovations and their association with SME entrepreneurs' well-being. Other studies have examined the mental health of SME owners, such as Martin et al. (2020), that examined the efficacy of a workplace mental health and well-being intervention explicitly for SME entrepreneurs or managers and Dawkins et al. (2018) whose study explored the motivations of SME owners and managers in engaging with workplace mental health promotion interventions. However, research on SME employees' well-being remains minimal, necessitating more focused research on this area.

2.5   Current Direction of Affective Well-being Research in Malaysian SMEs

In Malaysia, research on SMEs has been largely focused on productivity, performance, and financial based variables (Lim & Teoh, 2021, Razali et al., 2018, Ab Wahab, 2020, Mustapha et al., 2019, Surin et al., 2016, Asada et al. 2017), while research on the individuals and their corresponding psychological variances remain lacking. For example, research on SME business operations such as research on the adoption of information communication technology among Malaysian SME owners (Hashim, 2015), research on 100 SME entrepreneurs and factors influencing SME business success (Lim & Teoh, 2021), technological innovation on survival of Malaysian SMEs (Rahman et al., 2016), competitive advantages and market accessibility on SME performance (Razali et al., 2018) ICT adoption and SME business performance (Ab Wahab, 2020) and the relationships between transformational leadership, innovation performance, and perceived organisational support (Tajasom et al., 2015). Also, research has concentrated on Malaysian SME performance, such as SME performance measurement (Mustapha et al., 2019), Malaysian SME performance (Mahmud et al., 2019), SME business performance (Surin et al., 2016), knowledge management and strategic improvisation and its association with SME performance (Bakar et al., 2015), and innovation capability, strategic leadership with organisational performance (Mui et al. (2018).

Perhaps the closest well-being construct studies on SMEs in Malaysia are Salahudin et al. (2012) and (Ratanasiripong et al. 2016). Salahudin et al. (2012) found a significant and moderate positive relationship between job characteristics (conceptualised as a combination of job demand and social

support) and job control with employee well-being (conceptualised as employees' mental state and their general health). The study acknowledged that other predictors could explain the variance of the employees' well-being model (Salahudin et al., 2012). Ratanasiripong et al. (2016) sampled four ASEAN countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, to study the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among SME employees in these countries (Ratanasiripong et al., 2016). The study identified avenues to improve SME employees' occupational and psychological health (Ratanasiripong et al., 2016). Results showed that age, sleep, employment status and working hours significantly predicted depression, whereas smoking, sleep, employment status, working hours and income predicted anxiety and marital status, smoking, sleep, employment status, working hours, and income significantly predicted stress (Ratanasiripong et al., 2016). The study recommended that more effort is required to improve the psychological health and working environment of SME employees in the region (Ratanasiripong et al., 2016). Similarly, the study proposed that employees' mental health should be given more attention due to the ASEAN region's advancement in economic development (Ratanasiripong et al., 2016). Further, this lack of research on SME employees' mental health is an issue, given that SME employees represent the majority of the working population in the ASEAN region (Ratanasiripong et al. ,2016).

In recent times, globalisation, market liberalisation, and technological changes have challenged small and large-scale organisations worldwide (Gallato et al., 2012). These changes pose challenges to organisations regardless of their size, owners, managers and business type (Gallato et al., 2012). SMEs are not exempt, as these external factors cause difficulties beyond their control (Gallato

et al., 2012). However, what SMEs can control is their internal environment to maximise their strengths and minimise their weaknesses (Gallato et al., 2012) in their pursuit of supporting employee affective well-being. An organisation's inability to foster a positive and supportive work culture would cause stellar, experienced, and skilled employees to look for greener pastures elsewhere (Gallato et al., 2012). However, the focus and understanding of employees in SME is also lacking; specifically on matters such as why employees might choose to be employed within SMEs and the possible role of stress or negative impacts on employee well-being (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021). Further, there is a lack of research on SME employees' voice and perspective, which calls to employees as an essential and insightful sampling for future research on HRM in SMEs (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021). More so, research is lacking in exploring SME employees' perspectives and experiences concerning their affective well-being at work.

Previous research has focused on SME owners, managers, and leaders (Harney & Alkhalaf (2021), Lai et al., 2016, Häkkinen, 2012, Resnik, 2013), while studies of SMEs in Malaysia have focused on the general characteristics of SMEs, owner attributes, challenges faced, and effectiveness of government assistance programs (Gallato et al., 2012). With SMEs contributing significantly to Malaysia's economy, the need for research focused on employees' well-being needs cannot be overstated (Gallato et al., 2012), specifically in relation to employee affective well-being. In line with Malaysia's vision to be a developed nation, attaining higher productivity in the workforce will be beneficial by improving employee well-being (Salahudin et al., 2012). Section 2.5 explores

the conceptualisation of meaning at work and the association between meaning at work and affective well-being.

2.6 Literature Review for Meaning at work

2.6.1 Conceptualisation of Meaning at Work

Meaning at work refers to the degree of importance individuals ascribe to their work processes (Tablan, 2019). It describes the sense of contentment, belonging and purpose that employees feel about being at work (Salleh et al., 2020). Scholars have also alluded to meaning at work as a form of thriving at work (Salleh et al., 2020). Interestingly, meaning at work is not a new concept as seminal works such as Frankl (1959) have discussed how individuals seek meaning in life and work, while Whyte (1956) construed it as the search (by employees) for something deeper in their work.

"Man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life" (Frankl, 1959, p. 115).

''The organisation man seeks a redefinition of his place on earth – a faith that will satisfy him that what he must endure has a deeper meaning than appears on the surface'' (Whyte, 1956, p. 6 as cited in Rosso et al., 2010).

The research on meaning at work has inspired academic enquiry on how employees can achieve meaning at work, how meaning at work could change over time, and the cultural, personal and organisational consequences surrounding different beliefs on meaning at work (Rosso et al., 2010). Some of the existing research on the positive organisational outcomes of meaning at work are the relationship between meaning at work with engagement (Ghadi et al.,

2013), employee creativity (Akgunduz et al., 2018), and organisational citizenship behaviour (Maharaj & Schlechter, 2007). Other research has also found a relationship between meaning at work and negative organisational outcomes such as work stress (Kuchinke et al., 2010) and absenteeism (Soane et al., 2013).

Some sources of meaning at work include the self, other persons, and the work context (Rosso et al., 2010). Self-meaning at work can be categorised into three distinct aspects: value, motivation, and one's beliefs about work (Rosso et al., 2010). Work values are defined as "the end states that people desire and feel they ought to be able to realise through working'' (Nord et al., 1990, p. 21 as cited in Rosso et al., 2010). These states function as sources of meaning that employees derive from their work (Rosso et al., 2010). On motivation, intrinsically motivated employees tend to experience more meaning in their work (Rosso et al., 2010). Thirdly, employees who have higher levels of job involvement tend to derive more meaning at work (Brown, 1996).

Furthermore, one's co-workers and leaders may influence their experience of meaning at work (Rosso et al. 2010). In performing their duties, workers are continuously subjected to cues from others, evaluations of their worth, and the worth of their respective roles (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Employees then perceive and discern these interpersonal cues from others, which would reveal other employees' evaluations of them. Consequently, these evaluations would directly and indirectly impact how employees perceive meaning at work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Leaders can also be a source of ascribing meaning at work. For instance, an inspiring leader would produce significant meaning for their followers by having a congruent message that the

followers deem essential (Avolio & Bass, 1995). However, for that to happen, the leader must possess individualised consideration and attention to the needs of the subordinates , for the leader to be able to discern and promote those needs to achieve the respective goal (Avolio & Bass, 1995).

2.6.2   The Role of Meaning at Work and its Association with Affective Well-being

Humphrey et al. (2007) found that meaning at work is an essential mediator between the work environment and turnover intentions. Similarly, in non-work settings, meaningful existence provides a buffer or protective mechanism against adversities (Arnoux-Nicolas et al., 2016). Since meaningful work benefits employees and organisations, Michaelson (2005) has argued that the latter have an ethical and moral obligation to support employees in attaining meaning at work. Organisations can attain meaning at work for their employees by framing their tasks as social missions. When employees are assigned tasks with a social mission, they are more likely to feel that their actions are socially significant (Cassar & Meier, (2018). Similarly, organisations may create meaning at work by introducing socially responsible practices and philanthropic activities. The positive implications of such practices are evident in the level of importance that organisations accord corporate social responsibilities (Cassar & Meier, 2018).

From an individual standpoint, the importance of meaning at work can also be deduced from employees' ability to express themselves at work (Chalofsky, 2003). Employees' expression of meaning at work creates a sense of congruence between their identity and tasks (Sagiv et al., 2004). Conversely, individuals who do not perceive their work as meaningful would not perform

optimally (Maslow, 1971). Perhaps, the experience of meaning at work allows employees to meet their necessary human needs, including survival, relatedness, and self-determination (Blustein, 2008, Vanden Broeck et al., 2008). In a book chapter written by Ryan and Deci together with their colleague, they argued that one's need to pursue and maintain some sense of meaning in life is an undeniable consideration of one's existence (Weinstein et al.,2012). Prominent scholars such as Frankl have argued that finding meaning is a core motivation for human beings (Weinstein et al., 2012). The association between meaning and well-being can also be understood through the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Specifically, SDT proposes three psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness and competence (Ryan, 2009). When these three needs are met, an individual experiences increased well-being (Ryan, 2009). Although meaning is not part of the three core needs identified above, meaning can be investigated through the lens of SDT. This is because the motivated processes of assimilation, integration and symbolisation in meeting one's core needs, as defined in SDT, are central to meaning-making (Weinstein et al., 2012). Hence, given the close association of SDT with understanding the human experience and meaning-making, it is pivotal for this area to be explored further, especially in the context of employee well-being.

Consequently, research has been growing on the potential utility and benefits of meaningful work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Few notable strides have been made in examining the relationship between meaning at work and affective well-being. Golparvar et al. (2014) found that meaning at work positively predicted positive affect of employees. The study's findings indicate that work meaning is a phenomenon with general affective functions (Golparvar et al.,

2014). Further, Arnold et al. (2007) report that meaningful work positively predicted affective well-being among a sample of Canadian health workers. The research was conducted in two studies; the first conceptualised psychological well-being as positive affective well-being, while the second as mental health (Arnold et al., 2007). In both studies, meaningful work mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and psychological well-being (Arnold et al., 2007). A possible reason for this is that meaning at work is said to consist of most aspects of the job characteristic model by Hackman & Oldham (1976), whereby work meaning consists of skill variety, accomplishment in completion of task identity and task significance (Steger et al., 2012). The job characteristic model is robust in predicting both positive individual and organisational work outcomes.

Individuals who perceive their work as meaningful or serve some form of greater good reported increased psychological adjustments and embody employee qualities that are advantageous to the organisation (Steger et al., 2012). Individuals engaged in meaningful work often feel that their work inherently matters and impacts their quality of life (Steger et al., 2012). When one experiences meaningful work, they are more likely to perceive their work as motivating, satisfying, meaningful and a valuable aspect of their life experience (Steger et al., 2012). The variable also was positively related to the increased frequency of constructive work-related attitudes such as organisational citizenship behaviours, career commitment, organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and intrinsic work motivations (Steger et al., 2012). Besides, employees that perceived their job as meaningful are reported to engage less in counterproductive work behaviours such as absenteeism,

withdrawal intentions, and low extrinsic work motivations (Steger et al., 2012).

Other than improving work-related attitudes and decreasing counterproductive

behaviour, meaningful work positively influenced employee well-being and

decreased symptoms of psychological distress (Steger et al., 2012). In a study of

343 employees in 30 manufacturing companies, it was reported that meaningful

work improved employee well-being (Salleh et al., 2020). Hence, with meaning

at work being positively related to general well-being related variables (Steger

et al., 2012) and a key indicator of positive work outcomes (Carton, 2017), it is

contingent upon leaders of organisations to ensure that the conditions are in

place to support it (Carton, 2017).

The next section examines organisational virtuousness, research on

organisational virtuousness, and the interplay between organisational

virtuousness and affective well-being.

2.7   Literature Review: Exploring the Role of Virtuousness among SME employees

2.7.1   The Role of Virtue in Organisational Research

Originating from the Latin word *Virtus* or the Greek word *Arete* which

means excellence, virtuousness was explained by Plato and Aristotle as desires

and actions that are geared towards producing personal and social good

(Cameron & Caza, 2013). Aristotle (supplemented by Aquinas) has defined

virtue as a permanent and deliberate disposition based on reason while serving

as a standard and at the same time, conducive to be good (Chapman & Galston,

1992). In other words, Aristotle prescribes that optimum human life is one where

there is a longing and desire to pursue a good life (Gavin & Mason, 2004). In essence, humans are inclined towards wanting to achieve good things, live and do well (Gavin & Mason, 2004). Hence, human's intrinsic need for virtue can be seen broadly from a utilitarian perspective and connected with human flourishing (Chapman & Galston, 1992). Aristotle's methods also portray human virtues as characteristics that allow for happiness (Schudt, 2000). This is as virtue is a character that is optimal in pursuing happiness (which is conceptualised here as eudaimonia, often translated as "flourishing", which signals a state which is more than the emotional state of happiness) (Schudt, 2000). Human flourishing is conceptualised as a matter of complete life which includes virtue or excellence, and Aristotle saw it as our ultimate goal in life (Fowers, 2016). As Aristotle has described, "the excellence of man also will be the state which makes a man good and which makes him do his work well." (NE 1106a 15, 21).

From a more person-centred perspective, virtues are qualities that promote excellence, while vices are defects that lead to destruction (Battaly, 2015). Hence, it is common for researchers to describe virtue at an individual level (Newstead et al., 2018). For example, Weaver (2006) described virtuousness as central to one's moral identity development and self-concept. In contrast, Peterson & Seligman (2004) discussed virtues as ways to describe one's strengths. In more applied settings, such as Whetstone (2003), virtue is conceptualised as managerial excellence.

On the other hand, from a more collective construct, virtuousness has been associated with positive social consequences such as citizen reciprocity (Simmel, 1950) and societal stability (Smith, 1976), with these positive traits

being essential, in ensuring societal longevity (Cameron et al., 2004). This is likened to the viewpoint of (Solomon, 1992, p. 331) on virtue bing "an exemplary way of getting along with other people, a way of manifesting in one's own thoughts, feelings and actions the ideals and aims of the entire community". Other scholars have defined virtue almost exclusively as pro-social behaviour (Ridley, 1997). At a collective level, one's flourishing could be indicated by a healthy virtuousness or regarded as performing above a positive baseline (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2007).

However, human beings are not born equal in their capacity for virtue as some persons are fortunate with virtue, while others are not (Chapman & Galston, 1992). However, all forms of virtue are intricately intertwined with one's upbringing (Chapman & Galston, 1992). Most of the time, virtue is acquired rather than innate; hence, the circumstances under which virtuous behaviours are developed are essential to examine (Chapman & Galston, 1992). In recent times, the understanding of virtuousness has evolved from being a means to allow for more positive outcomes to demonstrating an ultimate good in itself (Cameron & Caza, 2013). Virtuousness conotes the best of humans, the most ennobling of people's behaviours, excellence and the very core of humankind (Cameron, 2011 as cited in Cameron & Caza, 2013). Virtuousness represents humankind's highest aspirations towards excellence or eudaimonism, and not just avoiding harm (Cameron & Caza, 2013).

2.7.2   Conceptualisation of Organisational Virtuousness

The pursuit of virtue is evident in structured activities consistent with giving moral discretion and meaning to one's life (Newstead et al., 2018).

Researchers have discussed how virtuousness is not an individualistic endeavour, as individuals are not separate from their external environment. Hence the pursuit of "good" in human life is interconnected with the good of others and the larger community (Gavin & Mason, 2004). Consequently, based on Greek teachings, for one to have a good life, one needs to be in a good society, preferably a society that gives them space to "flourish" (Gavin & Mason, 2004). Human flourishing is conceptualised as wholesomeness which includes virtue or excellence with Aristotle describing human wholesomeness as our ultimate goal in life (Fowers, 2016). Given that our daily lives are mostly spent at work, Aristotle's views on virtuousness may be extended to organisations; thus, "to achieve the good life, people must work in good organisations" (Gavin & Mason, 2004, p.387). In recent times, organisations have asserted influence over political, social, and interpersonal relations (Gavin & Mason, 2004). It is increasingly unlikely for one to work and grow in an organisation without embodying its aspects (Gavin & Mason, 2004). Even identity has become less defined by tribal or ethnic indices; instead, the nature of one's work depicts their identity (Newstead et al., 2018). Therefore, it is unsurprising that as individuals spend more time at work, they look to organisations to experience virtuousness.

Experts have also argued that the general understanding of virtuousness can extend from the individual to the organisation (Meyer, 2018). Other researchers have also echoed Aristotle's construal of virtuousness as transferable to a collective entity such as a corporation (Schudt, 2000). Hence, if humans find a need to be virtuous, then the workplace becomes an essential place for virtuousness to be explored, given that the workplace is an environment where moral and ethical needs are met. When an organisation is virtuous, morality,

ethics, and character permeate the organisation's corporate visions and core values (Gavin & Mason, 2004). This position aligns with Klein (1998, p. 56) "formal organisations can function like moral persons … they potentially have something analogous to character, which can be evaluated as virtuous or vicious". After all, virtuousness is based on what both individuals and organisations hope to be when they are in their optimal state (Cameron et al., 2004).

The moral and financial breakdown of large organisations has spurred businesses to recalibrate the worthiness and importance of organisational virtues (Rego et al., 2011). Unfortunately, while employees are looking for meaning, purpose and conditions to grow in the workplace, most organisations fall short in providing the enabling environment for employees to experience them (Newstead et al., 2018). Newstead (2018) argued that many of the issues faced by organisations, such as employee turnover, discrimination, and unethical leadership, stem from the disconnect between the meaningful environment members desire and the current modern organisation. They argued that lack of virtue is a recurrent problem in the modern-day organisational space. Virtue presents an opportunity to deal with the disparity between the work environment, employee desires and what the organisation offers (Newstead et al., 2018). Hence, adopting a virtuous perspective allows employees to develop essential moral character and eudemonic experience, which foster meaning, belonging and connection among employees (Newstead et al., 2018).

However, previous researchers also noted that if the pursuit of virtuousness is aimed at extrinsic means, then this should not be considered as virtuousness. For example, practising forgiveness, compassion, or courage only

to obtain compensation in return would not be considered virtuous (Cameron & Caza, 2013). Also, when acts of kindness are done to receive compensation or economic advantage, it ceases to be kindness but manipulation (Cameron & Caza, 2013). Virtuousness must be in the service of society, a service that goes above and beyond an individual or group's self-interest (Cameron & Caza, 2013). In other words, virtuousness creates a social value that moves beyond the individual's desires (Cameron, 2003, Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2020). Hence, if one were to demonstrate forgiveness, compassion, and courage in exchange for a desirable consequence, that is said to be not virtuous (Cameron, 2003). From an organisational perspective, virtuousness goes above and beyond constructs such as citizenship, social responsibility, and ethics (management terms which are arguably expected or customary in organisations) (Cameron, 2003). Importantly, there are differences between organisational virtuousness and the well-studied variables of pro-social behaviour, with researchers defining them as separate concepts. Organisational virtuousness positively influences employees to develop prosocial motivation (Stachowicz-Stanusch & Amann, 2018; Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2016). Prosocial motivation is a foundation for employees to demonstrate prosocial behaviour, which corresponds to organisational virtuousness (Stachowicz-Stanusch & Amann, 2018). Given that organisational virtuousness and pro-social behaviour are distinct concepts, this calls for virtuousness to be studied exclusively in work settings.

Importantly, corporate virtues can lead to sustainable profit and prohibit the abusive treatment of the organisation's workforce (Schudt, 2000). In other words, a virtuous corporation would function like a virtuous human who lives and works diligently (Schudt, 2000). Nevertheless, the understanding of virtue

would differ between individuals and corporations. Therefore, it is essential to consider the context and oddity of the organisation when implementing virtuous practices (Schudt, 2000). Schudt's (2000) defines corporate virtue as habits that are conducive to attaining corporate good wherein the habits are internalised within the corporation's culture and can exist through exchanges among essential stakeholders. This form of corporate virtue allows for long-term sustainable profit, as it sets the right context for cooperation between the employer and employee (Schudt, 2000). For example, managers should practice forgiveness when employees make mistakes and demonstrate compassion when dealing with personal issues (Stachowicz-Stanusch & Amann, 2018). Moore & Beadle (2006) have outlined the following characteristics of virtuous organisations: (i) awareness of their role in sustaining business practices, (ii) promotion of excellence, (iii) emphasise on the integral role of profit and reputation in organisational growth and sustainability, (iv) forbearance to withstand the corrupting powers of competitors, suppliers, and stakeholders; all of which nurture a singular focus on extrinsic motivators. Consequently, a virtuous corporation would require courage to withstand these temptations of corrupting power and decrease the environmental impacts on its characters, which could potentially be damaging (Moore & Beadle, 2006). Hence, to be distinct in corporate culture, "corporations must engage in practices with excellence, focusing on their internal good while warding off threats from the corruption of other institutions with which it engages" (Moore, 2005, p 9).

Organisational virtuousness looks into formal groups' responsibility to foster and sustain eudemonic action (Cameron & Caza, 2013). When we attribute virtuousness to an organisation, this signals that the organisation allows

and encourages the virtuous activities of its employees (Cameron et al., 2004). Hence, one can differentiate between virtuousness "in" and virtuousness "enabled" by organisations (Cameron et al., 2004). Virtuousness "in" organisations refers to the transcendent and elevating behaviour of the organisations' members, while virtuousness "enable" refers to the character of the organisation that allows its employees to demonstrate virtuousness (Cameron et al., 2004). Organisational virtuousness refers to "individuals' actions, collective activities, cultural attributes, or processes that enable dissemination and perpetuation of virtuousness in an organisation" (Cameron & Caza, 2004). Specifically, organisational virtuousness is not an all-or-nothing condition, as neither individuals nor organisations are exclusively virtuous nor non-virtuous (Cameron, 2003). Virtuousness in and through organisations may be expressed through an individual's behaviour or collective action (Cameron, 2003). Similarly, an organisation's inherent characteristics could inhibit or enable virtuous behaviours (Cameron, 2003). For example, a virtuous organisation would endeavour to create a culture embedded with values such as optimism, integrity, and trust. Further, virtuous organisations convey decisions honestly (Stachowicz-Stanusch & Amann, 2018).

There are three definitional attributes of organisational virtuousness: human impact, moral goodness, and social betterment (Cameron, 2003). Firstly, virtuousness is said to be connected with our inherent human nature of flourishing and moral character (Cameron, 2003; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Doherty, 1995), on qualities such as human strength, self–control and resilience (Cameron, 2003; Baumeister & Exline, 1999, 2000) and through meaningful human purpose and transcendent principles (Emmons, 1999; Dent, 1984;

Roberts 1988 as cited in Cameron, 2003). Based on this viewpoint, desires or actions which are not exclusively human are not virtuous (Cameron, 2003). A key aspect of virtuousness in organisations is its ability to have a positive human impact (Cameron, 2003). Secondly, virtuousness relates to moral goodness (Cameron, 2003). Virtuousness is most apparent with what Aristotle had labelled 'goods of first intent' (Cameron, 2003), or "that which is good in itself and is to be chosen for its own sake" (Metaphysics XII, p. 3) with values such as love, wisdom and fulfilment. In this regard, virtuousness possesses inherent good; or is beneficial for its own sake (Cameron, 2003). However, good of second intent refers to that "which is good for the sake of obtaining something else" (Metaphysics XII, p. 4), which includes constructs such as profit, prestige, and power (Cameron, 2003). A gauge of the difference between the "goods" of the first and second intent is that individuals do not get tired or bored with the good of first intent (Cameron, 2003). Hence, the moral aspect of virtuousness is demonstrated by the goods of first intent, which are ennobling, honourable and flourishing virtues (Cameron, 2003). Most importantly, this is synonymous with both organisations and individuals, as both have moral goals and derive aspects of goodness (Cameron, 2003). Lastly, virtuousness is demonstrated by social betterment; but crucially, this "betterment" goes above one's self-interest (Cameron, 2003).

2.7.3   Research on Organisational Virtuousness

Virtuousness in organisations has rarely been the focus of research, with this variable only being of somewhat interest recently (Cameron & Caza, 2013). As research on organisational virtuousness is still lacking, experts have sought

empirical institutionalisation modes conducive to organisational virtue (Moore & Beadle, 2006). This is because most management research has focused on problem-solving issues, competitor analysis, effectiveness and efficiency, as opposed to understanding the flourishing and life-giving elements of the corporation (Cameron et al., 2004). Hence, it is argued that little is known about the virtuous elements of organisations compared to their problematic aspects (Cameron et al., 2004). A Wall Street Journal survey on words usage between 1984 to 2000 found that words such as "win", "advantage", and "beat" had increased more than four times compared to terms such as "virtue", "caring", and "compassion" which had rarely been used (Walsh, 2002 as cited in Cameron et al., 2004). This lack of research and conceptual understanding is most unfortunate "because virtuousness is intimately tied to what is good for humans, so its omission from scientific investigation leaves a void in understanding the full range of consequential organisational phenomena" (Cameron, 2003, p. 49). In light of the decreased esteem in businesses and the influx of undesirable practices, scholars are responsible for exploring this research area that represents the peak of human potential, ennobling attributes and transcendent purposes (Cameron et al., 2004). A possible reason for this is how negative phenomena are said to capture more attention, which has led to research centred on more negative variables (Cameron et al., 2004). Unsurprisingly, this has made organisational studies not focus on a systematic and empirical understanding of virtuousness, including its expression and potential effects (Cameron et al., 2004). Hence, scholars have alluded to the possible role of virtue in promoting betterment among individuals as corporate leaders, efficiency in organisations, and employee engagement (Rego et al., 2011, Cameron, 2010, George, 2003).

All this further necessitates more focused research on organisational virtuousness.

However, it is essential to note that organisational virtuousness without demonstrated advantages will attract less interest from organisational researchers (Cameron, 2003). This position prompted the landmark study by Cameron et al. (2004), which examined the relationship between virtuousness and performance in eighteen organisations. The study found a significant relationship between virtuousness and organisational performance. The research designed a scale to measure employees' perception of organisational virtuousness. This scale has since then been used in various scholarly research to measure organisational virtuousness (Dubey et al., 2020; Ugwu, 2012). Previous virtue scales only assessed individual virtue (see Shanahan & Hyman, 2003; Cawley III, 1997) and not organisational-specific virtue; however, Cameron et al. (2004) developed an organisational-specific virtue scale. The organisational virtuousness scale has five sub-scales: organisational forgiveness, organisational trust, organisational integrity, organisational optimism, and organisational compassion. The survey's advantage is that it embeds virtuous behaviours in employees and virtuous characteristics enabled by the organisation. As mentioned, organisational virtuousness was positively and significantly related to organisational performance, even among organisations that had recently experienced downsizing. In downsized organisations, employees typically hold negative perceptions (Cameron et al., 2004). For instance, employee trust and empowerment could be shattered during downsizing, while those still in the organisation after the layoffs are termed as "survivors" (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). Despite the survivors' tag, they tend to

have negative feelings of guilt and insecurity over their colleagues' loss of jobs (Parker et al. 1997). Over time, these negative emotions lead to decreased organisational performance (Cole, 1993; Cameron, Freeman, & Mishra, 1993, as cited in Cameron et al., 2004). Specifically, downsizing shatters the social capital and interpersonal relationships between employees and diminishes the connection between the workforce and the organisation (Cameron et al., 2004). However, this study had approximately 16 to 18 organisations which had downsized which showed that non-virtuous perceptions and weak organisational performance would exist (Cameron et al., 2004). Contrarily, their study found that when virtuousness is present, performance does not decrease; virtuousness and organisational performance are both positively and significantly related (Cameron et al., 2004).

Since Cameron et al. (2004)'s study, some studies have utilised their scale to define organisational virtuousness operationally. Tsachouridi & Nikandrou (2016) examined the direct and indirect effects of perceived organisational virtuousness and organisational spontaneity. Organisational spontaneity refers to positive employee behaviour outside their prescribed role of helping co-workers and protecting the organisation (George & Brief, 1992). Tsachouridi & Nikandrou's (2016)'s study examined indirect effects or mediators through the social identity standpoint and organisational identification, pride, and respect, which are mediators of this relationship. Their findings indicate that organisational identification mediates the relationship between organisational virtuousness and spontaneity, while pride and respect mediate this relationship through organisational identification (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2016). Further, the study posits that when an employee perceives

organisational virtuousness, there is an increased likelihood for organisational identification and for employees to perceive organisational successes as their own, which would later benefit the organisation (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2016). It is reasoned that when employees perceive organisational virtuousness, it allows them to develop prosocial motives towards the organisation. Organisational virtuousness is also considered helpful for allowing employees to trust that their organisation is value-based. It can spark the cognitive processes of employees, especially if they find that the organisational values and beliefs are positive, consequently developing a sense of oneness with the organisation. Identification is essential for employees' pride and respect (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2016). This is consistent with the group engagement model, in which feelings of pride and respect can positively impact engagement as they foster identification with the respected group (Boons et al., 2015). When employees perceive that their organisation possess a high status (which allows for feelings of pride) and if individuals perceive themselves as having a high status in an organisation (allowing for respect), they are inclined to believe that being identified with the organisation is good for their self-worth (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, (2016). Feeling proud of an organisation that employees believe is virtuous would allow employees to deduce their organisational membership as positive, hence allowing for organisational identification and leading them to develop positive organisational behaviours (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, (2016). Also, feelings of respect in a virtuous organisation fulfil employees' socioemotional needs for esteem and approval, permitting them to acquire a sense of oneness and demonstrate positive employee behaviour (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, (2016).

Studies have also found a link between organisational virtuousness and positive job outcomes. Nikandrou & Tsachouridi (2015) found that even when there is a financial crisis, individuals who perceived higher organisational virtuousness had higher job satisfaction, decreased intention to quit and higher willingness to support the organisation. Further, perceptions of organisational virtuousness were found to moderate the impact of the financial crisis on one's job satisfaction and intention to quit. A justification is that employees who perceive organisational virtuousness could play down the effects of the challenges they encounter; consequently, they might adopt a more "virtuous" response which would collectively allow the organisation to navigate through a crisis (Nikandrou & Tsachouridi, 2015). The researchers reasoned that a possible link between organisational virtuousness and job satisfaction is that individuals might have higher job satisfaction if they perceived that working in an organisation has an overall positive impact. To further validate their results, Nikandrou & Tsachouridi utilised a focus group and found that participants experiencing organisational virtuousness were more motivated to perform the best for their organisation and support the organisation. Importantly, this form of virtuousness first made them encounter positive emotions, consequently enabling them to want to perform at their best for the organisation (Nikandrou & Tsachouridi, 2015). Specifically, some of the participants had mentioned, "I have a personal experience working in an organisation like that. Fourteen of the fifteen employees felt gratitude towards the organisation […] and they did their best […].," and "I feel gratitude […] I feel satisfied […] I feel obliged […] and I want to do my best to please the organisation.", (Nikandrou & Tsachouridi, 2015, p. 1836)

2.8   Literature Review: Testing the Framework of Affective Wellbeing among SME employees

2.8.1   Organisational Virtuousness and Affective Wellbeing

An employee's general sense of well-being is significantly impacted by the work environment, such that a workplace perceived positively would lead to happier employees (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). It is evident from the previous discussion that organisational virtuousness enables employees to perceive their workplace positively. Specifically, this positive perception can be tracked to each virtue or organisational virtuousness (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). For example, optimism allows employees to be more constructive; and positively influences their relationships with others due to its role in instilling confidence in the future ((Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). Trust, which is essential for social capital, allows employees to be at ease as they are less likely to doubt the intentions of their co–workers (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). Compassion allows for caring behaviours and reciprocal concerns for employee welfare. Integrity ensures honesty and buffers against unfairness, which decreases possible feelings of injustice at work. Lastly, forgiveness decreases stress at work as employees are in a "safe space" to make mistakes in the collective pursuit of organisational goals (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). When employees experience virtuousness in organisations, they may feel recognised as valued emotional and intellectual beings, as opposed to being viewed as just "human resources" (Rego et al., 2011). Also, employees working in virtuous environments can acquire high-quality interpersonal connections, which allow individuals to meet their social and security needs, consequently

experiencing increased workplace happiness (Rego et al., 2011). Further, the perception of virtuousness in the workplace could allow employees to perceive their general work environment as meaningful and experience greater happiness (Rego et al., 2011).

Magnier-Watanabe et al. (2020) found that corporate virtue positively influenced the subjective well-being and job performance of Japanese and French research participants. The study measured subjective well-being with questions assessing positive and negative emotions and life satisfaction. For Japanese respondents, organisational virtuousness was positively associated with job performance and positive subjective well-being, with a partial mediation of subjective well-being existing between organisational virtuousness and job performance (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). For French respondents, organisational virtuousness was significant and positively related to job performance and positive subjective well-being, although no mediation relationship existed (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). Hence, the Japanese and French had different operationalisation of organisational virtuousness, indicating that organisations should customise activites for virtue building in accordance to the location (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). Further, organisations should consider employees' individualist and collectivist inclinations. For example, in a Japanese collectivist society, subjective well-being complements organisational virtuousness to impact job performance positively (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020).

Other studies have found that organisational virtuousness is linked to affective well-being, although affective well-being was conceptualised as a mediating mechanism to explain direct relationships. Rego et al. (2010) analysed

responses from two hundred and sixteen employees and found that perceptions of organisational virtuousness (OV) predicted organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB), while affective well-being mediated the relationship between OV and OCB. Employees' perception of OV could persuade them to demonstrate more OCB (Rego et al., 2010). This is because employees are inclined to behave in a way that is congruent with the organisational values (Rego et al., 2010). For instance, employees might be more likely to help co-workers and supervisors if they perceive those behaviours as important to the organisation, and this could be possible if they perceive their organisations as virtuous (Rego et al., 2010). The study recommended that organisations build virtuous psychological cultures and promote employee and organisational synergy (Rego et al., 2010). Specifically, managers should observe how employees perceive their organisations in several ways: i) the sense of purpose managers and employees invest in their decisions and policies, ii) the ability to derive optimism despite challenging situations, iii) a generally respectful, trustful, courteous, and compassionate behavioural climate, iv) an alignment towards integrity and honesty and, v) a result oriented but a forgiving work environment (Rego et al., 2010). Although the above strategies are derived from employee perception, this is not enough and managers and organisations are called to act on sources of OV and health, allowing for the most efficient way to produce positive perceptions (Rego et al., 2010). By observing virtuous actions, employees could experience meaning at work, well-being, citizenship behaviours, and be participative agents in producing virtuous organisations (Rego et al., 2010). In other words, organisations flourish when employees flourish, allowing for a beneficial reinforcing cycle (Rego et al., 2010).

Other studies have also found a mediating role of affective well-being and other variables, such as and organisational virtuousness and affective commitment (Torkestani & Jamshidi Borujerdi, 2015). The study was conducted on employees in insurance companies in Tehran. Similarly, in Rego et al. (2011)'s study of two hundred and five individuals, organisational virtuousness positively predicted affective commitment. Further, affective well-being was found to mediate this significant relationship. Hence, it was deduced that fostering organisational virtuousness improved employees' affective well-being creating a committed workforce (Rego et al., 2011). Employees experienced OV as a salient emotional event which caused them to develop positive feelings and attitudes towards the organisation (Rego et al., 2011; Fisher, 2002; Lilius et al., 2008).

In a study on 478 banking employees, Ahmed et al. (2018) found that virtuousness had positively predicted employees' affective well-being and engagement, consequently positively predicting their performance. Further, affective well-being and engagement partially mediated this relationship; where well-being played a significant explanatory role (Ahmed et al., 2018). The researchers explained the relationship between virtuousness and affective well-being through the Organisational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al. 1986). The theory posits that fulfilling employees' socio-emotional needs create positive feelings for the organisation (Ahmed et al., 2018). Consequently, care and well-being perceptions derived from the organisations manifested as a form of positive organisational support and increased employees' psychological and emotional health (Ahmed et al., 2018). The researchers applied the social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977), which states that vicarious

reinforcement increases one's learning and psychological state (Ahmed et al., 2018). On this basis, employees who observe an environment of virtuousness in the workplace are flourished and nurtured; this allows for an increased psychological state and well-being. The OV mechanism also allows employees not to feel like human resources; but like individuals with emotions and intellect (Ahmed et al., 2018). Consequently, this allows employees to develop gratitude for the organisation, which increases employee well-being (Fredrickson, 1998; Ahmed et al., 2018). Ultimately, this experience of positive emotions has positive outcomes of building employees' physical, intellectual, and social resources (Fredrickson, 1998). Another study also found positive affect partially mediates the relationship between organisational virtuousness and work engagement (Sharma & Goyal, 2022). Similarly, in their study of a sample of knowledge workers from various Indian industries, it was found that OV predicted work engagement directly and indirectly through happiness (Singh et al., 2018). However, happiness here was conceptualised as context–free; general happiness and measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999). An implication of the study was for managers to cultivate organisational virtuousness to allow for employees' happiness (Singh et al., 2018). The following section discusses the literature on meaning at work and the link between organisational virtuousness with meaning at work.

2.8.2   Organisational Virtuousness and Meaning at Work

Although meaningful work is a well-known and established scholarly area, researchers still encounter challenges, such as reaching a consensus on what makes work meaningful (Tablan, 2019). Perhaps, a way around this is

through the construct and experience of organisational virtuousness. This is because meaningful work allows us to mature our character and realise our life's purpose (distinct from the pursuit of wealth, fame, and power) while living a life which makes the most of our human potential (Marchese et al., 2002; Tablan, 2019). Hence, meaningful work allows employees to demonstrate deliberate and self-enhancement activities that require applying intellectual virtues (Tablan, 2019). Further, meaningful work gives employees decision-making opportunities to make sound moral judgments. From an Aristotelian perspective, "identifying and learning how to meet such challenges requires the exercise of the virtues, whose cultivation is constitutive of the human good" (Beadle & Knight, 2012, p. 435). In other words, we meet our highest potential through work; similarly, our potential is met because of our virtues (Tablan, 2019).

Conversely, work that does not allow opportunities to attain one's potential and acquire virtues, either due to the mundane nature of work, lack of autonomy, or judgement, is non-eudaimonia and will render the work meaningless (Tablan, 2019). Shahid et al.'s (2020) review of literature deduced that virtuousness enables employees to develop meaning in their work and life. Working in an environment of virtuousness allows employees to cooperate towards achieving organisational goals. A virtuous workplace enables employees to work harmoniously as a part of a system and contribute to organisational missions, allowing them to experience meaningfulness at work (Shahid et al., 2020).

Based on Cameron et al. (2004)'s development and validation of the organisational virtuousness (OV) scale, OV comprised five factors: organisational optimism, forgiveness, trust, compassion, and integrity.

Organisational optimism is the belief that employees will succeed despite significant challenges (Rego et al., 2010). Organisational forgiveness considers how mistakes are quickly forgiven and used to cope in a work environment characterised by high performance. Organisational trust refers to values such as courtesy, consideration, and respect that typify an organisation where employees trust one another and their leaders. Organisational compassion considers how employees show acts of compassion and concern. Lastly, organisational integrity refers to values such as honesty, trustworthiness and honour within the culture of the organisation (Rego et al., 2010). As yet, no scholarly research has linked organisational virtuousness and meaning at work. There have been a few conceptual suggestions and recommendations in Shahid et al. (2020) and Tablan (2019) but no empirical work on this area. However, from an individual and psychological standpoint; there has been existing research linking the constructs of optimism, forgiveness, trust, compassion, and integrity (similar to the facets of organisational virtuousness by Cameron et al. (2004)) to meaning in life; although context (organisation) free. The author reviews the existing literature on this below.

Ju et al. (2013)'s study on two hundred and fifty community elders found that optimism significantly and positively predicted meaning in life and subjective well-being (Ju et al., 2013). Hence, optimists are said to make and experience meaning in life (Ju et al., 2013). Similarly, a study on pediatric physicians and nurses found that an individual's higher optimism predicted greater meaning in life (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Weintroub, 2008). Their study found that employees who soar above adversity through meaning-making might be predicted by their level of personal resources like optimism. Optimistic

individuals expect more favourable life events; and believe that their future will be positive. In contrast, pessimistic individuals do not expect events to go as planned; they intuitively expect a negative outcome. A possible reason could be through a claim by Frankl (1985) that one might find meaning in life through doing. Individuals with an optimistic outlook could enable healthcare professionals to derive meaning from their choice of job, which constitutes frequent encounters with death (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Weintroub, 2008).

After all, the capacity to experience a sense of meaning in life is crucial to psychological well-being (Kealy et al., 2020). Meaning in life is defined as the "sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence" (Steger et al. 2006, p.81). Nevertheless, meaning is also subjective, as what allows one to feel meaningful is distinct from what allows another to experience meaning (Kealy et al., 2020). Individuals anticipating positive outcomes might be more likely to discover activities and relationships that are personally meaningful (Kealy et al., 2020). For example, optimism predicts better perceived social support (Brisette et al., 2002). Hence, it is argued that optimism allows for better solutions to one's life challenges and better social connections; all would drive an individual to behaviours that generate meaning (Kealy et al., 2020). Empirically, individuals with higher dispositional optimism are found to be positively inclined towards coping strategies (aimed to eliminate, decrease or manage stress or emotions) (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006). Conversely, they are negatively linked with avoidance coping strategies (designed to ignore, circumvent or remove themselves from stressors and emotions) (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006). Optimists are also more likely to adapt their coping strategies to meet the requirements of their current stressors (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006).

Expectations of positive consequences are reasoned to increase engagement and attempt to conquer trials, while one's expectations of negative consequences might make an individual more inclined to disengagement and quitting (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006)

The link between trust and meaning is described by Dahlen (2010), who argues that when an individual can trust responsively, it gives way for one to be truly alive. In contrast, if we allow fear to consume us or become "deluded" by trust, this will rob us of the opportunity of living a life filled with meaning. Trust, defined as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p.395) is arguably the core of our social universe (Weiss et al. 2020). It allows for the right conditions to experience a meaningful life, a construct that was formed from the observation that life can be meaningful even under challenging circumstances (Phillips & Ferguson, 2013).

Self-compassionate individuals are more likely to approach life experiences constructively by resisting being fixated on negative responses or engaging in harsh self-criticism (Phillips & Ferguson, 2013). Self-compassion entails kindness and understanding of oneself when experiencing difficult circumstances instead of being self-critical (Neff, 2003). It also looks into the ability to perceive one's experience as part of the larger human experience as opposed to perceiving them in isolation. This ability to navigate through life positively enables one to find meaning in life proactively (Phillips & Ferguson, 2013). Hence, self-compassion allows for a conducive environment to experience meaning. Further, self-compassion correlates with positive mental health (Bluth & Neff, 2018) and is positively associated with mastery goals,

mediated by lesser fears of failure and better-perceived competence (Neff et al. 2005). Other benefits are that self-compassion was found to be positively linked with emotion-focused coping strategies and negatively related with avoidance-oriented strategies in their study among 110 students (Neff et al. 2005).

Van Tongeren et al. (2015) demonstrated the relationship between forgiveness and meaning. The first study of 491 participants found that forgiveness was positively related to meaning in life. The second study, a 6-month longitudinal study of romantic couples, found that participants who frequently forgave their partners were found to have increased meaning in life over time. Similarly, Głaz (2019) found forgiveness linked to meaning in life among Polish students. Forgiveness acts as a meaning-making mechanism for repairing relationships and restoring the positive impact of relationships (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). Interpersonal offences are barriers to relationships and disrupt the meaning–giving function of a relationship (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). Therefore, forgiveness functions as a relational repair strategy that allows one to experience meaning in life (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). As humans, we thrive in close relationships that offer a sense of meaning (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). Experiencing a close relationship could allow one to feel part of something bigger than themselves (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). One's life could also feel more significant when in interdependent relationships because of the feeling that their actions impact and are impacted by the other party (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). Since relationships allow for meaning and forgiveness restores relational harmony, forgiveness can be a meaning–making mechanism (Van Tongeren et al., 2015).

2.9   Chapter Summary

This chapter started with a discussion on affective well-being, followed by a discussion on the development of affective well-being at work. Then, the literature on affect at work, contributing factors of employee affective well-being in SMEs, and the current direction of affective well-being research in Malaysian SMEs were covered in detail. Thereafter, the chapter reviewed meaning at work literature, the conceptualisation of meaning at work, its role, and association with affective well-being. Next, the role of virtue in organisational research, conceptualisation of organisational virtuousness and research on organisational virtuousness were discussed in detail. Finally, the literature on the relationship between organisational virtuousness, affective well-being and meaning at work was covered in detail.

Chapter 3: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

3.0 Chapter Overview

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. Specifically, the amplifying and buffering effects of organisational virtuousness and meaning at work are covered in detail.

3.1 Underlying Theories and Framework of Study

3.2 Amplifying and Buffering Effects of Organisational Virtuousness

3.2.1 Amplifying Effects

The prediction of happiness via organisational virtuousness can be seen from its amplifying and buffering effects (Cameron & Caza, 2013). Virtuousness provides an amplifying effect due to its association with three consequences: positive emotions, social capital, and prosocial behaviour (Cameron et al., 2004). In relation to positive emotions, previous research has examined how an exposure to virtuous behaviour elicits positive emotions in individuals, which then leads to a replication of virtuousness in the individual (Fineman 1999; Fredrickson, 1998; Seligman, 2002; Staw, Sutton, & Pellod, 1994 as cited in Cameron et al. 2004). For example, when employees observe the display of compassion, gratitude or forgiveness by others, they feel empowered to act the same way (Cameron et al., 2004). Importantly, these acts of virtuousness produce positive emotions in a compounding manner; as illustrated by Fredrickson (2000) "In addition to the positive emotions experienced by the givers and recipients of help, people who merely witness or

hear about a helpful interchange may experience such emotions as well" (p. 137).

Positive emotions such as elevation, inspiration, and joy complement acts of virtuousness (Cameron et al., 2004, Rego et al., 2011). This observation inspires a sense of affective elevation, disseminating through the organisation via a contagion effect (Frederickson, 2003, Cameron et al., 2004). In this regard, individual virtuousness has become a higher construct of organisational virtuousness (Cameron et al., 2004). When employees observe acts of virtuousness, such as compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude, they also experience positive emotions; hence, a mutually reinforcing cycle ensues (Cameron & Caza, 2013). Further, virtuousness increases individual happiness, creating more virtuous behaviours, which then cultivates more happiness in the individual (Cameron & Caza, 2013, Rego et al., 2011). This bodes positively for the organisation "as this cycle continues, organisations are transformed into more compassionate and harmonious places" (Fredrickson, 2000, p.137).

Being helpful does not necessarily come from positive emotional states, but it guarantees positive emotions. This is because the individual who helps would feel proud of their actions later (Frederickson, 2000). Further, positive emotions are felt by the helping individual and the person being helped (Frederickson, 2000). Interestingly, even those who had witnessed the exchange between the giver and recipient could experience positive emotions. Based on this analysis, Frederickson (2000) elaborated on the mechanisms through which positive emotions permeate an organisation; and how these effects could be accumulated and compounded. Building upon this reasoning, Haidt (2000) discussed the emotion of elevation, which entails a warm or glowing feeling in the chest that

encourages individuals to improve themselves morally. Specifically, this emotion is said to be triggered by observing acts of moral beauty and virtue (Haidt, 2000). As elevation enhances an individual's desire to help and connect with others, its significance is synonymous with Frederickson's broaden and build model. Haidt (2000) found that participants who witnessed unexpected acts of goodness reported a cognitive change in the form of a more optimistic view of humanity. Through this experience, participants reported a sense of openness and desire to play, which Frederickson describes as the emotion of joy. The study also found that love and a desire for affiliation are consequences of observing saintly and virtuous deeds, even if one had heard second hand. In another study by Haidt et al. (2000) as cited by Haidt (2000), participants were induced with "elevation" experiences by watching a documentary on the life of Mother Teresa, while the control group watched a comedy or a non-emotional documentary. Participants who watched the Mother Theresa documentary reported higher feelings of love and inspiration compared to the control group. Hence, observing good deeds has a strong potential to change the thought–action repertoire, as it creates positive emotions such as love and admiration for the altruist (Haidt, 2000).

Another way virtuousness amplifies effect is through its relationship with the formation of social capital (Cameron & Caza, 2013, Baker, 2000, Coleman, 1998). Social capital is understood as goodwill driven by the structure of social relations to expedite action (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Hence, the core element steering social capital is the goodwill others have on us, which functions as one's key resource (Adler & Kwon, 2002). This "goodwill" can be in the form of sympathy, trust, and forgiveness others have towards us (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

However, it is essential to note that sources of social capital are the specific social structures where the individuals are located (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Hence, from an organisational context, social capital looks into the relationship among employees in which information, influence and resources flow (Cameron et al., 2004). Further, social capital functions as an essential social resource; embedded within social relations, which improves positive organisational outcomes by nurturing knowledge transfer and sharing (Ko, 2021). Social capital is crucial for employee outcomes, such as better physiological functioning, learning, work engagement, cooperation, attachment, and commitment (Baker & Dutton, 2017). Positive organisational behaviours propagate through social capital (Cameron & Caza ,2013).

Empirically, research established a strong relationship between social capital and one's mental well-being due to its utility in shared life events, social support, mutual appreciation, trust, and a sense of belonging through shared social interests (Forsman et al., 2013). For example, past studies have found a significant relationship between social capital and individual well-being (Portela et al., 2013). The study found that organisational social capital positively relates to employee well-being (Ko, 2021). Perceiving social capital in an organisation is a positive experience through one's feelings and thoughts, leading to positive attitudes. These positive affective experiences transfer to one's work life with a positive spillover approach to one's overall satisfaction with life (Ko, 2021). Hence, these positive emotions allow one to develop openness towards problem-solving, decreasing frustrations in daily work and promoting employee happiness (Singh et al., 2018). Hence, it is argued that social capital (which is

"amplified" through the experience of organisational virtuousness); allows employees to experience increased affective well-being.

Lastly, virtuousness "amplifies" effect through its association with prosocial behaviour (Cameron et al., 2004, Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2020). Prosocial behaviour is when employees demonstrate beneficial behaviours to others in the organisation (Cameron et al., 2004). It is a general thesis that prosocial behaviours positively impact both the helper and those being helped (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). As illustrated by Myers (1992), this positive impact can be in the form of happiness: "nothing makes you happier than when you reach out in mercy to someone who is badly hurt" (Myers, 1992, p. 194, as cited in Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Hence, "positive spirals of prosocial behaviour, following from spirals of positive affect, tend to flow from virtuous behaviour" (Cameron et al., 2004, p. 12). Interestingly, behaving virtuously without expectations of positive outcomes or social exchange seems innate in human beings (Cameron et al., 2004). In this sense, observing and experiencing virtuousness seems to unravel our pre-existing predisposition to act in ways that would be beneficial to others (Cameron et al., 2004).

An experimental study by Martela and Ryan (2016) found causal evidence linking prosocial behaviour to an increased positive affect and the experience of meaning. Another study found that prosocial behaviour predicted subjective well-being (Yang et al., 2017). Other research has also found relationships between prosocial behaviour (volunteering) with lowering depression levels (Musick & Wilson, 2003) and positively predicting happiness levels and individuals' health (Borgonovi, 2008). Specifically, volunteering – another form of virtuousness allows one to derive happiness by reinforcing satisfaction with

what one has as opposed to dissatisfaction with what they do not have (Borgonovi, 2008). This is as volunteering changes one's salient reference to those deemed below them economically, allowing them greater happiness (Borgonovi, 2008). Another way this happens is through the social role hypothesis. The social role hypothesis states that since volunteering is viewed as a valued activity in society, individuals who engage in it would feel useful and, consequently, experience greater happiness and better health (Musick & Wilson, 2003, as cited in Borgonovi, 2008).

Nevertheless, research has found evidence that prosocial behaviour promotes happiness under specific conditions (Aknin et al., 2019). Specifically, individuals are more likely to derive happiness from their helping disposition through three mechanisms (Aknin et al., 2019). Firstly, it would be essential that they have autonomy over the choice of whom and when to help. They are connected to the individuals they are assisting and can observe the positive impact of their helping behaviours (Aknin et al., 2019). Hence, based on the above arguments, prosocial behaviour (which is "amplified" through the experience of organisational virtuousness); allows employees to experience increased affective well-being.

3.2.2   Buffering effects

Virtuousness strengthens organisations through the ability to deliver a clear idea of desirable, aspirational, and honourable elements in the organisation. It also assists in replenishing and renewing organisations through its relationship with positive affect, social capital, and prosocial activity (Cameron et al., 2004). The existence of virtuousness in organisations acts as a buffer to protect,

inoculate, and create resilience for the organisation to rise above challenges (Cameron et al., 2004). This "buffering" mechanism helps organisations recover from negative events and avoid decreasing happiness among employees (Cameron & Caza, 2013). Specifically, virtuousness can "buffer" an organisation from the negative consequences of trauma or distress by boosting resilience, solidarity, and a sense of efficacy (Masten et al., 1999, Weick et al., 1999, Cameron & Caza, 2013). This "buffering" effect enhances happiness by decreasing or preventing the negative consequences of unwanted environmental events (Cameron & Caza, 2013). This is because buffering manifests as a resource for employees to absorb systems shocks, recover, mend relationships and work together (Bright et al., 2006).

Relationships in an organisation do not always lead to positive outcomes as co-workers are bound to hurt or offend each other at some point (Bright et al., 2006). When this occurs, practising virtues like forgiveness enables employees to control and manage the negative experience. Having the "buffering" effect of virtue can assist employees in reducing or preventing the diminishing effects of negative environmental events (Cameron & Caza, 2013). For instance, in times of collective pain and confusion, leaders can help employees and the organisation heal by propagating a compassionate response throughout the organisation (Dutton et al., 2002). Although humans have an innate capacity to show compassion, this might not be as easily demonstrated in organisations, with some being able to express and propagate it whereas others suppress it (Dutton et al., 2002). As such, implementing virtuousness in organisational contexts (Cameron & Caza, 2013) decreases employees' trauma and executes quicker recovery from employee setbacks (Dutton et al., 2002). This is

demonstrated in Dutton et al.'s (2002) study, which reasoned improved resilience among employees who observe and participate in acts of compassion. Therefore, virtuousness is important at the individual and managerial level by promoting leaders that care and support others in times of need and distress (Dutton et al., 2002).

Other research has found that organisational healing after a negative event was made possible through acts of virtue (Powley & Cameron, 2008). Specifically, virtues and values such as care, concern, compassion, and social support for employees produced the desired healing (Powley & Cameron, 2008). Besides their core operational responsibilities, organisations are considered integral to human and social relationships (Powley & Cameron, 2008). Embedded in those relationships; lies the capacity for virtuousness (Powley & Cameron, 2008). Hence when an organisational crisis occurs, regardless of its form (natural, technological, or human-induced), virtues bind the organisations (Powley & Cameron, 2008). Organisational virtuousness allows individuals and teams to be resilient and bounce back from challenges while allowing them to adapt and grow from them (Stephens et al., 2013).

This argument is also consistent with prevention research, which found that virtues such as courage, optimism, honesty, perseverance and hope function as a buffer against mental illnesses (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Hence, it is essential to foster human virtues as a buffering mechanism for negative events (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Positive human traits could safeguard against and deter mental and physical illnesses (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Taylor et al. (2000) examined the relationship between positive beliefs and disease progression among men with HIV. The study reports

that even unrealistic but optimistic viewpoints about the future were health protective, and one's capacity to discover meaning in their experience was linked with a better course of illness (Taylor et al., 2000). Hence, it was deduced that positive psychological beliefs like optimism could protect mental health in life-threatening scenarios and shield physical health. Positive psychological beliefs such as optimism are well regarded as protecting mental health.

3.3 Amplifying and Buffering Effect with Meaning at Work

As discussed in chapter 2, no empirical research has linked organisational virtuousness with meaning at work. Nevertheless, the researcher opines that there is a potential mediating affect of meaning at work between organisational virtuousness and affective well-being. Specifically, this is due to the potential amplifying and buffering effects of organisational virtuousness that presumably allows employees to experience a heightened meaning at work. For instance, previous studies have alluded to the relationship between positive emotions (King et al. 2006), prosocial behaviour (Martela et al. 2021) and social capital (Prusak & Cohen, 2001), the three mechanisms of OV's amplifying effect with meaning. Further, researchers still encounter challenges concerning what makes work meaningful (Tablan, 2019). Most research on the antecedents of meaningful work explores the optimum organisational context to allow employees to derive meaning. This is also due to the construct of meaning at work, which is subjective, multi-faceted, and personal to the employee. Consequently, the amplifying effect of organisational virtuousness would allow employees the right conditions to experience meaning at work. This is also compounded by the fact that work does not always allow employees opportunities to exercise their virtue (Tablan, 2019). Further, research has found

that possessing virtues affords one better personal resources and coping strategies to deal with positive and negative life events successfully, allowing them to experience better meaning in life; all consistent with the amplifying and buffering as discussed.

Although no empirical study has linked organisational virtue and meaning at work, Dutton et al. (2002) argued that compassion allows meaning among employees. For Dutton et al. (2002), organisational compassion is essential as it decreases the suffering of those affected and engenders optimal recovery from challenges. Further, compassion in the workplace also allows increased attachment to one's colleagues and the organisation (Dutton et al., 2002). More importantly, acts of compassion enable individuals to perceive meaning, even during adversity. However, leaders in organisations often fail to create a context for meaning for employees. Dutton et al. (2002) assert that "the leader creates an environment in which people can freely express and discuss how they feel, which helps them make sense of their pain, seek or provide comfort, and imagine a more hopeful future" (p.57). In this regard, a leader should cultivate an environment that welcomes individuals who have experienced trauma to reflect on questions on their own accord, assign meaning to the event, and begin the healing process. Another way to cultivate meaning among employees is through communicating and reinforcing organisational values by letting employees know the bigger purpose of their work (Dutton et al., 2002). Importantly, this meaning-making process can be amplified through an intersection of an organisation's virtuous acts towards society and employees. This is aptly illustrated in the case study as below:

"When Newsweek employees were coping with the unexpected illness and death of editor Maynard Parker, the magazine's editor-in-chief, Richard Smith, at once emphasised the company's commitment to community and its commitment to remaining a world-class news magazine. He created an environment where people could do their best work and simultaneously share their sorrow over Parker's losing battle with leukaemia. Smith gave daily updates on Parker's condition and stressed that the company was actively involved in getting him top medical care. Knowing that they had ample opportunities to talk about their feelings and that Parker was getting the best care possible, the Newsweek staff could then concentrate on honouring the publication's commitment to remaining a leading newsmagazine - which was particularly meaningful because Parker had so enthusiastically pursued this goal himself". (Dutton et al., 2002, p. 59)

Lastly, in relation to the construct of integrity and meaning at work, there is no existing literature on the relationship between organisational integrity and meaning at work. An organisation with integrity is an institution with a particular form of moral climate (Bowie, 2013). A moral climate refers to "ethical commitments that are value-based and are embodied in the character of the organisational members and the organisation's routines and incentive structures" (Bowie, 2013, p. 2). There is a close association between virtue and morality. Weaver (2006) described virtuousness as central to one's moral identity, while Gavin and Mason (2004) alluded to how virtuous organisations manifest morality in ethics, character, vision and core values. This is consistent with (Klein 1988) "formal organisations can function like a moral person … they

potentially have something analogous to character, which can be evaluated as virtuous or vicious" (p.56). Further, one of the main attributes of organisational virtuousness is moral goodness (Cameron, 2003), as virtuousness relates to our inherent nature of flourishing a moral character (Cameron, 2003, Ryff & Singer, 1998, Doherty, 1995). Thus, given the close association between organisational integrity and morality, and the link between morality and virtuousness, the relationship between organisational integrity and meaning at work is plausible.

3.4   Research Questions and Objectives of Study

Overall, the research questions for the three empirical studies of this PhD research are:

Empirical Study 1:

1. What organisational practices enabled SME employees to feel positive and negative emotions in the workplace?

Empirical Study 2:

1. What do employees perceive as meaning at work?
2. How does an organisation enable or hinder employees from achieving meaning at work?

Empirical Study 3:

1. Will Organisation Virtuousness (OV) significantly and positively predict Job-related Affective Well-being Scale (JAWS)?
2. Will OV significantly and positively predict Meaning at Work (MW)?
3. Will Meaning at Work significantly and positively predict JAWS?
4. Will MW fully mediate the relationship between OV and JAWS?

Also, the research objectives for the three empirical studies of this PhD research are:

Empirical Study 1:

- To explore and understand organisational practices that enable SME employees to feel positive and negative emotions simultaneously in the workplace.

Empirical Study 2:

- To explore how SME employees define and understand meaning at work, and what makes SME employees derive meaning at work.

Empirical Study 3: To investigate if:

1. Organisation Virtuousness (OV) will significantly and positively predict job-related affective well-being (JAWS),

2. OV will significantly and positively predict meaning at work (MW)

3. MW will significantly and positively predict JAWS

4. MW will fully mediate the relationship between OV and JAWS.

3.4   Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the role of amplifying and buffering effects as theoretical and conceptual frameworks in this study. Specifically, the process by which organisational virtuousness helps amplify positive outcomes and helps buffer organisations from negative outcomes were covered in detail. Also, the process by which organisational virtuousness helps amplify and buffer in association with meaning at work were discussed in detail. Finally, the

corresponding research questions and objectives of the three empirical studies were stated accordingly.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Chapter Overview:

This chapter begins with a discussion of the rationale for the research design, the philosophical paradigms of the study, its approach and methods for data collection, and the methodological justification for studies 1, 2, and 3. This is followed by a presentation of the study's sampling strategy, a description of the participants for studies 1, 2 and 3, and the research instruments: interview questions, scales, and procedure for data collection. Then, a discussion on ethics, procedure for data analysis, validation and reliability for a qualitative study, data analysis for a quantitative study, and justifications for the sample size used in this study.

4.2 Rationale for Research Design

This research aims to understand and explore affective well-being among SME employees in Malaysia. To do this adequately, the study adopted a mixed methods design. Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative research designs considering multiple perspectives and allowing for a convergence of complementary findings (Almeida, 2018). Further, mixed methods integrates quantitative and qualitative methodological and theoretical insights into a holistic and workable solution (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Specifically, it investigates the process of legitimising multiple ways of answering research questions as opposed to limiting a researcher's choice (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Its main characteristics are inclusivity, pluralism, and its complementary nature, which allows researchers to embrace a holistic approach to methodology selection (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Importantly, mixed methods research yields the most comprehensive answers to the posed research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Mixed methods research is a fairly recent paradigm, with seminal works traceable to the mid and late 1980s (Creswell, 2014). It was conceptualised to address the possible weaknesses of each type of design, as combining quantitative and qualitative designs allows for neutralising each design's weaknesses. Researchers have also argued that the product of mixed-method studies is superior to singular-method studies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In addition, integrating two different types of designs allows one to cross-check the validity of the respective databases and explore different questions compared to focusing on a singular database (Creswell, 2014).

Specifically, this study adopts the sequential exploratory research design, which allows the researcher to start with an explorative qualitative study and use the findings to develop the quantitative framework (Creswell, 2014). Thus, the follow-up study is a product or consequence of the result of the initial study. Researchers typically analyse the two studies separately and report the qualitative results first, followed by the quantitative results. Researchers also do not compare the results of the two studies, as the first study seeks to ascertain if the qualitative findings are generalisable to a larger sample. The qualitative findings are typically open–ended without a pre-determined response, while the quantitative results are usually close–ended instruments such as questionnaires and psychological instruments (Creswell, 2014). The sequential exploratory research design is suitable for exploring phenomena, identifying themes, and ascertaining the appropriate variables after the qualitative study (Almeida, 2018). In sequential exploratory studies, equal priority is given to the different

phases; but priority can be focused on either (Terrell, 2012). Its strength is in its research clarity due to its distinct stages. Its notable weakness is that it is time-consuming (Terrell, 2012) due to the multiple data collection that is needed (Almeida, 2018).

As mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, there is a lack of research on affective well-being at work in SMEs with current studies focused on SMEs and business outcomes. Further, the limitation of previous research to examine affective well-being as a singular variable (most studies combine it as part of the larger construct of subjective well-being and psychological wellbeing) denotes the importance of exploring this line of work. Given the importance of employees' affective well-being and the importance of considering the unique contextual elements of SMEs, together with a lack of research in this area; these calls for an exploratory stance and a qualitative design which formed the basis of empirical chapter 1.

Further, given the importance of understanding meaning at work, it is surprising that there is a shortage in the literature on meaning at work in SMEs. This gap is of concern given that SMEs have their unique context, which differs in theory and practice from large organisations. With no literature on meaning at work (both qualitative and quantitative) on SME employees, this forms the basis for a qualitative study in empirical chapter 2, which explores meaning at work among SME employees. Hence, given that there is minimal research on affective well-being and meaning at work among SMEs in Malaysia, this calls for an exploratory approach and justifies the usage of qualitative designs for both studies (empirical chapter 1 and 2).

Further, given that there is minimal research on affective well-being and meaning at work among SMEs in Malaysia, a sequential exploratory research needs to be done. The findings from the qualitative research would then allow the researcher to develop a conceptual framework where a follow-up quantitative study would be utilised. Thus, upon analysing the qualitative data and interpreting its results, the emergent themes from the study would guide the subsequent quantitative studies. The results and themes from the qualitative study will determine the choice of the variables for the subsequent quantitative study. Specifically, study 1 espouses organisations that enable SME employees to simultaneously feel positive and negative emotions in the workplace, while qualitative study 2 investigates how SME employees derive meaning at work. Quantitative study 3 was then conceptualised based on studies 1 & 2 with variables such as organisational virtuousness, meaning at work, and job–related affective well-being. The diagram below summarises the research design adopted in this study:

Figure 4.1

Sequential Exploratory Research Studies 1, 2 & 3

Qualitative Study 1: Job related affective wellbeing among SME employees	→	Qualitative Study 2: Meaning at work among SME employees	→	Quantitative Study 3: Organizational virtuousness, meaning at work & job related affective wellbeing
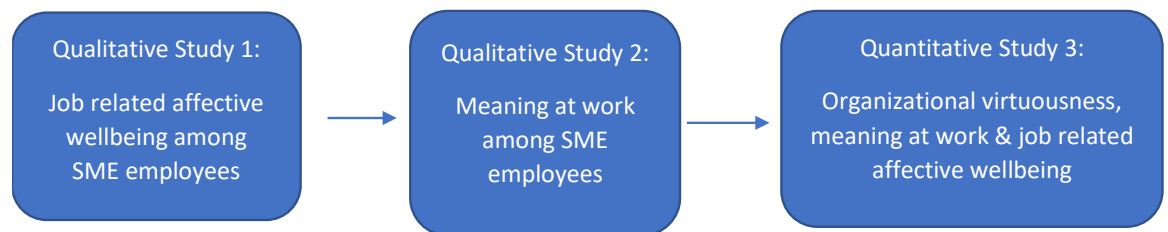
4.3   Philosophical Paradigms

The ideation of mixed methods comes from understanding the two major research paradigms, quantitative and qualitative research (Terrell, 2012). Historically, quantitative research is rooted in a positivist paradigm and has been the main design for research in the social sciences. Quantitative "purists" argue that social observations should be rationalized similarly to how physical scientists observe a physical phenomenon (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Social science research should be objective, separating the observer from the subject (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Positivist paradigms focus on statistical analysis with the intention of generalisation, leading to the discovery of universal findings (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). In contrast, qualitative "purists" are occasionally considered constructivists and interpretivists (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Interpretivism was developed from a critique of positivism to explore in-depth variables and factors (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The perspective here is that humans are distinct from physical phenomena as they experience and produce depth in meanings (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

There were calls in the 80s and 90s for a "truce" between these two paradigms, with researchers acknowledging that both methodologies are

compatible and research should not be dictated by a single method (Terrell, 2012). Hence, a philosophical paradigm of pragmatism would seek to understand a particular question, theory, or phenomenon using the most appropriate research method (Yvonne, 2010). Essentially, pragmatists do not depend on a particular method but consider the most appropriate out of different methods to answer the research question (Yvonne, 2010). Pragmatism acknowledges quantitative and qualitative research methods; consequently, it merges both to understand society and social interactions better (Yvonne, 2010). Thus, pragmatism allows scholars to "enjoy the complexity and messiness of social life and revive a flagging sociological imagination" (Yvonne, 2010, p. 14). With that, the mixed method research design adopts the philosophical paradigm of pragmatism.

4.4 Study Approach & Data Collection Methods

4.4.1 Methodological Rationale for Studies 1 & 2

The data for studies 1 and 2 were collected through interviews. Due to their similar methodologies, the rationale for the two empirical chapters will be discussed in this section. In general, qualitative research aims to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon of a particular sample, as opposed to ascertaining the cause and effect, predicting, or analysing the distribution of the characteristics of a population (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), "the basic definition of qualitative research is that it uses words as data, collected and analysed in all sorts of ways" (p.2). Essentially, qualitative scholars have invested in understanding how individuals perceive their experiences, navigate their worlds, and ascribe meaning to those experiences

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This process of "understanding" subjective experiences constitutes a qualitative design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

One of the instruments for collecting quantitative data is the interview. Interviews can be structured, semi–structured, or unstructured (Berg, 2009). The structured interview has more rigid characteristics: no deviations in question order, the wordings of questions are exact, and no additional or probing questions can be asked. Unstructured interviews are the opposite of structured interview formats. There is no defined order to questions, no pre-determined wordings to questions, and the interviewer could add or delete questions during the interview. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews are said to be between standardised and unstandardised interviews.

On the other hand, semi-structured interviews consist of a set of pre-determined questions and special topics, which are typically asked in a systematic order (Berg, 2009). The questions can be rearranged during the interview, and interviewers can probe beyond the respondent's answers. The questions are subject-centred, so the wording and vocabulary are familiar to the respondent. A major benefit of the semi-structured interview is its flexibility in navigating through the structured questions and its exploration of new areas which are spontaneously initiated by the interviewee. All of these allow for a holistic account of the participants compared to the structured interview (Berg, 2009). Given the benefits and flexibility of the semi-structured interview and the multifaceted nature of the topics in studies 1 and 2, semi-structured interviews were utilised for data collection. A comprehensive list of the semi–structured interview questions is detailed in Appendix A (Study 1) and Appendix B (Study 2). Given the limited research on affective well-being among SME employees

in Malaysia, using a qualitative design for empirical study 1 was pertinent. Also, there is currently no literature on meaning at work among SME employees, which justifies the adoption of qualitative design for study 2. The research objective here is to first, ascertain what employees perceive as meaning at work, and second, to explore how organisations enable (or hinder) employees from achieving meaning at work.

4.4.2 Methodological Rationale for Study 3

The third empirical chapter adopted a correlational research design to analyse data collected through surveys. In principle, quantitative research focuses on "deduction, confirmation, theory/hypothesis testing, explanation, prediction, standardised data collection, and statistical analysis" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.18). A correlational research study aims "to examine and describe the associations and relationships between variables" (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018, p.308). In other words, the goal is to ascertain if a relationship exists and explain the nature of the said relationship (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Unlike experimental studies, no attempts are made to manipulate, control, or interfere with the studied variables (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). In correlational research, two measured variables are subsequently reviewed to identify possible relationship patterns and measure their potential strengths (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Besides establishing relationships between variables, correlational studies can also be used based on prediction (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). This is seen when two variables are established in their relationship, making it possible to understand how one variable can make predictions for another (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). An extension of the

correlational research strategy is seen in multiple regression, where one criterion (outcome) or variable can be predicted or explained by a set of predictor variables (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018).

Data collection through questionnaires is common, especially in studies reliant on large data collection (Kothari, 2004). This method is typically adopted by individuals and large entities such as organisations and governments (Kothari, 2004). Specifically, a questionnaire is given to respondents to answer several questions presented in a pre–arranged order (Kothari, 2004). Essentially, this method tends to be employed in economic and business surveys (Kothari, 2004). There are various advantages of using questionnaires, which include: low cost, freedom from interviewer's bias, respondents' autonomy in answering, sufficient time for responding to questions, easy access to participants, and the potential for large data sets to be collected, thereby, enhancing reliability and dependability (Kothari, 2004). Given the benefits of questionnaires and their utility in management and business, questionnaires are used as this study's primary data collection method. For empirical study 3, a quantitative research design was adopted to validate the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the preceding qualitative empirical studies. Based on the findings and themes in empirical studies 1 and 2, the corresponding framework was tested on a quantitative paradigm through empirical study 3.

4.5 Participants

The inclusion criteria of participants for all three studies was similar. Participants must have been employees in Malaysian small and medium-sized enterprises for at least three months. Based on the criteria of the number of employees for the manufacturing sector, SMEs are defined as firms with no

more than 200 full-time employees. For the services and other sectors, SMEs are defined as firms with full-time employees not exceeding 75 (SME Corp Malaysia).

4.6   Sampling Strategy

Sampling entails selecting participants for a research study. There are two types of sampling methods: probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Probability sampling is used when the whole population is identified, subsequently allowing individuals in the population a specifiable selection probability. In non-probability sampling, the population is not overtly known, so individual probabilities are not identifiable (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Therefore, the sampling method is centred on rationality and convenience whilst ensuring representativeness and avoiding bias (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Given that it is impossible to know the number of employees in all SMEs in Malaysia (which is the participant inclusion criteria for this study), a non–probability sampling method was used.

In qualitative studies 1 and 2, participants were recruited using a non-probability sampling method known as purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling, "also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, relies on the judgment of the researcher to select the units (people, case/organisations, events, pieces of data) to be studied" (Sharma, 2017, p. 751). Convenience sampling, the most common sampling method in qualitative research, is used when participants are chosen based on their availability and willingness to partake in the study (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Purposive sampling was used because participants were required to fulfil two inclusion criteria: working in a Malaysian SME and working for at least three months.

Advertisements were posted on various online mediums to recruit voluntary participants based on their availability.

For study 3, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used. Snowball sampling is " a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances" (Sharma, 2017, p. 752). Similar to studies 1 and 2, participants were required to be SME employees. Given the specific nature of participants' inclusion criteria, participants were also asked to share the study survey with their acquaintances who meet the participant inclusion criteria to partake in the study.

4.7 Description of participants

4.7.1 Studies 1 & 2

Fifteen SME employees were interviewed for study 1 and study 2. Below are the participant summary and descriptions:

Table 4.1

Description of Participants: Participants 1 – 8

Participant	QI	YS	KC	SA	SP	IA	EL	CA
Age	31	26	26	23	26	29	33	23
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
Job Role	Manager	Executive	Manager	Executive	Executive	Center Lead	Consultant	Executive
Industry	IT	Service	Food Manufacturing	Talent Management	Education	Education	Social Service	E-commerce
Years in Organisation	3	11 (months)	1.5 years	5 months	10 months	5 years 7 months	1 year 2 months	7 months
Number of employees	12	11	31	12	10	4	12	74

Table 4.2

Description of Participants: Participants 9 – 15

Participant	MT	OW	JC	JP	MY	AM	TE
Age	24	24	29	23	29	27	35
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male
Job Role	Executive	Therapist	Manager	Executive	Manager	Consultant	Manager
Industry	IT Software	Special Needs	Education	Education	Social Services	Consulting	Manufacturing
Years in Organisation	1 year 9 months	1 year 1 month	5 years 3 months	7 months	5 years	3 years	1.5 years
Number of Employees	5	31	8	6	15	25	60

4.7.2   Study 3

For study 3, participants were recruited via an online – administered survey and 217 complete responses were garnered. Below are the respective participant descriptions.

Age	One participant did not state their age. The remaining 216 participants had a mean age of 31.1 years. The youngest participant was 19 years while the oldest was 66 years old.
Gender	87 males and 130 females
Nationality	One participant is from the Philippines, one hails from Australia, two are from Indonesia, and the remaining 213 participants are Malaysians.
Marital Status	140 participants are single, 69 participants are married, 5 are separated, while 3 participants chose the option "other".
Educational Qualification	4 participants indicated they had no formal qualifications, 15 had completed secondary education, 35 had a high school diploma, 112 had undergraduate degrees, 50 had graduate degrees (masters, Ph.D or other), while 1 participant responded "not applicable/others".

Type of employment	169 participants are permanent employees, while 48 participants are contract employees.
Working from Home	58 participants responded "Yes, I am working from home", while 106 chose "No, I am not working from home" and 53 responded, "I am partially working from home, while some days, I work in the office".

4.8   Covid/Pandemic Related Questions:

The researcher also asked additional questions pertinent to the pandemic. To the question "Has there been any salary cut in your current role because of the pandemic?" 95 responded "Yes" while the remaining 122 participants responded "No". Another question, "Do you think your company is severely affected by the pandemic?" was asked, and 145 participants responded 'Yes" and 72 participants responded "No". Lastly, the question "Are you worried about job security (in your current role) given the economic challenges due to the pandemic?" got a "Yes" from 143 participants and a "No" from 74 participants.

4.9   Instruments:

For studies 1 and 2, semi-structured interview questions were used, while for study 3, established measures were used.

4.9.1 Semi-structured Interview Questions (Study 1 & 2)

For a full list of the semi-structured interview questions used for study 1, please refer to Appendix A, while for study 2, Appendix B. Some of the questions asked for study 1 were:

"In your opinion, does your current organisation enable you to feel positive emotions in the workplace?"

"In your opinion, how can your current organisation further enable you to reduce negative emotions in the workplace?

For study 2, some of the sample questions were,

"Tell us about what you perceive about meaning at work",

"In your opinion, how do you think you could experience meaning at work?"

"Following what you have said and from your own perspective, what makes your work meaningful?".

4.9.2 Scales (Study 3)

For study 3, established scales were used. Specifically, the three variables were organisational virtuousness, meaning at work, and job-related affective well-being. The variables were measured using the existing established scales as discussed below.

4.9.2.1 Organisational Virtuousness

Organisational virtuousness was measured with the Organisational Virtuousness Scale by Cameron et al. (2004). The scale has 15 items and is

measured with a six-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scale also has five sub-dimensions: optimism (items 1 – 3), trust (items 4 -6), compassion (items 7 – 9), integrity (items 10 -12), and forgiveness (items 13 – 15). Examples of items include

"In this organisation, we are dedicated to doing good in addition to doing well."

"Acts of compassion are common here".

"This organisation would be described as virtuous and honourable."

The Cronbach Alpha reported by Cameron et al. (2004) was also good with all the sub-factors reporting alpha values of above 0.8. In this study, organisational virtuousness (as an overall scale) reported a high reliability of 0.95. In terms of the scale sub-dimensions, all five sub-dimensions reported high reliability as well: optimism (.828), trust (.883), compassion (.859), integrity (.910), and forgiveness (.90).

4.9.1.2 Meaning at Work

Meaning at work was measured with the Work as Meaning Inventory by Steger et al. (2012). The scale consisted of 10 items and was measured with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Examples of the items include:

"I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning."

"My work really makes no difference to the world".

The internal consistency or alpha value reported by Steger et al. (2012) was high at .93. In this study, the scale reported high reliability with a Cronbach Alpha value of 91.

4.9.1.3 Job-related Affective Well-being

Job-related affective well-being was measured with (JAWS) by Van Katwyk et al. (2000). The scale consisted of 20 items and was measured with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from never to extremely often. Example items include

"My job made me feel angry".

"My job made me feel excited".

and "My job made me feel frightened".

In Van Katwyk et al.'s (2000) study, this scale reported high reliability with a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.95. In terms of reliability for this study, the scale reported high internal consistency with a Cronbach Alpha Value of 894.

A full list of items for all three scales is attached in Appendix C, D, and E.

4.10   Procedure for Data Collection

4.10.1 Study 1 and 2

Firstly, the researcher contacted participants who had indicated interest in the study. Participants were then given a copy of the informed consent form (refer to Appendix F for a sample of informed consent given to participants) and were asked to sign and return the filled copy accordingly. Then, a suitable time for the interview was arranged. Most participants requested to participate in the

interview after work hours on weekdays or weekends due to convenience and availability. The interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour. Due to movement restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online. Specifically, the online platform Microsoft Teams was used due to its stability and built-in audio recording function. All the information collected through the interview was anonymous, and participants were not identifiable throughout this process. The ethical clearance of this study was obtained from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Research Ethics Sub-Committee, University of Nottingham Malaysia.

4.10.2 Study 3

For study 3, an online self–administered survey questionnaire was distributed. The survey was distributed through online social media and instant messaging platforms. The participants provided their consent through a forced choice response in the survey consent form (refer to appendix G for a sample of informed consent given to participants). After indicating their consent, they proceeded to the subsequent survey sections. The entire survey participation took between 20–30 minutes. The ethical clearance of this study was obtained from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Research Ethics Sub-Committee, University of Nottingham Malaysia.

4.11 Ethical Consideration of this Research

Permission to conduct all three empirical studies was obtained through ethical clearance from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Research Ethics Sub-Committee, University of Nottingham Malaysia. Also, to ensure the necessary ethical guidelines were met, the researcher adhered to the ethical

guidelines as recommended by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2019). The specific ethical guidelines are outlined below:

4.11.1 Consent

All participants' voluntary informed consent is obtained at the start of the study, and participants are informed that at any time, they are able to withdraw their consent. Participants are also told that they can withdraw from the study without giving any reason.

4.11.2 Anonymity

Participants are assured of anonymity in this study. Specifically, participants were informed that the information given was only accessible to the researcher and supervisors. In addition, any participant information that could be identifiable will be kept strictly confidential. Hence, the identity of participants will remain anonymous and untraceable.

4.11.3 Storage

Data collected from this study will be stored and kept by the researcher and supervisors for as long as it is required for research purposes. Even if the data is used in any subsequent research, the same rule of anonymity is assured. If data is no longer needed, it would be deleted, and all respective documents destroyed.

4.12   Procedure for Data Analysis

4.12.1 Studies 1 & 2

The phenomenological study "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon", (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Essentially, phenomenological researchers aim to lessen the experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon down to a description of the universal essence (Creswell, 2013). To achieve this, the researcher would collect data from individuals experiencing the phenomenon and create a composite description of the essence of the experience shared among all the participants (Creswell, 2013). The first step in the phenomenological research process is formulating the question (Moustakas, 1994). The topic and questions need to have social meaning, personal significance, and be stated clearly and concretely (Moustakas,1994). The research questions should fully reveal the essence and meaning of human experience and uncover the qualitative aspects of the subject's behaviour and experience (Moustakas,1994). Then, the researcher can proceed to the data collection process (Moustakas, 1994).

A phenomenological investigation usually adopts long interviews as the primary data collection method (Moustakas, 1994). Interview data is collected from individuals experiencing the phenomenon using interactive and open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994). To effectively narrate how participants perceive the phenomenon, researchers need to "bracket" the potential biases of their own experiences (Creswell, 2013, Moustakas, 1994). Participants are asked two general questions centred on what they have experienced in relation to the phenomenon, followed by the contexts or situations that have influenced their experiences of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Lastly, other open-ended questions will be asked (Creswell, 2013, Moustakas, 1994).

Once the interview is transcribed, the organisation and analysis of data begin. Researchers will study transcribed data from the first and second research questions to identify crucial statements, sentences, or quotes that allude to the way in which participants experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Then, the researcher would horizontalise the data and regard every "horizon" or statement in relation to the research question as of equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Here, the researchers would list every expression that is relevant to the phenomenon.

Thereafter, these horizontalised statements would showcase meaning or meaning units which are then listed. These "units" are then clustered into similar categories or themes, and overlapping and repetitive statements are not regarded (Moustakas,1994). These themes are then utilised to write about what participants have experienced. This is also called a textural description (Creswell, 2013). Then, these clustered themes and meanings are utilized to garner the textural description of the participant's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). These themes are also utilised to illustrate the phenomenon's context or setting, otherwise known as structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013). With the structural and textural descriptions, researchers can produce a compositive description representing the "essence" of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Hence, this essence should allow readers a better understanding of the phenomenon as illustrated by Polkinghorne (1989) "The reader of the report should come away with the feeling that "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (p. 46).

4.12.2 Validation & Reliability for Qualitative Study

There are a few validation strategies proposed by Creswell & Poth (2016) to clarify researcher bias, improve writing with detailed, rich, and thick descriptions, and member checking. These are elaborated below.

1. The peer review or debriefing allows for an external review of the study. The researcher sought counsel from senior academics to cross–check that the processes adopted in this research were objective and accurate.

2. Clarifying researcher bias was done by reflecting on past experiences, biases, or potential prejudices that might impact the interpretation and approach of the study. The researcher was an employee of a Malaysian SME, and his knowledge of the sector necessitated that he actively "brackets" himself from the research process to mitigate bias as much as possible.

3. Writing with detailed, rich, and thick descriptions. The researcher had adhered to previous scholars' data analysis processes to ensure that the best practices were adopted. Further, probing questions and sufficient interview time were ensured to allow a rich transcription for analysis.

4. Member checking involves asking participants their perspectives on the credibility of the study's findings. The researcher asked participants to validate information if he was unsure of what was mentioned or discussed during the interview.

4.12.3 Study 3

Data from this quantitative study was analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) through AMOS (Awang, 2015). SEM is regarded as a recent

multivariate data analysis technique that overcomes limitations posed by other methodologies, such as the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) and regressions (Awang, 2015). SEM, sometimes regarded as the Second-Generation Method, can concurrently analyse latent constructs with multiple indicators and the commonly observed variables in a model. This allows for their inter-relationships to be examined simultaneously (Awang, 2015). SEM can be used for testing of hypothesis for direct effects (path model) and direct and indirect effects (mediation effect) (Awang, 2015). Therefore, SEM was used to test this study's direct paths and mediation effect hypothesis with the full result reported in Chapter 7. With AMOS, one can conduct Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the measurement model of latent constructs. The CFA method can access the one-dimensionality, validity and reliability of latent constructs (Awang, 2015). Importantly, it is highly recommended that researchers conduct CFA for all studied latent constructs prior to modelling their inter-relationships in the SEM model (Awang, 2015). Hence, a CFA was conducted on all scales, and its results are reported in Chapter 7.

4.12.4 Sample Size

An essential guideline for qualitative research sample size is the number of participants and the extent of detail about each participant studied (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Previous scholars have recommended that the sample size for qualitative research is based on the research study employed. For instance, narrative research typically has 1–2 participants; grounded theory has 20–30 case studies and around 4–5 individuals, while phenomenological research is suggested to have 3 – 10 participants (Creswell, 2014). Hence, as studies 1 and

2 are qualitative phenomenological research, the sample size of 15 participants is deemed adequate.

Also, the discussion on data saturation is crucial when deciding on the sample size of a qualitative study (Boddy, 2016). Data saturation is the point whereby no new findings could emerge through any additions of interviews or cases in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2006 as cited in Boddy, 2016). In qualitative research, a single case study or interview is not enough to reach data saturation and normally requires a minimum of two interviews or more (Boddy, 2016). Hence, data saturation is said to be achieved through at least a sample of 12; especially if this sample is garnered from a relatively homogenous population (Boddy, 2016). Given that studies 1 and 2 have 15 participants, thus; the sample size in these studies are deemend adequate for data saturation.

Past scholars have recommended sample sizes depending on the complexity and characteristics of the studied model (Awang, 2015, Hair et al., 2010). Specifically, if the model has five or fewer latent constructs (with each latent construct having more than three items), the minimum sample size required is 100 participants (Awang, 2015, Hair et al., 2010). The minimum number of participants correspondingly increases when the number of latent constructs increases if the constructs have less than three measuring items (Awang, 2015; Hair et al., 2010). Thus, given that study 3 has three variables where all its corresponding scales have more than three items, the sample size of 217 participants garnered for study 3 is deemed adequate and acceptable.

4.13   Chapter Summary

This chapter opened with a discussion on the rationale behind the mixed methods research design, philosophical paradigms, study approach, and data collection methods. Next, there was a discussion on the methodological rationale for studies 1, 2, and 3, which combined qualitative and quantitative designs. Afterwards, an elaboration of the sampling strategy adopted in this study was presented. Description of participants for studies 1 and 2, and 3 were also provided, followed by an elaboration on the instruments, such as the interview questions and scales used. Lastly, procedures for data collection, a discussion on ethics, procedures for data analysis for all three empirical studies, and the justification for the sample size used in this study were provided. The subsequent chapter details the fi0rst empirical study of this research.

Chapter 5: Empirical Research 1

5.1   Chapter Overview

Chapter 5 presents the findings of empirical study 1. It discusses the themes and sub-themes of this qualitative study. Specifically, the six themes garnered in this study were trust at work, a compassionate and caring environment, altruism, integrity, forgiveness, and optimism were covered and discussed in detail. This is followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature.

5.2   Introduction

This study examined Malaysian SMEs to establish the organisational dynamics that made employees feel positive and negative emotions in the workplace. Specifically, the research question and objectives of this study were; What are the organisational practices that enabled SME employees to feel positive and negative emotions in the workplace? and to explore and understand organisational practices that enable SME employees to feel positive and negative emotions simultaneously in the workplace. The phenomenological investigation yielded six themes and corresponding sub-themes outlined in Tree Diagram 5.1 below.

Tree Diagram 5.1

Themes and Sub-themes
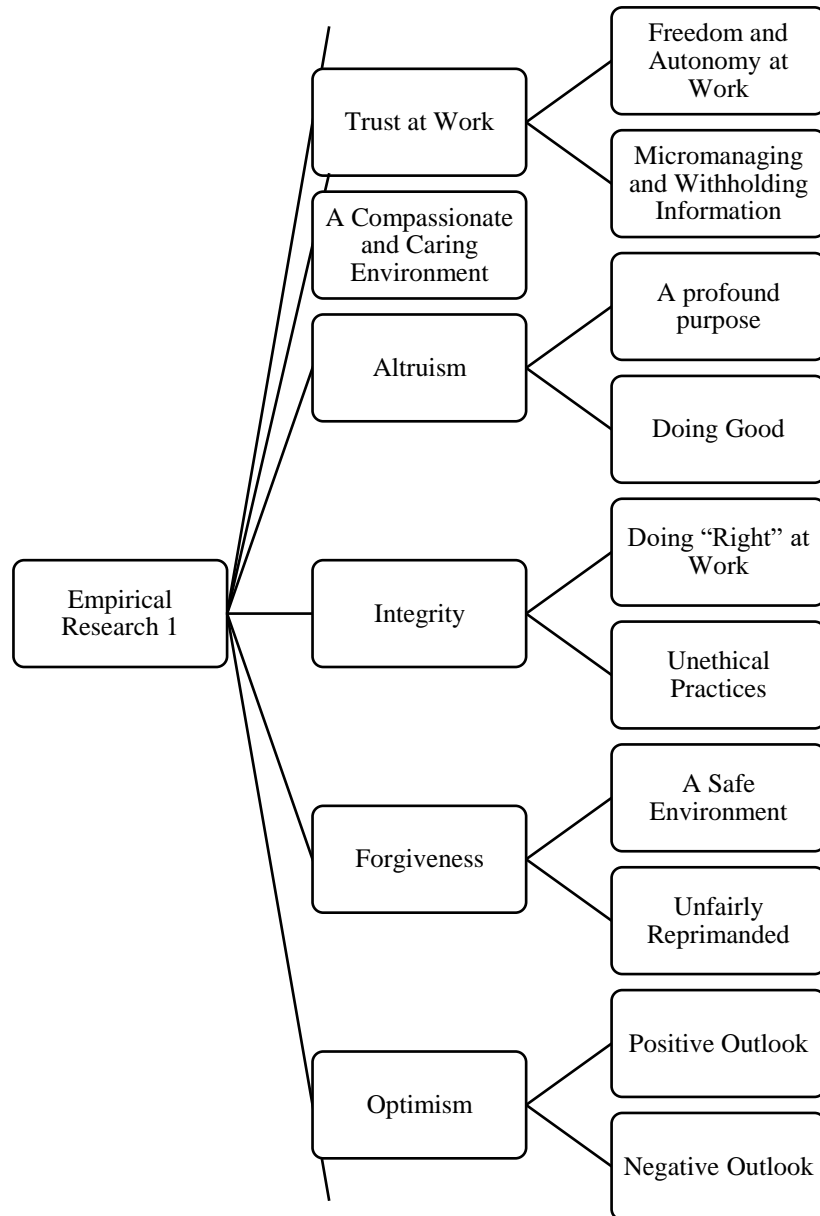
A phenomenological study "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p.76). Further, phenomenological researchers aim to reduce the individual experience of a phenomenon down to a description of its universal essence (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, this chapter discusses the six themes of trust, a

compassionate and caring environment, altruistic behaviours, acts of integrity, a forgiving environment and optimism which allows for the experiencing of an increased positive affect and decreased negative affect among participants. Each theme is also characterised by corresponding sub-themes, highlighting the instances of such lived experiences.

5.3   Theme 1: Trust at Work

The first theme discovered from the thematic analysis was trust at work, with two additional sub-themes of freedom at work and micromanaging and withholding information. This theme further highlights how SME workers who experienced freedom and autonomy at work within their organisation experienced positive affect at work. Conversely, individuals who experienced being micromanaged and information withheld from them within the organization had more experiences of negative affect. The following sub-section elaborates on the results related to these three sub-themes.

Table 5.2

Trust

Theme	Sub-themes:
Trust at Work	1. Freedom and Autonomy at Work 2. Micromanaging and Withholding Information

5.3.1   Sub-theme 1: Freedom and Autonomy at Work

Participants discussed how they felt positive affect when they experienced freedom and autonomy at work in their organisations which in turn made them feel trusted. They affirmed that trust typically manifests when

executing tasks without explicit instructions. For example, one participant, JP, shared how an expression of trust and "belief" from his line manager made him feel appreciated and confident about his capacity at work. JP further disclosed that his line manager's trust spurred him to perform his assigned tasks better. He confirmed that the experience enabled him to gain positive affect when she (the line manager) was on maternity leave.

"...my boss really believes in us...instead of just ordering us what to do she will just like, give us opportunities to like...try to use our own ways of teaching." JP

"...she went for maternity break...so she didn't ask anything about the organisation. Because she said she really believes in us, we can manage it well..." JP

Another participant, SM, disclosed that trust from relevant individuals in the organisation bolstered his authority on job-related decisions, which allowed for the experiencing of positive affect. He noted that trust from his line manager enabled him to make decisions faster because of the small size of SMEs. Furthermore, SM explained that the experience of trust and responsibility has allowed him to derive greater joy at work through opportunities to grow in his career and the organisation.

"I'm given the power to actually make decisions. And...yes, I will get permission from the boss, but essentially, the process is faster, I guess, rather than compared to the bigger companies..." SM

"They give you some form of ownership to...your role...like, for example, I don't think there's any fresh grads that are allowed to create modules...having that, you know, that responsibility and that trust. I think that that gives me joy" SM

SM's experience of how trust promotes autonomy was shared by other participants. For example, SA elaborated on how trust promoted autonomy and freedom in performing job-related tasks. It also helped them to secure a positive feeling and elevate their sense of belonging and happiness when working in SMEs. Essentially, the close proximity and less hierarchical nature of SMEs have facilitated this.

"In the sense that a lot of what I do at work, I don't have to go through my boss for approval for a lot of things. Because he has quite a lot of trust in me. So, I can just head projects by myself…" SA

"Because I head the entire thing, then yeah, of course, they need me. But that's not why I derive joy out of the organisation. It's more like the amount of trust they give me more than the fact that they need me…" SA

5.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Micromanaging and Withholding Information

Conversely, several participants shared how instances of being micromanaged and having information withheld in their organisation was associated with feeling negative affect. This could manifest in relation to a lack of trust in one's role (autonomy), relationships with subordinates, and the organizations as a whole. A participant, AM recounted that the absence of a trusting relationship between her and her former organisation manifested in negative emotions due to pressure associated with her day-to-day role and intense micromanaging. This was in stark contrast to her current company, where trust is prevalent from a role perspective. She opined that her current employer offered a much better condition for her to thrive, with the key drivers being a trusting environment and autonomy to perform her job. AM recounted

her experience with a former supervisor whose approach to information sharing caused her to harbour negative emotions against the organisation.

"One big thing that I think plays a big role in making me feel positive about this place is actually the management trust us and to me, that is very important. In my previous company…the thing I don't really enjoy is that they make us send in our daily thing to do list. So, everyone needs to list down their daily things to do. And it's like an Olympic of whose list is longer" AM

"…when I first joined in 2019, I was working under a middle level manager…that time was actually quite a rough period for me…because I felt like I was not empowered to do things. And I was not sure whether this is what people called office politics, when your supervisor is withholding information so that you do not know as much as your supervisor. And I really didn't enjoy it. So that is…one instance of creating negative emotions" AM

Similarly, another participant, AR narrated how certain untrustworthy behaviours from subordinates could lead to negative emotions. For example, when his subordinates withheld information and are not honest in relation to their expected tenure in the organisation. Untrustworthiness manifests in exploitation by colleagues resulting in disappointment and negativity towards the company. AR also revealed that unfair workload distribution caused distrust towards the company and bred negative emotions at the workplace.

"What will make me feel negative emotion is when the trainers go too fast, or like the turnover rate of the of the staff is too high . And that can cause a negative emotion because I will feel frustrated. I will feel like oh my God, this cycle again, you know, so frustrated is one thing, I will feel like disappointed also maybe

because maybe the trainers told me that they're going to be here for quite some time but then end up only maybe a few months, right. So, all those kinds of negative feeling will be there" - AR

"But I must say and be very honest that the first few years, I will feel very unfair, you know, and could also feel a bit of like I am being taken advantaged" – AR

Lastly, participants spoke about withholding vital work-related information because of a lack of trust. In this respect, AM mentioned how the lack of trust from the company made them feel anxious and uncertain about their position working in the SME. Although AM mentioned that confidentiality was sometimes meant to protect the employee from overreacting, it caused them to feel underappreciated and uncertain about their job security.

"It's about the transparency bit. I think the management might feel that we do not need to know everything, and they might also feel like not letting us know certain things is to protect us to avoid panic or what not. But in my perception, when they do that, they are actually creating more uncertainty among the employees, like the previous example I shared, our organisation was going through an acquisition process, but for the longest time, there was no update…no one told us whether after the acquisition, we would still have our jobs or not…" AM

5.4   Theme 2: A Compassionate and Caring Environment

The second theme that emerged from the study is a compassionate and caring environment. Most of the respondents affirmed that a compassionate and caring SME workplace nurtures positive affect among employees. Conversely, the absence of compassion leads to negative affect. This section discusses how

participants who experienced compassion and acts of care within the organisation or lack thereof experienced positive and negative affect, respectively.

Table 5.3

A compassionate and caring environment

Theme
A compassionate and caring environment

Most participants reported that having a compassionate and caring environment was important for developing positive emotions in the workplace. Line managers were particularly highlighted as important sources of workplace compassion and care. They can make employees feel supported and develop more positive emotions. MA and MT disclosed that their line manager's efforts transcended the traditional employer-employee relationship. These managers went the extra mile to take them out for lunch, establish a close relationship, and care about their career goals.

"My boss also…because…she cares about us, she asks about my vision, and my future plan. So, she said she might, she might be able to help me in that" JP

"… it's not about like you care about the end product… It's just that you know, someone is behind you to support you" JP

"I tend to have more opportunities to interact with my boss, because sometimes we will go out for lunch, like just both of us…we will talk about non-work-related stuff. So, in a way, it also allows us to know each other better…our bond also get closer from there" MA

"And he (the supervisor) makes us... he tries his best to make us feel welcome. And the small things the company does, for example, so our company has some agreement with a fruit stall nearby place like every week, we get three fruits…" EL

"Something quite special is that sometimes when our workload is not that high, our boss will actually bring us out, like, let's say for buffet. And then one good thing about this boss…is very generous la…she would just pay for us" MT

The form of compassion and care can also be directly related to the participants' role, as illustrated by participant AR, who mentioned how compassion and care permeate the organisation.

"When the cases get hard, or like, you know, maybe on that day the trainer you know, do the training, but then the student is not responding so well after that most of the time, the culture in our organisation is that we will support one another, we are close knit to one another, and then we will, of course , encourage and motivate" AR

According to AR, good relationships with colleagues helped SME employees to experience more positive affect at work. This is not regarding direct support or help with one's role, but in relation to a caring nature of colleagues, which is more on personal exchange. For example, JP, MY and OW affirmed how their colleagues attentively listened to their workplace struggles and helped them experience happiness and positive feelings.

"…when you feel down, they will notice it. So, they will somehow ask maybe you will be too sensitive to like, tell them the whole story, but at least you know that they care for you" JP

"So, some of us…even though we really just want to go home, but we just stay back …keep each other company and keep each other going until we finish our work. We had our dinner together and sometimes even like smuggle in some alcohol" OW

"… if you have any problems, or if we meet any difficulties… we'll bring up and discuss and see what's the solution that we can…have so basically everyone treat each other as a family. Yeah, so that's what made me feel happy and positive at my current workplace" JC

"I would say, yes, culture wise, my organisation emphasises a lot on like togetherness, and the family spirit. So, they really treat their staff like their family…" MY

More importantly, when AR was asked about how SMEs can allow for more compassion and care in the work environment, they opined that informal organisational activities such as having lunch/dinner together could help strengthen employees' bonds.

"So, what I would change is…to have more, stay back dinner time together, or maybe lunchtime, together…that will be I think, as simple as that we'll be able to knit all the trainers closer". AR

Notably, several participants mentioned that the small size of SMEs allows for closer relationships between colleagues, leading to closer physical and communicative proximity rarely found in multinational companies (MNC). JP also mentioned that due to its small size, SME employees who engage in counterproductive behaviour, such as backstabbing or fighting, could easily be

identified by others. This decreases the likelihood of employees engaging in negative or unproductive behaviours within an SMEs.

'*So, when the employees are not too many, we are able to connect with each other more closely…*" YS

"*I heard from my friends, like their company, maybe they are fighting for any position. So, they might use some maybe dirty tactic to…not let you move up or the jealousy will be there somehow…as compared to that, if you really show that in a small company…then it will be really obvious…if you have the intention, people will read it…*"JP

"*…because the number of employees is less, so our bond between the colleagues and because I'm also dealing directly with the boss, so actually our bond will be closer in a way because we all of us are in the same office and just one space and we can see each other every day. So, in a way that makes us closer*"- MA

Conversely, participants also shared how being in a less compassionate and caring environment could elicit negative emotions. For example, KE mentioned that blaming culture causes SME employees to experience negative affect at work.

"*There was a lot of blame culture going on back in the day. So, when something didn't go, right, there was a lot of targeting of like the managers or the people involved*" - KE

Interestingly, participant MT also elaborated on the possible negative outcome of excessive care that can elicit negative emotions among the employees. According to MT, colleagues tend to cross boundaries and meddle in other persons' affairs due to the size of SMEs.

"...there're only a few employees in the office. So sometimes there will be cross boundaries that happen. Our boss used to treat us like her own son in a way...sometimes there will be these cross boundaries that is quite concerning like she would interfere with our personal matters. That's non work related...so that kind of worried us also" - MT

"...a few of my colleagues, they are...foreigners, sometimes they need to find places to stay. So, my boss would interfere with that, also, but my colleague has his own preferences. So, there is some conflicts happen there also. So overall, I can see because conflict happens on non-work-related stuff. So, it also affects us..." - MT

5.5   Theme 3: Altruistic Behaviours

The third theme discovered from study 1 is altruistic behaviour, which shows how participants who experienced altruism within the organisation or lack thereof, experience positive and negative affect, respectively. Specifically, this form of altruism manifested through having a profound purpose at work and good organisational culture, such as being helpful within and outside SMEs. The finding also suggests that employees perceiving altruism will eventually find a profound purpose or engage in good behaviour inside or outside the organisational context.

Table 5.4

Altruistic Behaviours

Theme	Sub-themes:
Altruism	1. A profound purpose
	2. Doing Good

5.5.1 Sub-theme 1: A Profound Purpose

Two participants, YS and AM, mentioned that their organisation aligned with their values, allowing for a profound purpose and hence; fostered positive employee emotions. Specifically, both participants described their organisation as being desirous of helping them to experience positive affect. Besides, this form of organisational altruism may also influence SME employees' altruistic tendency, which in turn promotes more positive affect at work. AM also highlighted that altruistic tendency could be seen through employee engagement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and creating a positive impact towards the general society.

"I'm happy that my organisation is aligned to my vision as well because they are really wanting to help other people out…Yeah, altruism in themselves in their company, I can totally feel it. And I am really happy that…altruism can actually affect me to be more altruistic…so, that is basically that is what that triggers or enhance my positive emotions" - YS

"One of our biggest client is actually a sovereign fun, which gives out scholarships to a lot of scholars, and we run programs for all these scholars, when we run programs, we work together with NGOs, we get all these scholars to come up with projects and create an impact in the society. So basically, I feel like I am the bridge for all this to happen. And I find that very meaningful" - AM

Further, QI elaborated on how organisational culture allows for treating employees above what is required. In addition, QI mentioned that bringing goodness to others (in his case, he manages interns) makes employees feel more

positive at work. He also emphasised that organisations that help employees find their goals and growth opportunities attain more positive affect experiences.

"... let's say, when we take an intern in, we're not just like, asking the intern to photocopy stuff, we're not asking them to make coffee or anything like that. We're trying to instil as much knowledge to them as possible. And for me as a person, I like teaching and this company allows me to move forward with that with the interns as well, like, I always teach the interns basically everything that I could about the business and what we do and what can benefit for them as well in the future." - QI

Another respondent elaborated that SME owners' willingness to engage in altruistic behaviour helps them establish a greater sense of purpose for working in SMEs. For example, YS revealed that her company owner's contribution to society and overlooking profit-making helped her experience positive affect at work.

"He does not stop in helping other people out or psycho giving out a lot of psychoeducation such as…giving courses, online courses, giving a lot of knowledge and psycho educate the public…he really brings himself out to the public and he really shared knowledge and really selfless so that they are really selfless in helping other people" - YS

For QI and AR, helping clients beyond expectations was a source of profound purpose at work. In particular, QI felt that the SME where he worked showed a greater sense of altruistic tendency by providing help and support beyond making profits. More so, he commended how much his organisation

cared about their impact on other entities, making him feel positive emotion for serving purposefully.

"Well, I think like, in most businesses…some companies might take shortcuts in providing a solution to a customer or…providing a very cheap option to the customer instead of providing a very quality solution to them…so far, this is one of the companies I have been happy with that we provide quality over just like something that's fast that they need…we actually take our time with the customers, we get to know them…we get to be pretty much part of that team" - QI

"Like they made us feel more like they're part of their family, extended family like that. And because of the experience as well…the work that you're doing for them is not just work, but it's helping them bring change to them…" - QI

"…I feel this positive emotion…whenever I see my client happy…when…you managed to…help your clients…that process itself is very satisfying. You feel like you, you did something great right there…" - AR

Conversely, when respondents did not experience or form altruistic purpose (in the form of helping others), they encountered decreased positive affect. According to EL, the organisation's lack of a common profound purpose leads to misalignment between the company's and employees' goals and vision. Essentially, she also discussed that this negative impact is compounded due to the small nature of SMEs, which reduces a sense of employee belonging when working without a clear vision or goal from the SMEs.

"I guess because we're not a very big, not big company at all. It's only about…the 13 of us. It seems that the problem is with our company is that there's

no sense of belonging....nobody really wants to stay for long. There's no sense

of like, having a common goal or vision..." - EL

5.5.2   Sub-theme 2: Doing Good

This sub theme looks at how organisational altruism is shown and implemented through doing "good" with both internal and external organisational stakeholders. A few participants shared that they experienced positive affect when working with a selfless supervisor at an SME. They characterised selflessness as engaging in good behaviour without recourse to personal benefits. YS and SI described the positive effect of being selfless toward their clients.

"And he is really selfless in teaching us all the counselling skills, techniques and theories, which I'm really thankful for that…" - YS

"...because my boss is really good in public speaking, so he's, the top 28 in the world…so he does share what he has learned, his wisdom with me. And that, I think…that…you know, something that I was looking for…" - SI

Consequently, other participants also mentioned that different forms of altruism SMEs offer as rewards or benefits, such as medical plan (participant AM) or organisational support (participant SA), promoted their positive affective states.

"...on the generosity part that there's one important point…every year we have 1000-ringgit medical claim. And last year, I already claimed…600 or 700, by June….by July, I needed to do a surgery for my wisdom tooth. And I was like, man, I got no money for that. And my claim is already bursting soon, because I

can only claim for 1000…the surgery was 1200…that means not enough…when my supervisor found out about it…He told me…just go ahead and go look for a good doctor at private clinic…you can claim the remaining amount and whatever that is not enough. We will top up for you" - AM

"…And then I told him that like my aspirations of (an organisation) like, I can stay for this year, but then I want to go for (an organisation) in October this year, and then he was like…Oh, yeah, that's fine with me, you can just stay on until whenever you want, but then you tell me in July, whether you want to leave or not…and if you still want to stay in the organisation then will keep you but if you don't and you just learn what you can for now…" - SA

Besides benefits, two participants, SM and JC, shared how the SME stakeholders' altruism helped them excel by providing education fund offers and development-related projects. Particularly, they highlighted how the supportive gestures from the company to help them in their personal development influenced their experience of positive affect at work. Similarly, some participants disclosed that the altruistic willingness of SME stakeholders could be extended beyond employees' personal needs. For example, MY mentioned how she had been receiving financial and emotional support from her organisation to take care of her terminally ill relative. Similarly, AM revealed that his line manager's donation of money to his friend inspired him (AM) to feel positive affect in the workplace. These findings indicate that SMEs provided their employees with support and organisational altruism. Consequently, SME employees were more likely to accrue positive emotions and experience positive affect at work.

"And another aspect, which I really like is…we are rewarded for being competitive. So, they actually fund our, for example, toastmasters all of us they fund that for us…" - SM

"…She (her supervisor) always pushes us to upgrade ourselves. So…my diploma is also sponsored by the school…so (the organisation) provide a lot of opportunity for improvement if we are willing to" - JC

"…Two years back, when…one of my uncles was diagnosed with cancer, and…I became his caregiver…my company supported me financially, they subsidised some of my needs and…they would be considerate of my work. Let's say if I need to leave early or I have to attend to my uncle in urgently… " - MY

"…my housemate during MCO, he lost his job, he became a food panda rider. And then he got into an accident. So, he broke his arm…And…he couldn't work for two, three weeks…when my supervisor found out about it…They don't know each other…my supervisor just passed me 300 ringgit like that and asked me to pass to my housemate from a different race. My supervisor is a Malay and my housemate is a Chinese, they have never met each other. But then he's willing to do that. So, I'm just amazed. Yeah, I'm inspired, I want to be like them, I want to be able to do kindness to other people as well..."- AM

5.6   Theme 4: Integrity

This theme discusses how employees who experienced integrity within the SMEs, or lack thereof, experienced positive and negative affect, respectively. We found that participants who work in organisations that uphold acts of integrity, ethics, and reputable work culture experience positive affect. Conversely, participants experienced negative affect when they worked in

organisations that engaged in unethical practices. The sub themes identified were doing "right" at work and unethical practices.

Table 5.5

Integrity

Theme	Sub themes:
Integrity	1. Doing "Right" at Work
	2. Unethical Practices

5.6.1 Sub-theme 1: Doing Right at Work

Participant QI experienced positive emotions whenever their organisation created a culture of work that avoided shortcuts but delivered the best on the job (doing "right"). For them, this form of integrity engenders positive emotions.

"… organisation itself always tries to keep us on a straight path…we don't take shortcuts…we try our best to deliver the best. And because of that practice, I think they also kept trying to instil that into us. And everyone just naturally brings it out in their work" - QI

QI further mentioned that the opportunity and ability to work appropriately bring out the best in him and generate positive feelings from working.

"...some companies might take shortcuts in terms of providing a solution to a customer or even just providing a very cheap option to the customer instead of providing a very quality solution to them. ...so far, this is one of the companies I have been happy with that we provide quality over just like something that's fast…we actually take our time with the customers, we get to know them we get

to be pretty much part of that team. Like they made us feel more like they're part

of their family, extended family…"- QI

Additionally, YS mentioned that seeing her line manager putting her best effort at work has helped her to develop positive affect from working in the SME. According to YS, her line manager has been exemplary in willingly attending to clients and helping them to overcome financial challenges by charging affordable rates. These few examples have inspired YS to work in the SME landscape.

"…he actually put out all his jobs and he will actually attend to him, even when he is requiring for a very urgent timing, he will attend to it. So, this is what really inspires me…he is really happy to help the people out" - YS

"…because some of the clients they are actually having some financial issues problems. But in our centre, our rate is about 150 per hour which is a really low if you want to compare with other markets outside" – YS

5.6.2   Sub-theme 2: Unethical Practices

Conversely, AR (who works for a training firm) spoke about instances when the firm engaged in unethical practices that bred negative emotions. According to AR, poor organisational practices led him to question the integrity of the firm and made him feel negative about their work ethics. In particular, he cited unfairness in workload distribution as one of the firm's unethical organisational practices.

"I would say pretty negative about is when there will be a clash…in terms of being a business and being a proper consultant. Because sometimes a client…,

they don't really need the training, they are really good. They're really fine….

then there is another part whereby the consultant knows that oh, we really need

the fee…so that itself for me, it causes a bit of negativity or negative emotion

because…I will say it's not so ethical." – AR

"And then I was assigned to have a lot of extra other like other tasks…and…he

didn't tell me before…during the interview…sometimes I do feel like maybe they

may take advantage" – AR

Conversely, OW, who works in an autism centre, discussed how the centre tends to overlook essential aspects of the therapist-client relationship to increase company revenue. Specifically, the centre offers trials for sessions which do not benefit the long-term nature of a therapeutic alliance and causes an increased workload for the therapist. Other instances are as elaborated by AR, whereby the centre was not congruent in pre- and post-employment job responsibilities.

"…we they are doing like short term hires, like really short, like five days, one

month, three months, they think that it makes perfect business sense like to get

parents…to understand that how ABA can help their children's but for the

therapists, it's actually it's actually very painful, because it takes time to get to

know children, and it takes time to build rapport with children….it actually takes

time and effort and a lot of energy to build rapport…" - OW

"… I was assigned to have a lot of extra …tasks…he didn't tell me before,

like…during the interview, they didn't tell me before they didn't say that…you

are also expected to do this…sometimes I do feel a bit of like taken advantaged"

– AR

5.7   Theme 5: Forgiveness

This theme discusses how participants who experienced forgiveness and acts of forgiveness within the organisation, or lack thereof, experience positive and negative affect, respectively. The study found that positive affect is nurtured in a work environment where colleagues and supervisors forgive each other. Conversely, the absence of forgiveness, typified by acts such as being unfairly reprimanded or hurling verbal abuse, fosters negative affect. The sub themes identified were a safe environment and unfairly reprimanded.

Table 5.6

Forgiveness

Theme	Sub-themes:
Forgiveness	1. A Safe Environment
	2. Unfairly Reprimanded

5.7.1   Sub-theme 1: A Safe Environment

The study's respondents disclosed that working in a supportive and forgiving environment enabled them to create more room for developing positive emotions. Specifically, this allows for a safe environment to make mistakes, typified by the forgiving nature of one's superior. For example, JP and SA highlighted that knowing their line managers are forgiving allows them to develop themselves in the company. Further, a forgiving environment forged among colleagues also fosters positive emotions, as shared by YS.

"She will say maybe…although there might be some mistakes…but she will point out and say "good job and keep going". Yeah, you'll be a better teacher in the future" - JP

"So, if I'm doing something wrong, then they will tell me…and won't tell me in a way that's like, we can't trust you with this anymore…But like, oh, maybe you should do this the next time you run something"- SA

"…because my colleagues, they are counsellors or clinical psychologists, so their empathy skills are quite high. So, and whenever I have done any mistakes or something wrong, it wouldn't make me feel as stressed…because everybody is understanding, and they really consider my own feelings" - YS

YS attributed the forgiveness in SMEs to the small size of the workforce. A smaller workforce eases forging connections between employees and overlooking mistakes.

"So, when the employees are not too many, we can connect with each other more closely . And more understanding…so and whenever I have done any mistakes or any something wrong, it wouldn't make me feel as stereesed…because everybody is understanding, and they really consider my own feeling" YS

Similarly, QI discussed how an environment which promotes sharing and unbiased judgement of wrongdoing created a "safe space" for SME employees to grow.

"…he actually listens and takes into account our ideas and our solutions. And I think that kind of inspires us a bit and gives us a bit more positivity in sharing ideas inside the workplace as well, because it makes us feel safe. Like, there's no stupid idea or anything…" QI

"My managing partner, he is the biggest advocate on asking questions, he will always be telling people, there are no stupid questions. The only thing that makes you stupid is not asking questions. But I think that gives me a lot of confidence in putting forth my question and not feeling like this might make me sound dumb" – AM

5.7.2   Sub-theme 2: Unfairly Reprimanded

Conversely, some participants experience negative emotions in less forgiving work environments. This tends to happen when they are verbally abused or unjustly reprimanded for making a mistake. According to KE, such a circumstance causes the employee to feel unappreciated and thus makes them experience negative affect, stress or anxiety.

"There was a lot of blame culture going on back in the day. So, when something didn't go, right, there was a lot of targeting of like the managers or the people involved"- KE

".... (The founder) sent out a massive email which was littered with F bombs and accusations to the manager saying that this manager needs to either be terminated and he was very disappointed, yada, yada, yada. Long story short, it was a very difficult to read kind of email, and I straight away told my head of department that I do not appreciate it even though this was not relating to me. I did not appreciate the fact that a founder could send out an email written in this style"- KE

"...to be honest, it makes me feel stressed and tense in a way. Because like, when she's scolding, it kind of affect our state as in we can't really focus on our work" MA

Similarly, MT highlighted how being scolded over a simple mistake can have negative affect on all employees due to the proximity of SMEs. MT revealed that a line manager's overreaction when handling office conflict can cause other team members to develop negative emotions.

"...I do feel negative emotions…because…when my colleagues did something, or even myself did something wrong, because we are all working in one space. So, when someone did something wrong, my boss eventually will scold the person and then it actually affects all of us. So, all of us will be involved in it" - MT

"...Because we can't listen to the scolding because we are in one area…That scolding being in the office so it kind of affects our state and mood as well" - MT

Further, the emotional nature of MT's supervisor caused him to be afraid of approaching his boss when he made any mistakes.

"I think it would be better if my boss can stay calm, when mistakes or issues happen, which is, deal directly with the solutions . I mean, be more solution-oriented because…my boss…tend to be angry when mistakes happen and scold us. So sometimes when mistakes happen, we don't dare to approach boss and talk about it…" - MT

5.8   Theme 6: Optimism

This theme discusses how participants who experienced optimism and acts of optimism within the organisation, or lack thereof, experience positive and negative affect, respectively. An organisation's optimistic culture, illustrated in the belief in positive future outcomes and positive encouragement

and reinforcement, allowed participants to experience positive affect. Conversely, a negative outlook typified by a lack of optimism and an unsupportive work environment caused negative affect. The sub themes identified were believing in a positive work outcome and negative outlook.

Table 5.7

Optimism

Theme	Sub-themes:
Optimism	1. Positive Outlook
	2. Negative Outlook

5.8.1 Sub-theme 1: Positive Outlook

Several participants discussed how a culture of optimism in the form of having a positive outlook allows them to experience positive affect when working in SMEs. This culture is illustrated in openness, sharing and promoting development within the company.

"...they introduced this sharing among peers, so that we are encouraged to share something that we learn that inspired us. So, during our meeting, anyone could share about this positive thing...that worth sharing and worth learning to each other" - MY

According to MY, her line manager's optimism helped her and other co-workers to develop positive affect towards the company.

"...my superior and my boss will always share some positive articles a good read to the employees. Yeah...they...wish to instill positivity among the employees" - MY

On the other hand, QI described their optimism over completing a job, succeeding in a role, and facilitating organisational change. These acts helped QI to derive positive affect at work. Meanwhile, AM described the overt optimism they derived from encouragement and positive reinforcement at work.

"...the ship(organisation) is not being stirred by just one person; everyone has a responsibility inside. I think that helps us feel positive about the work that we do as well, because everyone feels like they're contributing something . It's not just like, we're a cog in the machine...but we're helping in making decisions as well"- QI

"So, in this current company, sometimes we try things, we fail, but then there are a lot of positive encouragement from them" - AM

AM differentiated between the optimism culture in her current company and her previous organisation.

"I was in the previous company to help them start up a new business arm. It's not a miracle, you know, it's not like the moment you want to start something, it will roll out very well, perfect. We had ups and downs, and the management doesn't acknowledge the effort. So that was actually very demotivating" AM

"So, in this current company, sometimes we try things, we fail, but then there are a lot of positive encouragement from them" - AM

5.8.2   Sub-theme 2: Negative Outlook

Conversely, KE and EL disclosed how unsupportive line managers and a lack of optimism such as having a negative outlook resulted in unhappiness at

work. For YS, this lack of optimism manifests in a lack of belief in employee intervention and initiative.

"There was a lot of blame culture going on back in the day. So, when something didn't go, right, there was a lot of targeting of like the managers or the people involved…" - KE

"So because our boss, one of the thing is that he thinks like, all of you are not good enough"- EL

"I would say of course, I have negative emotions in my company. Yeah, so basically, the main thing was that because different individuals, they have different kind of characteristic. And…some of the colleagues…they are really anxious…" - YS

"…the pace right now in this society…is a lot of online… digitalisation, but…some of the colleagues … couldn't accept the change They couldn't really move forward. So, they…(have) a lot of worries and then they keep on challenging like…does this really work …they put themselves in this really anxiety situation, which is really not necessary…but they are really scared. So, this is what holding back the whole company… which makes me really frustrated…and really angry…so that's the negative emotions that I have currently this few days I have been experiencing"- YS

Further, YS elaborated that the lack of optimism and negative outlook easily permeated the organisational culture, hindering different aspects of organisational growth.

"And instead of blaming, or instead of challenging each other, instead of throwing out all the questions, and expect it not to happen and expect it to cannot

move further anymore. So, I, I hope that the organisation can really put everybody else together, because everybody wants to change. So, if everybody wants to change then everybody needs to work together to move forward. Yeah, we cannot just blame and pointing fingers to each other…" – YS

5.9   Discussion

This qualitative study, which aimed at exploring what allows SMEs employee to experience positive and negative affect in their workplace, has garnered the following themes and sub themes linked to SME employees' experience of affective well-being: Trust at Work (sub themes: Freedom and Autonomy at Work, Micromanaging and Withholding Information), A Compassionate and Caring Environment, Altruism (sub themes: A profound purpose and Doing Good), Integrity (sub themes: Doing "Right" at Work and Unethical Practices), Forgiveness (sub themes: A Safe Environment and Unfairly Reprimanded), Optimism (sub themes: Positive Outlook and Negative Outlook). Previous research has established the importance of ensuring positive affect amidst capital, technology, and staff development limitations when working in SMEs (Rubio-Andrés et al., 2021; Chaiprasit and Santidhiraku, 2011). Further, there are challenges in relation to developing and retaining SME employees (Tarmann, 2017), which further necessitates focused research in this area. In light of the above, the findings of this qualitative study are significant for understanding the affective well-being of Malaysian SME employees. Further, this study's objectives and findings are consistent with extant literature that has advocated extending organisational research to smaller organisations and adopting qualitative methodologies in underdeveloped research areas (Glendon et al., 2007).

The findings of this research are also consistent with the variables analysed in previous studies. For example, organisational virtuousness has been found to be linked to affective well-being (Rego et al. (2010, Ahmed et al., 2018). Specifically, previous studies construe positive leadership as significantly linked to employees' affective well-being. A lack of support from one's superior is likely to impact the affective well-being of the individual negatively (Johnson, 2011, Warr, 1987, 2007, Mäkikangas et al., 2011), while positive leadership in the form of support, empowerment and consideration are associated with positive employee affective well-being (Skakon et al., 2010). The present study identified trust as a form of positive leadership that permeates Malaysian SMEs. The study's participants shared their experience of positive affect derived from the trust their supervisors bestowed upon them when performing their roles. In this way, trust was associated with feelings of appreciation and confidence in their ability at work. Further, trust was noted to breed feelings of autonomy and freedom in performing one's task, allowing for positive affect. Essentially, this is manifested when tasks are executed without explicit instruction from one's superior. This allows employees to feel trust at work; which in turn facilitates positive affect. This form of trust also allows one to feel appreciated and have heighted esteem in their work ability, which would also increase work motivation. Conversely, this study had found that participants experienced negative affect when they experienced being micromanaged and having information withheld – all in which makes participants feel less trusted at work. Importantly, it was found in this study, that instances of untrustworthy behaviors could also come from subordinates which led to negative affect. This is shown through a participant's experiences of their subordinate who was not

honest about his expected tenure in the organization, which led to difficulties in the participant's role as a supervisor. Crucially, participants discussed that the smaller nature of SMEs facilitated this experience of trust. This is as with a smaller sized company, it is more suitable and opportune for employees to be given direct autonomy and decision-making opportunities which would be more challenging in larger, hierarchical organisations.

Conversely, previous studies noted that toxic leadership negatively predicted job-related affective well-being (Hadadian & Sayadpour, 2018). In the current study, this form of toxic leadership was evident through the virtue of forgiveness, whereby participants who experienced an unforgiving environment typified by verbal abuse experienced negative affect. This is consistent with Magnier-Watanabe et al.'s (2020) study that identified forgiveness as a catalyst for decreasing work stress as employees perceive themselves as being in a "safe space" to make mistakes. It was found that in this study, positive affect is nurtured when participants are in a forgiving environment which makes participants feel that they are in a "safe" environment to perform their tasks and make mistakes. Conversely, acts of a non – forgiving environments typified by acts such as being unjustly reprimanded, or experiences of verbal abuse had caused negative affect. For instance, participants spoke on the importance of having a "safe space" which allows for sharing and unbiased judgements, as well as opportunities to develop themselves in the organization. Unforgiveness can also be exacerbated due to the smaller nature of SMEs; as participant mentioned that being reprimanded over a simple mistake can have negative spillover effect on employees' affect and mood due to the proximity of SMEs.

Further, Galabova and McKie (2013) identified close-knitted communication between co-workers and subordinates as a key strength of SMEs. This finding is consistent with the theme of a compassionate and caring environment, where the study's participants shared instances of compassion and care they experienced from direct supervisors and colleagues. Based on the work features of the vitamin model, personal control is said to have a positive effect on affective well-being (Warr, 1987, 2007; Mäkikangas et al., 2011). However, it may have a curvilinear effect, whereby after a certain amount is acquired, any subsequent increase would have a negative impact on employee well-being (Mäkikangas et al., 2011). The present study illustrates the curvilinear effect, whereby participants experienced positive affect from trust in their job roles but decried insufficient autonomy and freedom when they perceived a lack of trust. High-quality interpersonal connections are also said to be an outcome of working in virtuous environments (Rego et al., 2011) with a less formal hierarchy allowing for opportunities to let the top management hear their voices and suggestions faster (Galabova and McKie, 2013). This is aligned with the findings of this study, in which participants note that the smaller nature of SMEs allowed them better access to management and decision making opportuntieis. Nevertheless, this study found that acts that are not virtuous could also allow employees to experience a compounding negative effect, as the negative consequences would impact employees more easily due to the small size of SMEs.

Importantly, the themes in this study mirror the sub-dimensions of the organisational virtuousness scale developed by Cameron et al. (2004). Specifically, the themes of trust at work, a compassionate and caring

environment, integrity and forgiveness are similar to the sub-dimensions found through factor analysis in Cameron et al. (2004)'s instrument: organisational trust, compassion, integrity and forgiveness. Interestingly, Cameron et al. (2004) also found a sub-dimension of organisational optimism, but this factor included other facets of virtuousness. The items under the sub-dimensions of optimism were:

"We are optimistic that we will succeed, even when faced with major challenges"

"In this organisation, we are dedicated to doing good in addition to doing well"

"A sense of profound purpose is associated with what we do here".

Interestingly, item 1 on optimism is similar to the theme of optimism found in this study, which discusses optimism in relation to performing well in one's role. Further, items 2 and 3 of this sub-theme of optimism mirrors the sub-themes of altruism, which were doing good and a profound purpose. Hence, it is deduced that the findings of this qualitative study are similar to the sub-dimension of the organisational virtuousness scale by Cameron et al. (2004).

As discussed in Chapter 3 (theoretical and conceptual framework), organisational virtuousness allows for affective well-being through the amplifying and buffering effects of virtuousness. Specifically, the amplifying effects of virtuousness could be understood through its associations with three consequences: positive emotions, social capital, and prosocial behaviour (Cameron et al., 2004). Positive emotions discuss how an individual who experienced or observed acts of virtuousness will have a higher likelihood of

experiencing positive affect. Further, observing acts of virtuousness and experiencing positive affect allows employees to be more likely to demonstrate acts of virtuousness themselves, increasing their positive affect. Further, observation of virtuousness which inspires a sense of affective elevation can disseminate through the organisation via a contagion effect (Frederickson, 2003, Cameron et al., 2004), which allows individual virtuousness to arise to organisational level virtuousness (Cameron et al., 2004). This study shows organisational level virtuousness through participants' accounts of the culture of compassion and care permeating the organisation. Participants had also mentioned how receiving acts of virtuousness, such as care and compassion, enabled them to experience more positive affect. Further, participants spoke about how having informal activities to allow for a closer bond between employees would facilitate positive affect, which further alludes to the contagion effect of virtuousness. This amplifying effect of positive emotions is also demonstrated through participants' accounts of observing their supervisor's virtuousness, which made them more motivated to perform acts of virtuousness.

Another form of amplifying effect discussed in Chapter 3 was social capital. Social capital looks into the goodwill others have towards us, which can manifest in sympathy, trust and forgiveness (Adler & Kwon, 2002). In this study, social capital can be perceived as trust. The study's participants shared how they felt when their organisations and direct supervisors trusted them to execute their roles. This form of trust could also manifest as being given more authority to make job-related decisions or autonomy in their jobs. Participants also spoke about receiving compassion and care from their supervisors and colleagues, which is often regarded as more than just formal organisational

relationships. As discussed by participants, this could be due to the close promixity of SMEs which facilitates the forging of close relationships among employees. Further, participants experienced more positive affect when experiencing altruism from individuals in the organisation and forgiveness for mistakes made in one's role. All these acts of virtuousness facilitate an amplifying effect for affective well-being through social capital. Lastly, the amplifying effect could be understood through prosocial behaviour, which benefits others in the organisation (Cameron et al., 2004). This study illustrates prosocial behaviour in themes such as a compassionate and caring environment and altruism. Specifically, under the sub-theme of Doing Good for the Altruism theme, participants spoke about experiencing more positive affect when having a selfless supervisor and organisation. Specifically, this selflessness was in relation to supervisors imparting their knowledge, support, and organisational altruism on employee welfare. This altruism also extends beyond employees to their family members and friends. The mechanism of organisational virtuousness is also illustrated through buffering effects, further demonstrated in this qualitative study. Virtuousness functions as a buffering mechanism by protecting and creating resilience (Cameron et al., 2004) and recovering effectively from negative events (Cameron & Caza, 2013). This mechanism is illustrated in the study when participants feel that compassion and a caring environment, help, forgiveness and optimism buffer against the various challenges of one's role in an SME, allowing for an increased positive affect and decreased negative affect.

5.10   Chapter Summary

This study aimed to explore and understand the organisational dynamics that enables SME employees to feel positive and negative emotions in the workplace. It found that participants who experienced virtuousness in their organisations had more instances of experiencing positive affect at work. Conversely, participants who did not experience virtuousness in their organisation were more likely to experience negative affect at work. The themes and sub-themes garnered in this study were Trust at Work (sub themes: Freedom and Autonomy at Work, Micromanaging and Withholding Information), A Compassionate and Caring Environment, Altruism (sub themes: A profound purpose and Doing Good), Integrity (sub themes: Doing "Right" at Work and Unethical Practices), Forgiveness (sub themes: A Safe Environment and Unfairly Reprimanded), Optimism (sub themes: Positive Outlook and Negative Outlook). This chapter ended with a discussion of findings in relation to the existing literature.

Chapter 6: Empirical Research 2

6.0 Chapter Summary

Chapter 6 presents the findings of empirical study 2. It discusses the themes and sub-themes of this qualitative study. Themes emerged from the first research question were What is Meaning? (sub themes: fulfilment & personal development, being aligned to personal values, impact on the organisation, and impact on society) and meaning and affective well-being. The second research question generated the following themes and sub-themes: Trust and Altruism at Work, Doing "Good" Work, Doing "Good" in Society and Care and Compassion (sub themes: positive and negative influence). Lastly, a discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature was presented.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and analysis of study 2, a qualitative study that explored how Malaysian SME employees derive meaning at work. It answers the following research questions:

1. What do employees perceive as meaning at work?

2. How does an organisation enable or hinder employees from achieving meaning at work?

The research objective of this study was to explore how SME employees define and understand meaning at work, and what makes SME employees derive meaning at work. Some of the study's semi-structured interview questions include:

"*Tell us about what you perceive about meaning at work*"

"In your opinion, how do you think you could experience meaning at work?"

"Does your current organisation allow you to derive meaning at work?"

"In your opinion, how can your current organisation further enable you to have and develop more meaning at work?".

A complete list of the semi-structured interview questions is in Appendix B. A phenomenological study "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p.76). Further, phenomenological researchers aim to simplify the individual experience of a phenomenon down to a description of its universal essence (Creswell, 2013). The specific process of the data analysis is outlined in Chapter 4.

In summary, a total of six main themes were discovered in study 2. The first research question (What do employees perceive as meaning at work?) produced two themes, while the second research question (How does an organisation enable or hinder employees from achieving meaning at work?) produced four themes. The six themes and corresponding sub-themes are listed in Tree Diagram 6.1 below.

Tree Diagram 6.1

Themes and Sub-themes
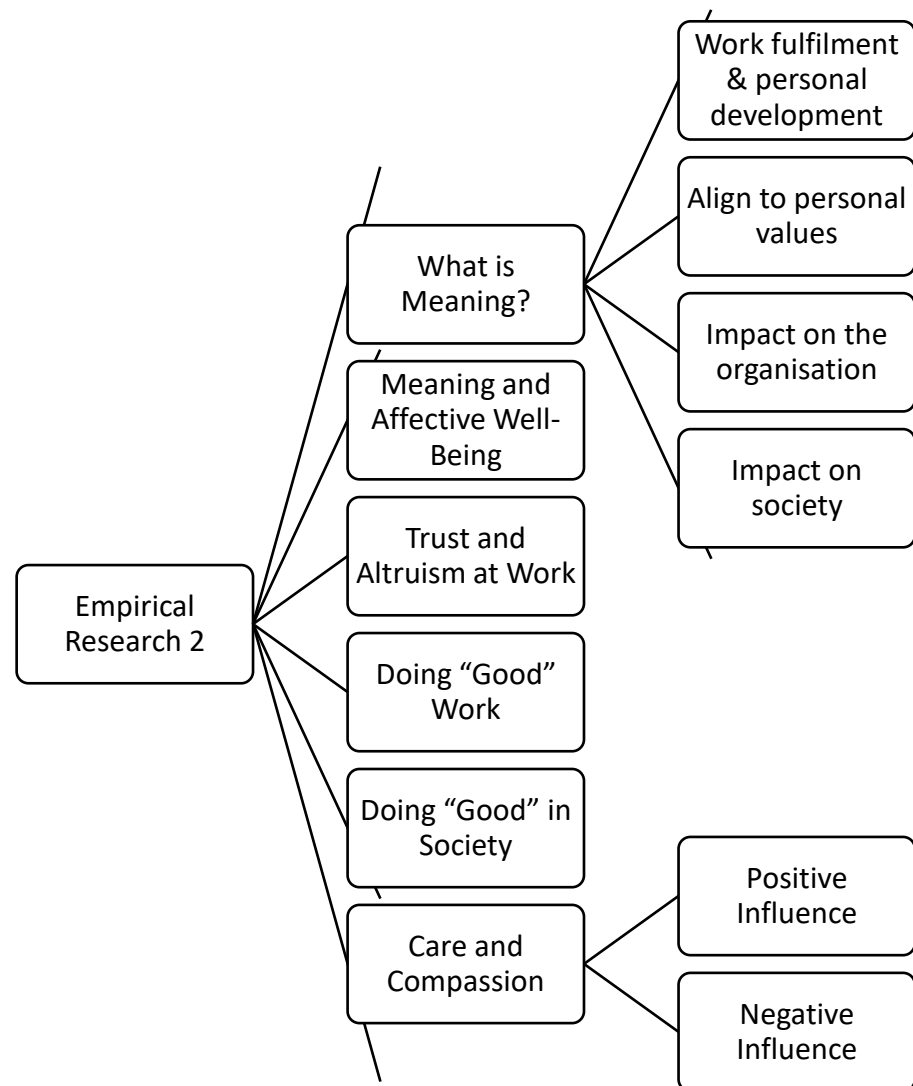
6.2   Theme 1: What is Meaning at Work?

At the outset of the phenomenological study, the respondents shared their

views on meaning at work the study's key construct. Since meaning at work is

an abstract and personal construct, participants were prompted to describe it in

their own terms. Although their responses varied, they appeared to congregate

on the following sub-themes 1) fulfilment & personal development, 2) being

aligned to personal values, 3) impact on the organisation and 4) impact on

society.

6.2.1 Sub-theme: Work Fulfilment & Personal Development

Most participants shared their perspectives about deriving meaning at work. In particular, they highlighted the role that being fulfilled at work plays in deriving meaning at work. For example, OW mentioned that " my workplace is the place where I find fulfilment" and elaborated that fulfilment was achieved when he felt accomplished and productive at work.

"a day well spent…knowing that I did not go…work mindlessly for eight hours…like fulfillment…I (am) feeling like (I) accomplished a lot of stuff today. I done…this, I feel like I'm a better…person before going to bed…that day. For me, that would be my fulfilment" OW

Further, OW used the state of becoming a "better person" to define meaning. When probed about what he meant by a "better person", he elaborated that it meant personal development, leadership prowess, and work efficiency.

"In terms of personal development, leadership skills, like little shortcuts, that I discovered working with children, like how to best…build rapport with the children…how to best execute this program…" OW

6.2.2 Sub-theme: Align to Personal Values

In the second sub-theme, a few participants elaborated on how meaning at work could be derived from having a job aligned with one's values. For instance, AR and AM described meaning at work as something that must align with their values. They both mentioned that for a job to be perceived as meaningful, it must fit their pursuit and positively impact their lives and others.

"…when I do this current job, the meaning is…it must tie in with my value as well…my value personally, I want to always be very impactful to whomever I meet, I want to…be someone of an impact of…another life" AR

"I think this is just my personal principle, I want to be able to add value to whoever cross path with me. And if I'm not able to do that, then I just don't feel like there's much impact. And in a sense, there's not much meaning…" AM

Also, KE highlighted the importance of work being aligned with his core values and personal objectives.

"If we're talking about what I think meaning and what factors affect the meaning or an employee achieving meaning at work? Well, I would say…that there, there must be an alignment of personal core values or personal objectives with the work that they do…"KE

"Well, my response would then be as long as the work that the staff is promised and is doing has is aligned with their personal core value…then I believe that they would then experience meaning at work…" KE

6.2.3 Sub-theme: Impact on Organisation

One of the interesting findings from this study is that participants described meaning at work from an impactful point of view. Most participants highlighted that their work should enable them to make a positive difference within the organisation. This point was expressed from a work contribution perspective, where employees are allowed to excel at work, produce high-quality outcomes, and promote change. More so, some respondents emphasised

the need to engage in tasks that bring positive change and efficiency to different organisational stakeholders.

"Meaning at work to me sounds…like you (are) excelling in your speciality and making a difference inside the organisation because of your speciality…" QI

"…and when you do high-quality work, or a good job. For me, it feels good…because I feel there is meaning towards my work that I'm not just doing this just for money, but I'm doing something that is helpful to others…bringing a difference or making a change" QI

"I guess meaning at work would be like…the work that I do, bringing actual results to the company like contributions to the company…" CR

Participant KE, elaborates that meaningful work is work which extends beyond mundane operational work; whereby it is work that brings effective change to the organization.

"Meaningful work is work that provides effective change to the organisation. So, I would count something like providing an analysis of our model or prediction model, that changes how we operate, providing meaningful work rather than for example, doing the administrative task for lack of a better word, for example, like, you know, printing a bunch of papers" KE

6.2.4 Sub-theme: Impact on Society

Other than the impact on the organisation, several participants spoke about the need for their work to impact society positively. This can range from performing positive behaviour and assisting clients, as AR, AM, JP, MY, and TR elaborated. Further, some participants described their work as an opportunity

to empower people around them. This opportunity filled them with a sense of meaning and made them feel satisfied about making a positive difference in the lives of others.

"...I want to always be very impactful to whomever I meet, I want to...be someone of an impact of...another life...so this job allows me to do that, because I am directly impacting the customer. Because I train them, I ensure that they have an improvement in their cognitive skill. And that itself, give me the meaning to go to work, give me the meaning to wake up" AR

"And because of this, this feeling and meaning, it is providing a lot of satisfaction" AR

"Meaning at work to me is when I can add value to others...now I have become an analyst in the consulting line. So, all these roles require a party that needs help, in terms of that they are looking for knowledge...looking for solutions, and then I will be the provider of all this, so that gives me a lot of satisfaction" AM

"You are working, you can contribute to society somehow. So, if you could contribute, and at the same time, you can find happiness and satisfaction..." JP

"Things that you're interested and you're going to share, for example...I am interested in coffee. So, whatever I learn from the knowledge of the coffee, I (am) able to share with other people to improve the other person's knowledge on...the thing that I'm passionate at, thing that I am interested at...I think that will be very meaningful" TR

"What makes my work meaningful at my current role? So, first, is the nature of my work, which is helping people. So, I think that's the biggest meaning that I

find at work, which I can help people so that I...do really find it meaningful"
MY

Additionally, AM discussed how charitable efforts could impact society positively. An organisation's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) helps employees derive meaning at work. Based on the finding, employees derive meaning at work when they feel empowered about the positive impact of their job on society.

"Okay, my work leadership, excellence. One of our biggest clients is sovereign fun, which gives out scholarships to a lot of scholars, and we run programs for all these scholars, when we run programs, we work together with NGOs, we get all these scholars to come up with projects and create an impact in the society. So basically, I feel like I am the bridge for all this to happen. And I find that very meaningful" AM

Conversely, AM elaborated that if one cannot achieve meaning at work, this can lead to feelings of dread and existential crisis. Specifically, this lack of meaning is derived from a feeling of not contributing to both the company and society at large.

"There was a time in one of my previous roles...I felt like there is no meaning... it's like having an existential crisis. Why am I even in this company, I am not contributing to this company, I'm not contributing to the society, I'm just here coming to work every day, you know dragging myself and waiting for 5.30 so that I can go home. That was really a very dreadful episode in my life. And I think that is when I felt like, it's really meaningless...and I don't feel like I'm generating any good for the society" AM

6.3   Theme 2: Meaning and Affective Well-being

This theme represents the intersection between meaning at work and affective well-being of SME employees. The study's findings suggest that affective well-being ranges from promoting positive emotions such as satisfaction, a general sense of happiness, and excitement. Most respondents identified positive and constructive emotional experiences as the indicators of meaningful work. Some participants disclosed that a meaningful state at work empowers them to thrive emotionally.

"And because of this, this feeling and meaning, it is providing a lot of satisfaction" AR

"The purpose, satisfaction…" JC

"Meaning at work is definitely important…like if I don't find meaning, I don't think I'll be working at all…also, if I get to solve a problem, then…I will be really happy about that as well…" CR

"It's very important because…we spend a lot of time at work…I don't like to drag myself to work for five days, and then just enjoy that two days. And then having that Monday blue again…knowing that I'm doing something that I want, and then I feel happy and satisfied with what I have done in my career" MT

"…meaning at work is what keeps me productive, motivated, excited and energised" AM

"Meaning at work to me elicit positive emotion for me because…like…all my work is worth it then I would feel happy…" CR

"you are working, you can contribute to society somehow. So, if you could contribute, and at the same time, you can find happiness and satisfaction…" JP

Other participants disclosed that meaning at work was essential for one's well-being and a source of motivation to go to work. Specifically, this motivation enables them to improve themselves in their roles. A few participants, for instance, YS, stressed the importance of acquiring meaning by paying attention to one's well-being, including mental health. This highlights the importance of meaning at work for them to establish a good reason and motivation to improve their well-being.

"So, if I don't feel meaning at work, I think my mental health will be really, really, really weak. I…will just drag myself to work, or I wouldn't feel happy…If I don't feel meaningful at work, I don't feel meaningful in my life already…" YS

"I will say that it is really, really important. On a scale of one to 10, about nine, my rate is about nine or 10. Because one thing is that I don't want to waste my time working, I don't want to just clock in, clock in and clock out. So, if I feel meaningful at this work, I will enjoy it. And then I will, in turn enhance my mental health, well-being as well" YS

"Meaning at work is really important to me because it will boost…the effectiveness of your work…and…if you like, really, really find meaning at work itself, it will really help a lot of things like effectiveness, and then maybe your motivation to really go…for better solutions in job…I feel like meaning at work is really important" JP

"Meaning at work is important for me…I think if there's no meaning at work you won't feel that…the driving factor to go to work." TR

"So that I won't feel dreadful every morning to get up for work" JC

"Meaning, it is very important, because if I'm doing something that I don't find passion in or I don't find, like, make something like, even a small difference, I feel that there's no point for me to do the work in the first place, it doesn't motivate me to do the work. So, for me to have meaning at work, which is for myself is to make a difference, then it motivates me more to work harder for myself" QI

"I think that when someone has meaning in work, he or she will be motivated in his or her work, and then keep striving for growth for himself or herself…It won't be like dragging yourself to work every weekday and then looking forward to weekends" MT

6.4   Research Question 2

In relation to research question 2 (How does an organisation enable or hinder employees from achieving meaning at work?), four themes were found which were trust and altruism at work, doing "good" work, doing "good" in society and care and compassion. The themes identified point to the role of virtuousness in enacting meaning at work. Specifically, the study's participants opined that organisational virtuousness could positively impact their day-to-day roles, allowing them to experience meaning at work. It examines how virtuousness in an organisation allows employees to experience meaning at work through virtue such as trust, altruism, integrity, care and compassion in their respective job roles.

Table 6.2

Themes
Research Question 2: How does an organisation enable or hinder employees from achieving meaning at work?
Trust and Altruism at Work
Doing "Good" Work
Doing "Good" in Society
Care and Compassion (Sub themes; positive and negative influence)

6.4.1   Theme 1: Trust and Altruism at Work

This theme looks at how virtuousness within an organisation allows employees to experience meaning at work. Specifically, participants opined that trust and altruism at work positively impacted their day-to-day roles, allowing them to experience meaning at work. For example, when participants experience trust from the organisation in relation to their role, this allows them to experience meaning at work.

"Personally also…when the company actually move me from trainer to, to the lead shows the trust there, and then it shows that, you know…they want to see me grow into that role…for me, it's quite meaningful" AR

When asked how his current employer could improve his experience of meaning at work, AR explained that they could sponsor him to attend training programmes abroad and trust that the knowledge gained would benefit the organisation. This indicates the perception of virtuousness received from

different stakeholders within the organisations through trust and altruism in influencing employees' meaning at work.

"Our company is also a master licensee for Malaysia…the program comes from the United States (US). So, I guess to provide more meaning also can show like…this program…helps in not only Malaysia context, but maybe other context and giving…the opportunity to go to the headquarters which is at the US or even like other licensees in different countries… to look at the kind of results…can provide more meaning to the trainers" AR

Another participant whose diploma education was sponsored by her organisation shared how this altruistic gesture influenced her experience of meaning at work. This form of tangible or monetary trust and support enriches employee experience and engenders greater meaning at work. Similarly, JC mentioned that receiving kindness, trust, and understanding while seeking additional knowledge/skills leads employees to develop meaning at work.

"…the opportunity that, that my organisation provides. I joined this line with…only a little bit of knowledge about children's development…basically, I had no experience in this line…and then I was sent to get my diploma from there, I learnt…the true value of how this early childhood education works" JC

Further, TR explained how establishing good relationships and trust with other industry players could assist him in deriving meaning at work. According to TR, good relationships established within the organisation allow employees to seek meaningful experiences in their job and indirectly improve their product offerings even without monetary reward. This signals the importance of organisational virtues such as integrity and doing good to society. Specifically,

TR's views were anchored on his organisational role, which requires much interdependence from other industries.

"Well, at least there's a platform where we can connect with the other industry players, especially on the SME…it leads to like, open a platform…whereby we can help them to improve either their workflow or the business and to solve some of their problems" TR

When probed further about the link between meaning at work and having a positive connection with other industry players, TR opined that:

"if we can…come together and work together and create a harmonious synergy, I think that will be able to be, yeah, cater to other people. I mean, we can help a lot more new businesses" TR

Other participants, such as MY, elaborated that the trust they felt with their superiors allowed them to gain meaning at work, while SM spoke about the importance of being given "more say" in his role to allow him to derive meaning at work.

"I would say the guidance of my superior…he has trust in me and I have trust in him. So, I do find that important. And sometimes when I'm lost at work, when I've talked to him about how to do things, he would advise me accordingly. I think that that's all that matters to make things work" MY

When MY was probed about how this positive relationship with her superior is linked to meaning at work; she elaborated:

"...because that's how I, I feel that I'm guided. I'm not working alone. Yeah, so I felt that there is someone…that guides me and someone that I can look up to, and I can learn something from…" MY

"because my role as a program division head involves a lot of planning and… organising and execution….when I have to execute all the work, and or when I'm lost at planning, I need someone to guide me…" MY

"give us more options…you know, giving you more say I guess" SM

Participant AM also elaborated on the importance of trust in an employee's ability to complete a task.

"I think just make sure we…constantly are given the freedom to make decisions. That is very important. Because ultimately, let's say back to the (situation) that I feel very meaningful, like the engaging scholars, we are bridging them with all the NGOs, etc... if let's say everything is just instruction from my boss, and I didn't get to have any input on which NGO will be good, what kind of community projects will be good, everything is just about executing my boss's idea…I wouldn't feel as much satisfaction as I am today, because it's not from me" AM

6.4.2: Theme 2: Doing "Good" Work

This theme looks at how participants who experienced situations in which organizations themselves are doing "good" work or allowed them opportunities to demonstrate "good" work, facilitated in their experience of meaning at work. This could be either through opportunities to make a difference and positive impact in one's role. Conversely, instances which are not aligned with a "good" work such as a lack of integrity posed as a barrier for participants to experience meaning at work. For example, QI buttressed the relationship

between meaning at work and positive influence by describing how his organisation's aim to make a difference in other businesses allows him to derive meaning at work. QI's current organisation deals with system implementation that helps businesses to digitise themselves.

"Our organisation always says that this system is built…to try and make things easier, we want to make a difference to people. That was one of the things that they highlighted when they first gave us our first town hall meeting…so that was one of the first values…that we had to make a difference to other businesses whether in terms of making more money, doing more business, or helping the employees well-being or making it much easier for them" QI

In addition, QI disclosed that the small make-up of SMEs reinforces any positive impact that one has in their role. Thus, if one's idea is implemented in the organisation, its positive impact is easily felt by other employees.

"Once you go into a large corporation, you kind of lose a sense of that. Because there are so many people inside the organisation in the first place, your ideas might not reach the top. So, you might not be heard…your voice is drowned out….but in an SME…our voices are heard, and we can feel that it's heard. And when it's heard, and if it's implemented, well, the organisation responds positively towards it. It gives us more reinforcements about you did a good job, thanks for sharing the idea because of your idea, this customer is quite happy with what we've implemented…so those kind of positive remarks and reinforcements kind of like, makes the employee feel better about the work that they do" QI

Further, it was found that a lack of virtuousness such as integrity hinders participants from experiencing meaning at work. Specifically, participants discussed how a lack of organisational virtuousness could negatively impact their day-to-day roles, hindering them from experiencing meaning at work. For instance, QI shared that an organisation's lack of integrity in its operations could lead to a decline in meaning at work.

"I think one of the things probably is the process of implementation for our customers because we usually have a short window of the process of implementation…and then we sort of like, let go and let them experience themselves or try to use the system as best as they can. But I feel that sometimes, we don't do enough hand holding for some of the customers…the organisation is like picking and choosing the companies that they want to give more time to and like certain companies don't have as much time as others. And I don't feel that it's fair for those companies. I feel that we should give everyone a fair amount of time to get used to the system and be able to use it to the best that they can. Because I feel that it brings my work down the drain when I must rush everything…and they themselves don't understand what they're doing" QI

Conversely, another participant, EL, experienced a lack of meaning when she was ignored and felt taken for granted by her organisation. Specifically, she decried the mismatch between her current role and job responsibilities because it decreased her feelings of meaning at work. Similarly, KE cited the incongruence between his day-to-day tasks and job responsibilities. These examples show a lack of integrity on the part of the organisation, inadvertently decreasing the experience of meaning at work among the workforce.

When asked about how the organisation can help develop more meaning, participant EL said,

"… it's really to let us see more clients. Because it's not only me, but a lot of us. We are unhappy just doing the admin work just sitting at our desk, doing all the data utilisation" EL

"it's just to see clients. So, I hope to just see more clients and to improve my skills as a counsellor, so that I'd be able to give quality therapy to people. That's it. " EL

"Because that is I think that's the only meaning for me is just to see clients" EL

However, when EL asked her organisation to allow her to see more clients; the organisation's response was,

"I've been told that if I'm not happy with the culture, then maybe the company is not for me. So, if I'm not happy, I should just leave. But the thing is, because in the job description… it's not like I didn't know the responsibilities like 60% admin work 40% in (seeing) clients. It's just now it's more like 70 - 80% doing admin work" EL

"For example, I know for a fact that one of the senior marketing managers was told that they are going to get the opportunity to create some really great…marketing strategies…but then come in only ended up trying to boost sales over tiny…side dishes or whatever. So, in that regard, he may not be getting meaning at work…" KE

6.5 Theme 3: Doing "Good" in Society

Participants spoke about deriving meaning at work from their organisation's virtuous acts such as involvement in acts that positively impact or doing "good" in society. Essentially, this theme discusses how organisational altruism positively impacts society with no direct benefit or profit for the organisation. Hence, this process of deriving meaning differs from the first theme, which positively impacts one's day-to-day job.

"One of our biggest clients is a sovereign fund, which gives out scholarships to a lot of scholars, and we run programs for all these scholars. When we run programs, we work together with NGOs, we get all these scholars to come up with projects and create an impact on society. So basically, I feel like I am the bridge for all this to happen. And I find that very meaningful " AM

"But the real meaningful part, I would say it's during the scholar's development program that we do. That part is where I find a lot of meaning because other than helping these scholars to impact society by engaging NGOs, we are actually developing, you know, the future CEOs of ...Malaysia. I mean, this is how such a tiny human being like me, may be able to make an impact for my nation " AM

Other participants like TR spoke on how his organisation's support for the underprivileged allows him to derive meaning at work.

"For instance, I was involved with one of the NGO that offered training to the less, privileged kids. Most of these kids have learning disabilities, so the NGO tried to integrate them into society. So, our company become like, this is a focal

point because…we use the product to basically…help other people…that I really found this very meaningful" TR

In light of his contributions, TR advocated for more corporate social responsibility programs by SMEs to help their employees develop meaning at work.

"I believe they could. Like how if the company can do more like sort of like a CSR program and how to relate back to society and merging different industry to help to create a more synergy kind of environment and I think that will be something that will create better meaning" TR

Lastly, AM, extolled her organisation for taking up programs that might not be profitable but are valuable to society. She shared instances whereby her organisation organised pro–bono activities which helped her experience increased meaning at work.

"…sometimes certain programs, we have a very, very low profit margin, but they're willing to take in those projects, because it adds value to the society. So, and of course, when we take in those projects, that means we need to allocate manpower and there will be like men days, which means cost to the company, but they're willing to do that, because they feel like business is not supposed to be only about profit… It's also about what kind of impact you're leaving to the society" AM

"There are also times whereby they will do pro bono talks to university students. So those are all the work that we do not charge, but then we feel like we should do it because it's within our expertise, and we can actually help more people to benefit from it. So that is quite aligned with my personal belief" AM

6.6   Theme 4: Care and Compassion

This theme unravels how virtuousness in the form of care and compassion that exists within interpersonal relationships, such as with direct supervisors, management, and colleagues, facilitates the experience of meaning at work. This is further discussed below through positive and negative influence sub-themes.

6.6.1   Positive influence

The positive influence sub-theme shows how care and compassion experienced through interpersonal relationships leads to the experience of meaning at work. For instance, AM explained how witnessing and experiencing care and compassion from their superiors allowed them to derive meaning at work. This may manifest either internally or externally, but regardless of the mode, AM opined that it leads to the experience of meaning at work.

"...the management, the managing partner, and one or two of the senior partners were from a lower socio-economic status previously...so they understand how people need to fight for opportunities . So, they do instil this in us and at every now and then...our managing consultant will be volunteering to...fundraise...for different... organisations...some for orphans and...single mothers. And people are actually quite willing to donate, because the leaders themselves are, they are leading by example. So...they will always be the first one to respond and to donate as well. So, overall, it creates a very...loving culture in my company, like it is a norm for us to help people..." AM

"when we have our ex-colleagues...not even current employee, you know, ex-employee, his wife went into ICU and he alone need to take care of the one-year-

old, he and the one-year-old kid is also not that healthy…our managing consultant actually do a whole fundraising activity to get a donation and help the ex-employee to push through the financial hardship. So, it shows a lot of care towards the ex-employee" AM

"…they are really supportive of what you're doing. And they will always be there if you need them in terms of financial or in terms of professional input" AM

Another participant spoke on how the care and compassion he received from his superior allowed him to garner meaning at work.

"maybe…to open a center in the future (participant discussing on this being his dream). So that's my end goal. And then my boss is really supportive in that. And she said she will help me in the future, maybe…to open up the center…so I really find that meaningful" JP

Further, this form of care and compassion also extends to when participants experience difficulties at work. Participant JC, when asked how the organisation allows for meaning:

"If I am overloaded with work, I will voice out and then my boss will think of a way la to help me to cut down the workload by assigning, like, assigning to other people to work on that" JC

When participant JC was asked how this relates to meaning at work they responded:

"So when you're at work, you need to find purpose, right? And for me, for me, work help you to stay alive, but work also need to bring some positivity and

happiness to your life instead of just work…(and) money. Yeah. So for me, we need to be happy as well…when we are at work " JC

Then, when asked about the relationship between the organisation and meaning at work, JC illustrated the relationship thus:

"….there was one morning that I was scolded by my parents in front of the gate, then I have, I still have to face her child, I still have to look at the other children, like normal and I have to calm myself…then I actually voiced this incident to my, to my boss…she actually is quite supportive. And she took care of my well-being as well. She said, if you if you don't feel good, you can take half day leave and go home for rest. And then she actually asked more about the incident like, do I need an apology from the from the parent? If I need an apology from a parent, she will go and voice out to the parent. Yeah. So, from there, I feel that I'm not alone…I feel better"

Lastly, participants also experienced meaning at work through the care and compassion received from colleagues;

"What is meaningful is to make…to build a good relationship with my colleagues, and…maybe help each other out. So, the environment really gives me that, the meaning to like, continue my job" JP

"my company values teamwork, so you can't do everything alone. And then if you somehow bear all the burden by yourself, and no one's helps you, then it doesn't bring any meaning to work because …the only thing you will feel is…even more burnout,…stress or…maybe dissatisfaction because maybe you will think that…no one helps me or whatsoever. So, because my company value, teamwork, so everyone work as a team, so everyone help each other up" JP

"so that's what that brings meaning to my job too, because I work in a comfortable environment that make me feel okay…you won't feel like going back home like going back to center(his workplace)…is like dread or like very stress…so, you won't feel stress like I have to do everything on my own, I have someone behind me that will help me. So, if I take leave or whatsoever other people maybe they won't feel get angry they will just say okay, I will help you like that. So, I like the environment itself…" JP

When probed further on the link between this caring and compassionate environment and meaning at work, JP explained:

"if you can do comfortably in your area. So…you will like…somehow boost your work level. Like…effectiveness of your work, so if you if you feel negative…then maybe you won't be performing well in your field… so that's the connection I can draw" JP

6.6.2   Negative influence

This negative influence sub-theme indicates how a lack of care and compassion in interpersonal relationships hinders employees from experiencing meaning at work. Specifically, participants shared how misunderstanding and lack of compassion and care from their superiors decreased their experience of meaning at work. Participant SM spoke about how he experienced less meaning at work during a tough time adapting to a new role.

"Okay, let's just say that it's very…tough to be in my current role, there's a lot of stress involved because you need to prove yourself…initially, I came to this company for a marketing role. But then because of my background in psych, I don't have that basic knowledge in marketing. So one of the toughest

thing was actually trying to do the marketing role….they are expecting me like really like experts in marketing at first go…they rebuke me every week, you know…I think at that point, maybe my meaning of work was very low" SM

Participant SM also mentioned that this could be due to the small nature of SMEs;

"Because you see small companies, you need to be really good at a lot of things. If you don't, you're not good at it. Wow, quite tough" SM

"you kind of feel like you are alone…more like, You're on your own. And you need to really fight to stay alive. you're fighting every single moment…" SM

Specifically, SM elaborated on his superior's lack of compassion by citing instances when he was told that he "wouldn't make the cut", was being "so low" and how this had "broken him".

"I remember there was one time they told me that…if I was in a room full of marketers, I probably wouldn't make the cut"

"that marketing is something that I'm so low that it will that I have to pay them in order for me to actually do that role. Because it doesn't give them any gain…(participant SM then elaborated on how he felt about this comment)….You are a soldier and whether you die or not, that is on you." SM

"for someone who tell you can't do something that that really broke me" SM

SM also spoke about receiving care from a non-direct superior. Although he appreciated the gesture, it did not help with the knowledge he needed to acquire to succeed.

"The other Boss…he teaches me… he's like a a brother kind of figure…. I'm very grateful. Just that one part (he) couldn't mentor me in, in something that I really wanted to excel at…because you see, I was lost" SM

6.7   Discussion

6.7.1   Discussion for Research Question 1

To address the study's first research question, the participants conceptualised meaning at work through the sub-themes of fulfilment and personal development, alignment with personal values, impact on the organisation, and impact on society. Regarding fulfilment and personal development, they shared how meaning at work entails feeling accomplished and productive at work. This finding is consistent with Salleh et al.'s (2020) conceptualisation of meaning at work as a form of thriving at work. With regards to the alignment with personal values sub-theme, participants perceived meaning at work as being aligned with the personal values associated with performing one's job role. For instance, if one's core value is to positively impact others, meaning at work is achieved when their job allows them to do this. This finding aligns with previous literature, which noted that meaning at work is a way to express oneself, allowing for congruence with one's identity and work tasks (Chalfosky, 2003; Sagiv et al., 2004).

Regarding the impact on organisations sub-theme, participants construed meaning at work as being able to make a positive difference in their day-to-day tasks, which positively impact the organisation. Participants spoke about the importance of performing tasks that had real-life impact on the organisation. As for the impact on society sub-theme, participants construed meaning at work

based on their organisation's role in positively impacting customers and society at large through charitable initiatives. Subsequently, in the meaning and affective well-being theme, participants highlighted the relationship between meaning at work and affective well-being, which can range from positive emotions such as satisfaction, a general sense of happiness, and excitement. This finding supports the view that the association between meaning at work and affective well-being leads to positive outcomes for employees, organisations, and society (Salleh et al. 2020; Steger et al. 2012; Carton, 2017). In addition, the study's findings are consistent with Golparvar et al. (2014) and Arnold et al. (2007), which found that meaning at work predicted positive affect of employees. In the present study, participants spoke about the importance of feeling motivated and not "dragging" themselves to work, which is consistent with Kelly Consulting's (2009) finding that employees were willing to receive lower pay in return for a meaningful job role. Finally, the study's findings are consistent with studies that found employees that perceived their job as meaningful were less likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviours such as absenteeism, withdrawal intentions, and low extrinsic work motivations (Steger et al., 2012); which shows that past studies' findings extend upon even to the context of SMEs.

6.7.2   Discussion for Research Question 2

The themes found in this study such as trust and altruism at work, doing "good" work, doing "good" in society and care and compassion shows how employees who experienced virtuousness within the organisation derived meaning at work. Participants shared how organisational virtuousness positively

impacts their day-to-day roles and facilitates their experience of meaning at work. This finding aligns with scholars who have alluded that meaning at work is impacted by job characteristics (Salleh et al., 2020). Further, this supports the amplifying aspects of virtuousness, which make it conducive for the participants to experience meaning at work. Previous studies have supported the view that virtuousness provides an amplifying effect due to its associations with positive emotions, social capital, and prosocial behaviour (Cameron et al., 2004). From a qualitative perspective, this study found that virtuousness amplifies employees' experience of meaning at work. For instance, participants who experienced virtuous qualities such as trust and altruism from their organisations experienced meaning at work. Trust and altruism positively impact one's day to day roles, which in turn allows one to experience meaning at work. This could include opportunities to grow and develop in one's role, freedom in making decisions at work and having a "voice" at work. This is due to the smaller nature and close proximity of SMEs which exacerbates and facilitates the experiencing of virtue. Further, participants reported finding meaning in job roles that allowed them to contribute to the organisation, clients, and society at large. Perhaps, this was because individuals are able to develop their character and purpose, which was different from the pursuit of wealth, fame, and power. The study found that organisational virtuousness provided employees with opportunities to live a life of positive purpose, allowing them to experience meaning at work.

Further, organisations that does "good" work in ways of practicing integrity were more likely to allow employees to feel that their role had a positive impact, thus priming them to derive meaning at work. This were through opportunities to make a difference and have a positive impact in one's role, while

a lack of integrity created challenges for participants to experience meaning at work. This lack of integrity could be through performing shortcuts at work, which led to below park work output, and if employees' needs were not taken care by the organization. Participants cited the small size of SMEs as the reason why commendation for work done was easily transmitted. This is as impacts of ideas and efforts which are aligned with integrity is more easily felt by employees due to the smaller nature of SMEs. Conversely, when organisations displayed a lack of integrity, it made employees feel less likely to develop meaning at work. This was presumably due to the association of a negative impact in their roles towards the organisations, clients, and society, decreased fulfilment and misalignment with core values. This could be due to the smaller nature of SMEs; where in organisational acts which are not of integrity would be more easily observed. Participants who do not experience virtuousness, such as compassion and care in their roles, might feel they cannot do their jobs, making meaning at work unlikely to occur. In other cases, participants reported a mismatch between their assigned job description and actual day-to-day responsibilities. This scenario occurred in mundane work environments that lacked autonomy and denied employees opportunities to reach their potential and acquire virtues (Tablan, 2019).

The doing "good" in society theme highlights how organisations impact positively on society through corporate social responsibility programmes aimed at supporting the underprivileged. This form of organisational altruism support and amplifies the effect of virtuousness amongst employees, as witnessing it may influence them to do the same when the opportunity permits. Cassar & Meier (2018) posit that organisations with social missions help employees

develop meaning through psychological mechanisms wherein they perceive themselves as part of the bigger social influence. Based on this study's results, sometimes the "social mission" might not be overt and can occur through day-to-day interpersonal relations. Even if the social mission is in relation to the employee's role, it might not be as obvious and can be a by-product of a CSR activity that might be different from the organisation's business offerings. Hence, the association between virtue such as organisation's doing "good" in society and meaning at work could be due to this form of virtuousness allowing employees to exercise their true and innate virtue; which consequently allows them to experience meaning at work. Simply put, we meet our highest potential through work; similarly, our potential is met because of our virtues (Tablan, 2019).

The study found that participants who experienced virtuousness through interpersonal relationships were more likely to experience meaning at work. Their experience could be indirect, such as witnessing altruistic behaviour (such as helping and being charitable to others) of their superiors or direct. They also shared how experiencing virtuousness, such as trust, made them feel more supported, guided, and competent. This could be due to how the experience of virtuousness could function as a "buffering" mechanism to protect, inoculate, and create resilience for the organisation to rise from challenges (Cameron et al., 2004). Specifically, these "buffering" mechanism safeguards organisations, allowing them to recover from negative events and prevent decreasing employee happiness (Cameron & Caza, 2013). Hence, the virtuousness experienced by participants in this study; could "buffer" them from the unwanted and negative stressors in a role; which consequently leads to experiencing meaning at work.

In this theme, it was found that participants also experienced meaning at work through the care and compassion received from colleagues. This is consistent with Shahid et al.'s (2020) deduction that virtuousness enables employees to develop meaning in their work and life. This is because being in an environment of virtuousness encourages employees to cooperate towards achieving organisational goals (Shahid et al., 2020). Such an environment develops from thriving in a virtuous environment that has allowed employees to work harmoniously as a part of a larger working system and thus, contribute to organisational missions which would allow them to experience meaning at work (Shahid et al., 2020). Further, virtuousness such as compassion in the workplace also allows increased attachment to one's colleagues; and, consequently, to the organisation while improving their resilience (Dutton et al., 2002). Conversely, participants who experienced a lack of understanding, care, and compassion from their direct supervisors felt incompetent, alone, and less meaningful at work. Due to resource constraints experienced by SMEs, this lack of virtuousness can be exacerbated as there are much expectations put forth on employees (which decreases opportunities and instances to demonstrate virtues such as compassion and care) especially when a focus on business survival is more imminent.

6.8   Chapter Summary

Participants discussed their perception of meaning at work from the first research question. The sub-themes that emerged from their responses were fulfilment & personal development, being aligned to personal values, impact on the organisation, and impact on society. Further, participants elaborated on how meaning at work allowed them to experience affective well-being, specifically

from a range of positive emotions such as satisfaction, a general sense of happiness, and excitement. The second research question generated the following themes and sub-themes: Trust and Altruism at Work, Doing "Good" Work, Doing "Good" in Society and Care and Compassion (sub themes: positive and negative influence). This chapter ended with a discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature.

Chapter 7: Empirical Research 3

7.0   Chapter Overview

This chapter starts with an introduction followed by an elaboration on the results of this empirical study. Specifically, the fitness of the measurement model, summary of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and results, convergent validity, reliability, discriminant validity and normality of data were discussed. Next, the results concerning the relationships studied were discussed, such as the descriptive statistics, the interrelationship between variables and hypotheses testing. Finally, a discussion of the findings from this empirical research is presented.

7.1   Introduction

This study's research questions were: to investigate if 1) Organisation Virtuousness (OV) will significantly and positively predict job-related affective well-being (JAWS), 2) OV will significantly and positively predict meaning at work (MW), 3) MW will significantly and positively predict JAWS and 4) MW will fully mediate the relationship between OV and JAWS. The findings of qualitative studies 1 and 2 formed the conceptual framework and basis for this empirical research 3. Study 1 found that participants who experienced virtues such as trust, a compassionate and caring environment, altruism, integrity, forgiveness, and optimism had experienced more affective well-being at work. This finding is consistent with the construct of virtuousness proposed by Cameron et al. (2004), who developed a scale to measure organisational virtuousness. Hence, this formed the basis of the first hypothesis of this study: organisation virtuousness (OV) will significantly and positively predict job-related affective well-being (JAWS). Next, the findings of qualitative study 2 suggest that organisational virtuousness enables employees to experience meaning at work. Further, it was found that by experiencing meaning at work, employees tend to experience more positive and less negative

affective well-being. This qualitative study also alludes to the role of meaning at work as a potential mechanism for explaining the relationship between organisational virtuousness and affective well-being. Hence, this formed the basis of the subsequent three hypotheses of this study: 2) OV will significantly and positively predict meaning at work (MW), 3) MW will significantly and positively predict JAWS, and 4) MW will fully mediate the relationship between OV and JAWS.

7.2   Results

Figure 7.1

Variables studied
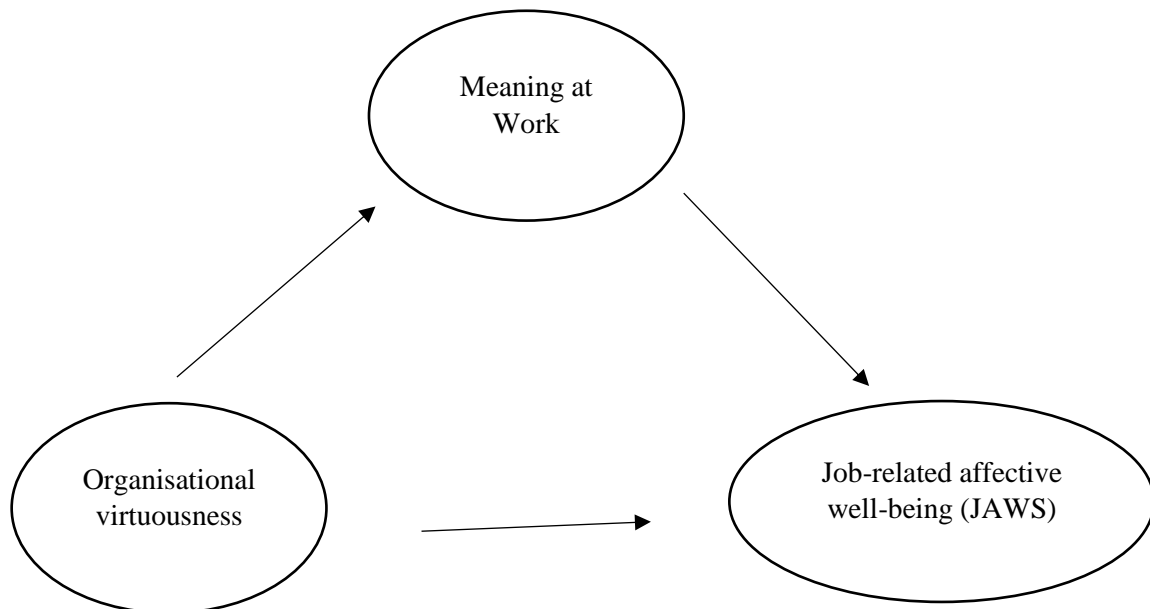
7.2.1 Fitness of Measurement Model

Figure 7.2

Variables and Relationships Studied (AMOS Graphics)
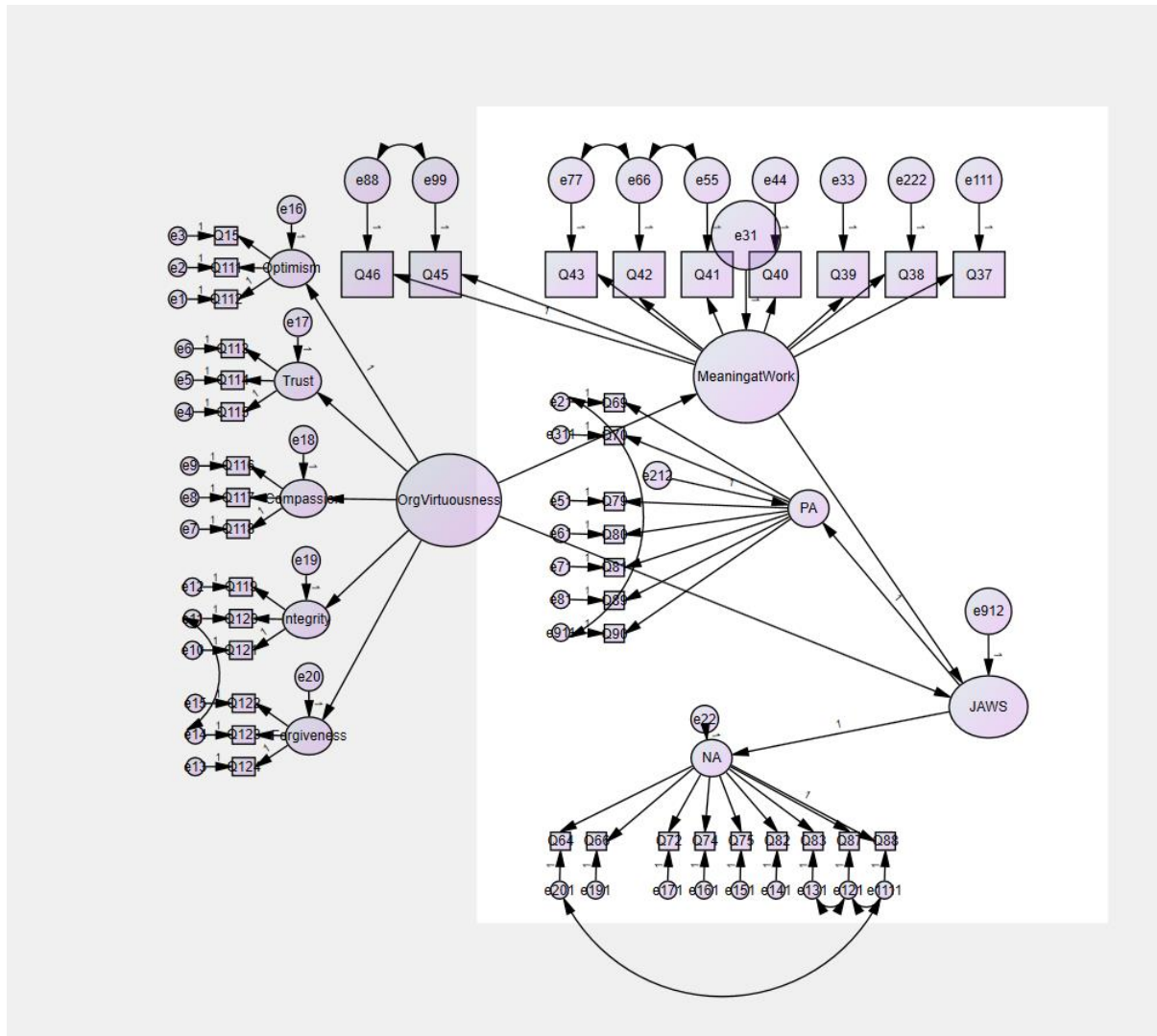
7.2.2 Method

A pooled – confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted before hypothesis testing. In a pooled CFA, all latent constructs are combined with the corresponding CFA procedure executed at once (Awang, 2015). A pooled CFA was advocated due to potential issues that

could arise when performing CFA for each measurement model separately (Awang, 2015) and to ascertain construct validity (Afthanorhan, et al., 2014, Chong et al., 2014).

In observing "fitness" of a measurement model, three model fit categories were utilised - absolute fit, incremental fit and parsimonious fit (Awang, 2015). Absolute fit is assessed based on Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) in which the corresponding value or level of acceptance should be below 0.08. Incremental fit, on the other hand, observes three types of indices - CFI, TLI, and IFI whereby the acceptance levels should be above 0.9 (Awang, 2015; Bollen, 1989; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996 as cited in Stuifbergen et al., 2005). Besides, the Standardised Root Mean Square index (SRMR) is also observed for incremental fit with a desirable value of lesser than 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For absolute fit, the index (chi square index) does not apply to studies with sample sizes that exceed 200 (Awang, 2015). Similarly, for the parsimonious fit in which the index is chisq/df, this would not be applicable if one's sample size is more than 200 (Hair et al., 1996; Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996 as cited in Awang, 2015). Hence, given that the sample size for this study is more than 200, these indices (chi square index & chisq/df) were not observed. Henceforth this thesis proceeds to observe SRMR, RMSEA, CFLI, FLI and IFI for model fitness evaluation.

7.2.3   CFA Summary and Result

Upon the first pooled CFA attempt, some model fit indices did not achieve the recommended level (For example, the CFI level was 0.856), although it was close to the respective required levels. Consequently, all items with factor loadings less than 0.6, which is deemed problematic according to (Awang, 2015) were deleted. Affected items were deleted individually, and the test was re-executed until all factor-loading items reached the minimum threshold higher than 0.60. Modification indices (MI) were also observed, as recommended by Awang (2015) to improve model fitness of the pooled CFA, a value above 15 indicated

redundancies between items. All items with high MI (>15) were correlated with a free parameter estimate based on Awang's (2015) suggestion. The overall model fit for the pooled CFA is presented in table 7.1 below:

Table 7.1

Model Fitness and Construct Validity

Indices	Value
SRMR	**0.061**
RMSEA	**0.061**
CFI	**0.915**
TLI	**0.909**
IFI	**0.916**

7.2.4 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is ascertained by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct (Awang, 2015). Essentially, the AVE values for each construct should be more than 0.5 for convergent validity to be achieved (Awang, 2015). In this thesis, AVE values for all items are above 0.5 (as per Table 7.2); hence confirming that convergent validity has been achieved.

Table 7.2

Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Organisational Virtuousness	1	0.848		
	2	0.79		
	3	0.729		
	4	0.848	0.973	**0.709**
	5	0.847		
	6	0.844		
	7	0.767		
	8	0.877		

	9	0.816	
	10	0.87	
	11	0.891	
	12	0.878	
	13	0.854	
	14	0.905	
	15	0.845	
Meaning at Work	1	0.763	
	2	0.745	
	3	0.711	
	4	0.665	
	5	0.759	0.936	**0.623**
	6	0.887	
	7	0.823	
	8	0.88	
	9	0.84	
Job – Related Affective Well-being	1	0.606	
	2	0.695	
	3	0.843	
	4	0.839	
	5	0.856	
	6	0.779	
	7	0.632	
	8	0.726	
	9	0.648	0.946	**0.525**
	10	0.672	
	11	0.607	
	12	0.701	
	13	0.816	
	14	0.798	
	15	0.621	
	16	0.672	

7.2.5 Reliability

Reliability is essential as it demonstrates that the research instrument would produce similar and consistent results under different circumstances (Roberts & Priest, 2006). All constructs in this study met the required reliability Cronbach alpha levels. Specifically, organisational virtuousness (as an overall scale) reported a high reliability of 0.95. In terms of the scale's sub-dimensions, all five sub-dimensions reported high reliability: optimism (.828),

trust (.883), compassion (.859), integrity (.910), and forgiveness (.90). Also, Meaning at Work scale reported high reliability with a Cronbach Alpha value of .91. Lastly, the Job-Related Affective Well Being Scale (JAWS) reported high internal consistency with a Cronbach Alpha Value of .894.

7.2.6 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was established using the Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio, whereby a value of less than .85; indicates that discriminant validity had been ascertained among the two constructs (Henseler et al. 2015). Hence, given that all HTMT ratios are below .85 as per Table 7.3, discriminant validity was established in the study.

Table 7.3

Discriminant Validity

HTMT Ratio	
JAWS-Meaning at Work	**0.631**
JAWS- Organizational Virtuousness	**0.512**
Meaning at Work – Organisational Virtuousness	**0.759**

7.2.7 Normality of Data

Researchers must ascertain the normality assessments for their data before proceeding to design the structural model (Awang, 2015). The assessment of normality is performed by evaluating the skewness of each item, whereby a skewness of 1.0 or lower signals that the data is normally distributed (Awang, 2015). For the critical region (CR), the value must not exceed

8.0 (Awang, 2015). Another way to evaluate normality is through observing the multivariate kurtosis statistic. However, SEM through Maximum Likelihood Estimator (MLE) is robust to kurtosis violations in regards to multivariate normality; providing the sample size is sufficient and the CR values do not exceed 7.0 (Awang, 2015). Hence, given that the sample size of this study is more than 200, skewness values of all items are 1.0 and lower. All CR values do not exceed 7.0 (refer Table 7.4 below); as such, it is deduced that this study's normality assumptions are met.

Table 7.4

Normality of Data

Variable	skew	c.r.	Kurtosis	c.r.
Q64	**-0.118**	-0.709	0.151	**0.454**
Q66	**-0.132**	-0.794	-0.112	**-0.336**
Q72	**-0.21**	-1.266	-0.608	**-1.829**
Q74	**-0.237**	-1.426	-0.61	**-1.835**
Q75	**-0.621**	-3.734	-0.445	**-1.339**
Q82	**0.017**	0.103	-0.37	**-1.112**
Q83	**-0.262**	-1.576	-0.509	**-1.531**
Q87	**-0.13**	-0.779	-0.689	**-2.07**
Q88	**-0.085**	-0.51	-0.724	**-2.178**
Q90	**-0.048**	-0.287	-0.325	**-0.976**
Q89	**-0.037**	-0.224	-0.123	**-0.371**
Q81	**0.068**	0.411	-0.501	**-1.507**
Q80	**-0.067**	-0.402	-0.158	**-0.474**
Q79	**-0.177**	-1.064	-0.248	**-0.746**
Q70	**-0.225**	-1.353	-0.023	**-0.071**
Q69	**-0.032**	-0.193	-0.532	**-1.601**
Q37	**-0.428**	-2.575	-0.394	**-1.186**
Q38	**-0.81**	-4.873	0.027	**0.082**
Q39	**-0.789**	-4.746	0.412	**1.24**
Q40	**-0.74**	-4.448	-0.09	**-0.27**
Q41	**-0.986**	-5.932	0.677	**2.036**
Q42	**-0.809**	-4.866	0.969	**2.914**
Q43	**-0.865**	-5.204	0.547	**1.644**
Q45	**-0.556**	-3.343	-0.054	**-0.164**
Q46	**-0.721**	-4.339	0.448	**1.346**
Q122	**-1.045**	-6.284	1.136	**3.416**

Q123	**-0.98**	-5.895	1.08	**3.249**
Q124	**-0.86**	-5.175	0.5	**1.503**
Q119	**-0.881**	-5.3	0.603	**1.813**
Q120	**-0.855**	-5.141	0.685	**2.061**
Q121	**-0.87**	-5.233	0.673	**2.025**
Q116	**-1.023**	-6.155	1.166	**3.505**
Q117	**-0.947**	-5.694	0.629	**1.893**
Q118	**-0.69**	-4.151	0.194	**0.584**
Q113	**-0.904**	-5.436	0.591	**1.776**
Q114	**-0.964**	-5.797	0.949	**2.853**
Q115	**-0.832**	-5.002	0.408	**1.227**
Q15	**-0.973**	-5.851	0.723	**2.173**
Q111	**-0.763**	-4.59	0.32	**0.963**
Q112	**-0.942**	-5.668	0.739	**2.221**
Mutivariate			297.604	**37.815**

7.2.8   Results Analysis

Using SPSS, the descriptive statistics and interrelationship variables (correlation between variables) were calculated. The described statistics are detailed in Table 7.5 and Table 7.6 below.

Table 7.5

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
OV	**217**	**19**	**99**	**72.00**	**14.627**
MW	**217**	**9**	**63**	**45.08**	**11.121**
JAWS	**217**	**40**	**129**	**89.73**	**14.956**
Valid N (listwise)	**217**				

The correlations between variables indicated moderate to high values as indicated in Table 7.6 below.

Table 7.6

Interrelationship between Variables

Constructs	Correlations
Organisational Virtuousness (OV)	**OV – MW = 0.728, p<0.01** **OV- JAWS = 0.699, p<0.01**
Meaning at Work (MW)	**MW – JAWS = .713, p<0.01**
Job – Related Affective Well-being (JAWS)	-

7.3   Hypothesis Testing

This quantitative study found that all four hypotheses are supported. Specifically, the hypothesis that 1) Organisation Virtuousness (OV) will significantly and positively predict job-related affective well-being (JAWS), 2) OV will significantly and positively predict meaning at work (MW), 3) MW will significantly and positively predict JAWS and 4) MW will fully mediate the relationship between OV and JAWS. The diagrammatic representation is presented in figure 7.2 below.

Figure 7.3

Relationship between OV and JAWS
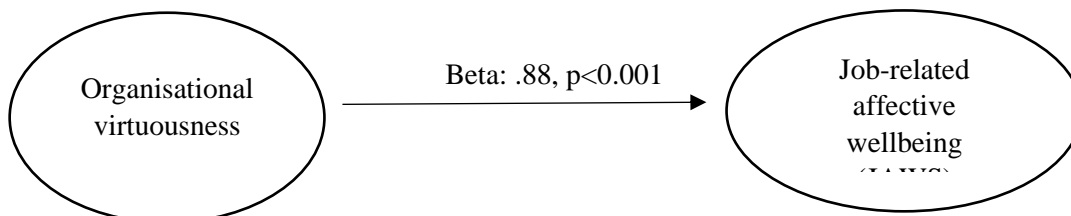
Regarding the relationship between organisational virtuousness and job-related affective well-being, the standardised beta estimate is .88, p<0.001. Hence, the hypothesis that OV will significantly and positively predict JAWS is supported.

Figure 7.4

Mediation Relationship
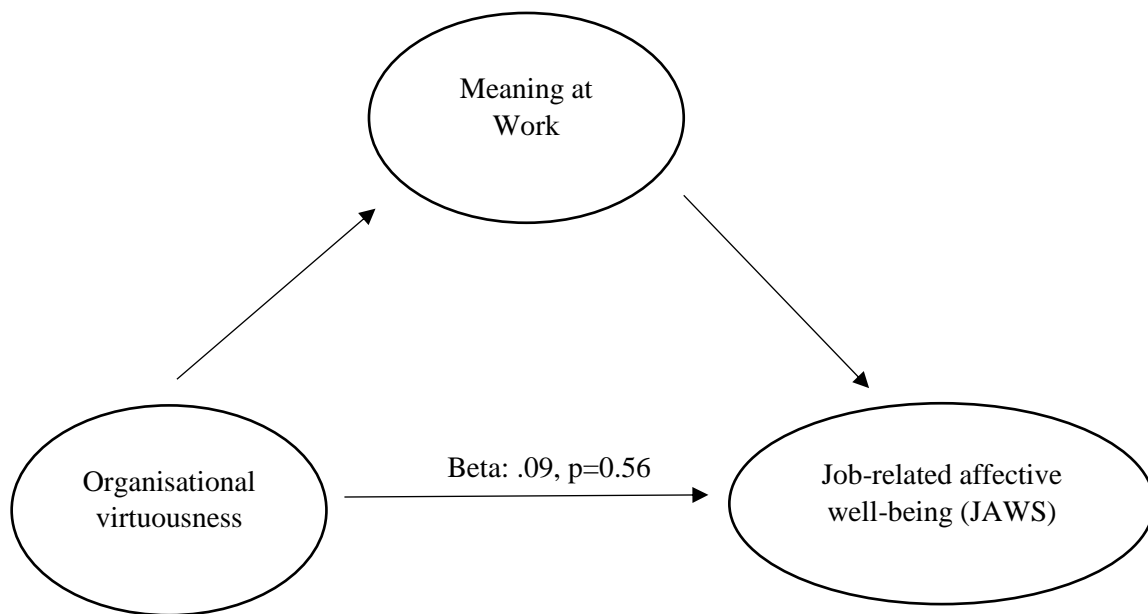
When the mediator, meaning at work (MW) enters the structural model, the standardised beta estimate of the relationship between OV and JAWS reduced to 0.09 and is not significant, p = 0.56. Hence, this indicates that a full mediation has occurred. The hypothesis MW will fully mediate the relationship between OV and JAWS is supported.

Figure 7.5

Relationship between OV and MW
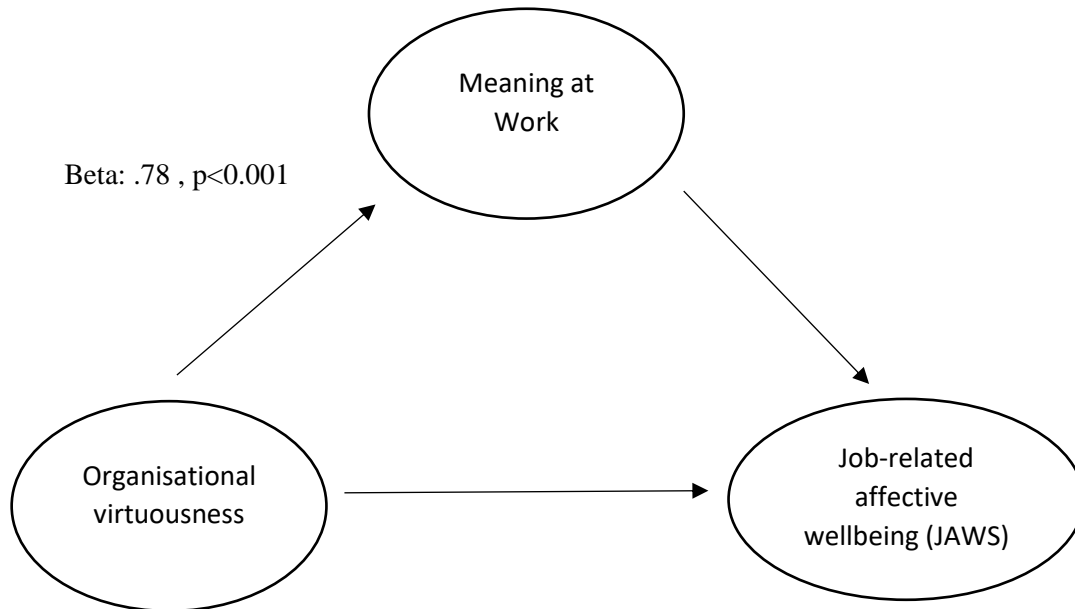
Regarding the relationship between OV and MW, the standardised beta estimate is .78 , p<0.001. Hence, the hypothesis that OV will significantly and positively predict MW is supported.

Figure 7.6

Relationship between MW and JAWS
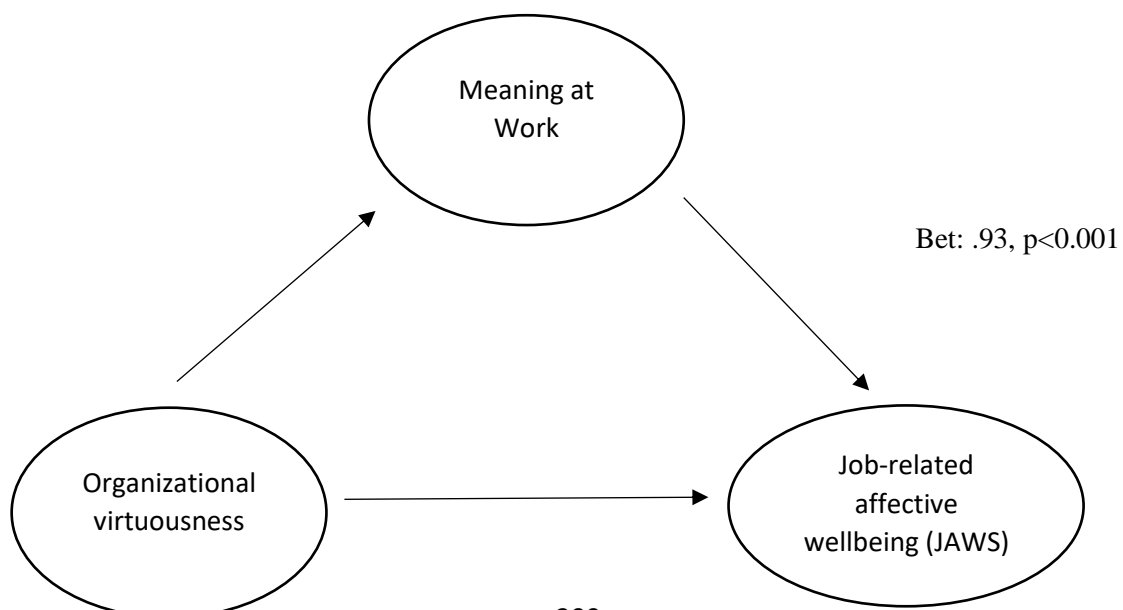
Regarding the relationship between MW and JAWS, the standardised beta estimate is .93, p<0.001. Hence, the hypothesis that MW will significantly and positively predict JAWS is supported.

Hence, the indirect effect of OV to JAWS through the mediator MW is significant, confirming that a full mediation has occurred.

7.4   Discussion

This study focused on affective well-being, and as discussed extensively in the previous chapters, the importance of examing this variable cannot be overstated. Currently, the literature on affective well-being is steadily growing, with some researchers conceptualising affective well-being and happiness interchangeably (Hofmann et al., 2014). Specifically, the current research has utilised the JAWS scale to evaluate affective well-being from a job context. Further, Van Katwyk et al. (2000) advocated that the JAWS be given a more holistic consideration in organisational research and for research to identify relevant predictors of JAWS. Hence, this research has addressed this gap as it found significant predictors of JAWS which were organisational virtuousness and meaning at work.

Further, there had also been a lack of literature on affective well-being specifically on SMEs, which is concerning and problematic for theory, research, and practice. Given that SMEs face their unique context and undergo their unique set of challenges, it is imperative to not generalise research focused on large organisations to SMEs. Most management theories had been developed and tested on large organisations, with little known attention paid to its applicability to SMEs (Heneman et al., 2000, Brotherton et al., 2009). This is odd considering that scholars such as Henry et al. (1995) cited in Cassell et al. (2002) posit that management theories primarily focused on large organisations, although their economic advantages have decreased over the years. Further, a nation's economy is dependent on SME's ability to succeed

(Robu, 2013) and specifically, in Malaysia, SMEs play significant economic and social roles due to their utility in increasing job opportunities, decreasing the unemployment rate, and increasing competition, productivity and consequently; the economy of a nation (Razak et al., 2018). Thus, this research's focus on SMEs in Malaysia addresses the abovementioned gap using virtuousness and meaning at work to predict SME employees' affective well-being.

Given that organisational virtuousness and meaning at work do not require monetary resources for execution, this study found virtuousness to be significant with affective well-being; SMEs can use this finding to increase affective well-being among their employees. Further, past scholars have noted that creating workplace happiness (which is frequently used interchangeably with affective well-being (Briner, 1997) might not necessarily require additional monetary resources. It can be achieved through spontaneous and inexpensive initiatives such as developing a friendly workplace environment (Chaiprasit & Santidhiraku, 2011). Such an initiative can be implemented in SMEs' informal and ad-hoc environment typified by small size and resource constraints (Lai et al., 2017). Nevertheless, this can be seen as an advantage as given the smaller nature of SMEs which allows an agile nature of quick adjudication (Senturk, 2010). Thus, it is unsurprising that variables such as organisational virtuousness and meaning at work which thrive on a personal disposition, can effectively permeate SMEs.

Consequently, more meaningful interactions and encounters can occur in SMEs compared to larger organisations, where bureaucracy and complex hierarchical communication thrive. Hence, SMEs should tap into this strength, further supporting Senturk's (2010) assertion that SMEs are essential because "small is beautiful". Furthermore, there has been a lack of human resource practices that can improve affective well-being in the workplace. However, it is equally important to understand what could influence affective well-being based on the unique work environment (such as working in small versus big companies). The failure of

organisations or human resource practitioners to acknowledge this characteristic would lead to difficulty in discerning the right human resource strategies to empower employees and subsequently leads to monetary or resource loss in SMEs.

More so, human resource practitioners can tap from the variables of organisational virtuousness and meaning at work to develop effective human resource practices. For example, they could advocate a culture of virtuousness that breeds trust, integrity, and compassion through employees' interpersonal relationships and interactions (see Chapter 8 for a discussion and elaboration on the implications of this study). Such elements are important as they empower SME employees to bring forth more skills, outcomes, and well-being which are crucial to the survival of these types of companies.

This study also found a significant and positive predictive relationship between organisational virtuousness and affective well-being. This is partly consistent with Magnier-Watanabe et al. (2020)'s report of a positive association between organisational virtuousness and subjective well-being among Japanese and French employees. However, their study revealed no significant differences between the influence of organisational virtuousness and negative subjective well-being, which was confirmed in the current study. Magnier-Watanabe et al.'s (2020) positive subjective well-being included questions on positive affect and life satisfaction, while negative subjective well-being included questions on negative affect and life satisfaction. Hence, the current study complements Magnier-Watanabe et al. (2020) in terms of the influence of organisational virtuousness to predict both positive and negative states of employee affective well-being.

Also, the findings of this study are consistent with other studies that found affective well-being to mediate the relationship between organisational virtuousness and other variables. This mediation indicates the positive relationship between OV and affective well-being. Previous

studies have used affective well-being as a mediator, with it rarely being an outcome variable. For instance, Rego et al. (2010) found that affective well-being mediated the relationship between OV and organisational citizenship behaviours, while research by (Torkestani & Jamshidi Borujerdi (2015) on employees in insurance companies in Tehran, who found a mediating relationship between affective well-being, organisational virtuousness, and affective commitment. Similarly, Rego et al. (2011) found that organisational virtuousness positively predicted affective commitment, with affective well-being mediating this significant relationship. Ahmed et al. (2018) found that affective well-being and engagement partially mediated the relationship between virtuousness and performance, while Sharma and Goyal (2022) found that positive affect partially mediated the relationship between organisational virtuousness and work engagement.

On the significant relationship found in this study between meaning at work and affective well-being, Golparvar et al. (2014) found meaning at work positively predicted positive affect of employees. Similarly, Arnold et al. (2007) found that meaningful work positively predicted affective well-being among a sample of Canadian health workers. Further, meaningful work was found to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and affective well-being. However, it is equally important to note that the literature on meaning at work and affective well-being is lacking, as existing literature tended to focus on the relationship between meaning at work with other positive work outcomes such as organisational citizenship behaviours, career commitment, organisational commitment, job satisfaction, intrinsic work motivations (Steger et al., 2012), and negative work outcomes such as turnover intentions (Humphrey et al., 2007), absenteeism, withdrawal intentions, and low extrinsic work motivations (Steger et al., 2012). Hence, this significant relationship between meaning at work and affective well-being among Malaysian SME employees complements the extant literature.

This also highlights how SME employees greatly value the opportunity to experience meaning and feel empowered when working in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Similarly, there is a dearth of literature on individual constructs of virtuousness, such as optimism, forgiveness, trust, and compassion. Given the significant relationship between organisational virtuousness and meaning at work, the previous literature should be reviewed to comprehend its relationship within the work context. For instance, studies have found that optimist experience meaning in life (Ju et al., 2013). Taubman-Ben-Ari and Weintroub (2008) found that among pediatric physicians and nurses, individuals with higher optimism predicted a greater sense of meaning in life. This suggests that employees with high levels of personal resources (e.g optimism) are more likely to overcome adversity through meaning-making (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Weintroub, 2008). Further, optimistic individuals generally expect a more favourable life event and perceive that their future outcomes would be positive (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Weintroub, 2008). Given that this study identified a significant link between organisational virtuousness and meaning at work, one can draw some links between optimism and meaning supported by previous studies. This suggests that when SMEs are optimistic about their work outcomes, it will allow employees draw their personal resources that can act as a buffer against the negative challenges or adversities. Employees in an optimistic organisation could also expect more favourable and positive outcomes, allowing them the right conditions to experience meaning at work.

Further, the association between trust and meaning was described by Dahlen (2010) who stated that when an individual trusts responsively, it paves way for them to be truly alive. Hence, trust allows for the right conditions for one to experience meaning in life; a construct that was formed from observations that life can be meaningful even under challenging circumstances (Phillips & Ferguson, 2013). Consequently, one could also deduce that in an organisation, employees who experience trust either from the organisation, supervisors and

colleagues could develop meaning at work. Also, compassionate individuals tend to deal with life experiences constructively by not being fixated on negative responses or engaging in harsh self-criticism (Phillips & Ferguson, 2013). Hence, compassionate organisations empower their employees to deal with challenging circumstances effectively, which helps them achieve meaning at work. Recent studies have associated forgiveness and meaning in life, such as (Van Tongeren et al., 2015) and (Głaz, 2019). They construe forgiveness as a meaning- making mechanism due to its role in repairing relationships and restoring the positive impact of relationships (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). Interpersonal offences are obstacles that hinder a relationship's meaning–giving function (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). As humans, we thrive in close relationships that offer a sense of meaning (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). Since relationships allow for meaning and forgiveness restores relational harmony, forgiveness allows for increased meaning in life (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). In organisations, acts of virtuousness such as forgiveness facilitate the repair of employees' relationships, ensuring they experience meaning at work.

Given the significant findings of the quantitative study, the amplifying and buffering effect of virtuousness holds true within SME settings where the small nature of SMEs is a strength, not a weakness. On the contrary, in large organisations, formal hierarchies and structures are essential to ensure the organisation is well-controlled and managed. However, this is not essential, at least in relation to organisational rigidity in SMEs. In fact, constructs such as virtuousness and meaning at work which thrive on a personal level; could manifest better in SMEs due to the small nature of SMEs which would allow for more in-depth encounters to take place. Thus, one could argue that the amplifying and buffering effects of virtuousness could work best in relation to positive emotions (Cameron et al., 2004, Rego et al., 2011). Employees who observe a sense of virtuousness such as compassion, forgiveness and gratitude, would in turn, experience positive emotions, which allows for a mutually reinforcing cycle

(Cameron & Caza, 2013). Previous research supports the view that exposure to virtuous behaviours elicits positive emotions in individuals and consequently, leads to a replication of virtuousness in the individuals (Fineman 1999; Fredrickson, 1998; Seligman, 2002; Staw, Sutton, & Pellod, 1994 as cited in Cameron et al. 2004).

Given the significant link between organisational virtuousness and meaning at work in this study, one could also argue that this replication of virtuousness is the underlying mechanism that allows for the experience of meaning at work. This aligns with the study's findings of meaning at work as a significant mediator between organisational virtuousness and affective well-being. Also, a demonstration or act of virtuousness is what precedes the experience of meaning at work. The amplifying effect of virtuousness can also transcend from an act of individual virtuousness to a higher construct of organisational virtuousness (Cameron et al., 2004), which allows for a sense of affective elevation to disseminate through the organisation via a contagion effect (Frederickson, 2003, Cameron et al., 2004). As employees can experience meaning at work, just from observing the goodness of organisational virtuousness, this link is not surprising. Essentially, this amplifying effect of virtuousness allows employees to experience meaning at work, facilitating increased affective well-being.

Virtuousness can also have an amplifying effect through the formation of social capital (Cameron & Caza, 2013, Baker, 2000, Coleman, 1998). The core element guiding social capital is the goodwill of others (Adler & Kwon, 2002). From an organisational context, social capital represents the relationship between employees in which information, influence and resources flow (Cameron et al., 2004). The significant link between organisational virtuousness with meaning at work as a mediator could also be understood through the amplifying effect of social capital. Shahid et al. (2020) deduced that virtuousness enables employees to develop meaning in their work and achieve organisational goals (Shahid et al., 2020). Specifically, a virtuous environment enables employees to work harmoniously as a part of a larger working system and

contributes to organisational missions (Shahid et al., 2020). Thus, virtuousness could amplify employees' experience of positive social capital, facilitating their experience of meaning and increasing affective well-being at work.

Virtuousness can also amplify prosocial behaviour (Cameron et al., 2004, Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2020) when its positive impact is evident on the helper and those being helped (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Given that meaning at work is a significant mediator in this study, one can argue that virtuousness amplifies meaningful work and affective well-being in SME employees. Prosocial behaviour tends to occur in organisations that allow employees to develop meaning through a psychological mechanism of perceiving that their actions are part of a more significant social influence, which allows them to form social bonds with society (Cassar & Meier, (2018). The organisation may do so by paying attention to its corporate social responsibilities (Cassar & Meier, 2018).

Further, virtuousness can also act as a buffering mechanism that protects, inoculates, and creates resilience for organisations to rise above challenges (Cameron et al., 2004, Meyer, 2018). This buffering allows an organisation to bounce back from negative events and prevents decreasing happiness among employees (Cameron & Caza, 2013). This is as work that would not allow one to achieve their potential and gain virtues, either due to the monotonous nature of work, unsatisfactory levels of autonomy or judgement is non-eudaimonian will cause one's work to not be meaningful (Tablan, 2019).

Additionally, there is a concept which is named paternalistic leadership (PL); in which type of leadership is said to be prevalent in an Asian context, such as in Chinese family businesses (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Further, paternalistic leadership is said to be an effective way to influence employees' behaviors especially among an Asian context (Chen et al., 2019). Essentially, paternalistic leadership looks to have some overlap with organizational virtue

given its focus on benevolence and morality which warrants further discussion. PL is a type of leadership with a combination of formidable discipline and authority but coupled with father-like benevolence and strong moral compass (Farh & Cheng, 2000). PL is said to be a fatherlike leadership style whereby there is a clear and strong authority; together with aspects of concern, considerateness, and moral leadership (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Paternalistic leadership has three main constructs namely authoritarian, moral, and benevolent leadership and these three elements are with varying degrees (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Authoritarian leaderships look into the behavior of leaders that assets authority, demand and obedience over subordinates (Farh & Cheng, 2000, Wu et al., 2012) while benevolent leaderships refer to behavior of leaders in showing individualized and holistic concern over employees' personal wellbeing (Farh & Cheng, 2000, Wu et al., 2012). Lastly, moral leadership looks into leaders who show superior personal virtues and unselfish characteristics (Farh & Cheng, 2000, Wu et al., 2012).

Some empirical studies have looked at the three elements of paternalistic leadership with organizational outcomes. In their study on employees in private organizations in China, perceived interactional justice had mediate the relationship between moral and benevolent leadership and trust in supervisor but perceived interactional justice did not mediate the influence of authoritarian leadership on trust in supervisor (Wu et al., 2012). Their study had also found supervisor trust to have a positive relationship on work performance and organizational citizenship behaviours (Wu et al., 2012). Some implications of this study include the showcase on how benevolent and moral leadership would positively influence organisational outcomes (Wu et al., 2012). Chen et al. (2019)'s study of employees in manufacturing companies had shown that benevolent and moral leadership positively correlates with organizational commitment. However, authoritarian leadership and organizational commitment had no significant relationship (Chen et al., 2019). In their meta-analysis, it was found that overall, moral, and benevolent leadership were positively related to

numerous follower outcomes while authoritarian leadership was negatively related to numerous follower outcomes (Bedi, 2020). Given the close association between organizational virtue and paternalistic leadership, future studies can further explore this link. This is also due to Malaysia being an Asian culture, hence presumably might adopt some aspects of paternalistic leadership. Nevertheless, paternalistic leadership focuses on the role of a leader, but perhaps a paternalistic environment among employees and peers is still unclear and under researched, which warrants further future research.

Lastly, it is essential to consider that the data was collected during the Covid 19 pandemic. Previous research have established the unprecedented challenges associated the COVID 19 pandemic (Lu et al., 2020), some of which include: increased turnover intentions of employees, decreased long-term competitive advantages of SMEs (Pan & Lin, 2022) and frameless work situations that exacerbate workers stress and anxiety (Russo et al., 2021). Hence, to understand participants' views about the pandemic, they were asked additional questions pertinent to the pandemic during the survey. Questions such as "Do you think your company is severely affected by the pandemic?" was asked; and 145 participants responded "Yes" while the remaining 72 participants responded "No". To the question "Are you worried about job security (in relation to your current role) given the economic challenges due to the pandemic?" 143 participants responded "Yes", while 74 responded "No". Given the responses, it is evident that participants felt negatively impacted by the pandemic, with most indicating that they were worried about their job security. Hence, given the uncertainty and challenges of the pandemic on SMEs, it further necessitates and further shows the importance of understanding affective well-being among SME employees, which this study, through its qualitative and quantitative studies has managed to achieve.

7.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter started with an introduction, followed by an elaboration on the results of this empirical study. Next, the fitness of the measurement model, summary of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and results, convergent validity, reliability, discriminant validity and normality of data were discussed. Next, the results concerning the relationships studied were discussed, such as the descriptive statistics, the interrelationship between variables and hypotheses testing. Specifically, all four hypotheses were supported in this study. Finally, a discussion of the findings from this empirical research in relation to existing literature is covered in detail.

Chapter Eight: General Discussions, Implications and Conclusion

8.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the general discussion and contributions of the three empirical studies within this PhD research. It elaborates on the study's practical and theoretical implications and contributions. Finally, this study's limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed, followed by a general thesis conclusion.

8.2 Study 1: Affective Wellbeing in the Workplace

Study 1 aimed to explore and understand what about an organization that enables SMEs employees to feel positive and negative emotions in the workplace. In study 1, it was found that participants who experienced virtuousness in their organisations were more likely to experience positive affect at work. Conversely, participants who did not experience virtuousness in their organisation were more likely to experience negative affect at work. Specifically, participants who experienced virtues such as trust at work, a compassionate and caring environment, altruism, integrity, forgiveness and optimism derived more affective well-being at work. Participants construed trust as the freedom and autonomy to perform their jobs and make job-related decisions allowed them to experience positive affect.

The small size of SMEs was identified as a catalyst for employee trust at work due to the smaller nature of SMEs which could presumably allow organizations to give more freedom and autonomy as compared to large organisations. This could be due to the nature of employment relation in SMEs are often informal and adhoc; given its' size and resource constraints (Lai et al., 2017). Thus, SMEs have the benefit of taking advantage of group level interactions within the organisations (Brotherton et al., 2009). Conversely, participants who

experienced a lack of trust from being micromanaged by their supervisors or being left out of decision-making processes at work reported negative affect. This is consistent with past literature that denotes that elements which negatively affect the wellbeing of SME employees' include challenges associated with one's superior (Johnson, 2011).

In the next theme, a compassionate and caring environment, participants shared how compassion and care from their direct supervisors, managers, organisations, and colleagues caused them to experience positive affect at work. Conversely, a lack of compassion and care led to negative affect at work. Thirdly, participants disclosed that altruism manifested in organisational cultures that advocated profound purpose and help for others and society at large. Specifically, they affirmed that the altruistic culture of "doing good" thrives in organisations that go above and beyond to support employees, external parties and the larger society. As for integrity in the workplace, participants experienced positive affect when their organisations were fair to clients and avoided taking shortcuts and doing what is right (such as being fair to clients) experienced more positive affect. Conversely, acts that lacked integrity, such as short-changing clients and incongruence in the assignment of job responsibilities, led to negative affect.

Next, the theme of a forgiving environment illustrates how a forgiving environment among employees nurtured their experience of positive affect. Participants noted that the small size of SMEs enabled employees to develop close relationships and tolerance. Conversely, participants who experienced a less forgiving environment, characterised by intolerance and verbal abuse reported negative affect. More so, whenever an employee was unfairly reprimanded, participants noted that the organisation's size had a negative compounding effect. Finally, in the theme of optimism, participants spoke about how a general culture of optimism, in relation to success in one's role, and optimism arising from encouragement and reinforcement of a job well done allows one to derive positive affect. This could be due to the

buffering effect of virtuousness; which allows employees to mend relationships, collaborate (Bright et al., 2006), and "buffer" an organisation from the negative consequences of distress by promoting resilience, solidarity, and a sense of efficacy (Masten et al., 1999, Weick et al., 1999, Cameron & Caza, 2013). Conversely, a lack of optimism, such as blaming each other when things go wrong, and feeling pessimistic about work tasks, can lead to negative affect.

Overall, this study has shown the manifestation of virtuousness and the resultant affective outcomes. The study illustrates the utility of qualitative studies in unravelling social scientific themes. For instance, the virtue of trust was manifested and experienced by participants in job roles that deprived them of autonomy and freedom to execute their jobs. However, virtues such as compassion and care were developed from direct interaction and interpersonal relationships, while altruism manifested in the higher-order organisational culture. Integrity arose through job roles, forgiveness through interpersonal relationships, and optimism through employees' work tasks. Hence, this shows that virtues manifest differently (through job roles, interpersonal interactions, and general organisational culture or mission) to positively or negatively impact employees' affective well-being. Based on participants' accounts, this study has also shown that most of the virtues are able to be permeated better due to the smaller nature of SMEs, as the closer interactions allow virtues to be amplified better. Conversely, due to the smaller nature of SMEs, acts which are not virtuous can also have a compounding negative effect, as the negative consequences affects employees more easily due to the smaller nature of SMEs. Lastly, this study supports the amplifying and buffering effect mechanisms, specifically in relation to affective well-being, which is further elaborated in the theoretical implication section below.

8.3   Study 2: Meaning at Work

The second qualitative study examined the circumstances under which SME employees derive meaning at work. The two research questions of this study were: 1) What do employees perceive as meaning at work and 2) How does an organisation enable or hinder employees from achieving meaning at work? In this study, participants discussed their perception of meaning at work. The following sub-themes emerged from the study: fulfilment & personal development, being aligned to personal values, impact on organisation and impact on society. Participants spoke about how meaning at work is derived from finding fulfilment and having personal development at work, in relation to performing one's role more effectively. Also, participants described meaning at work as being derived from having a job that is aligned with one's personal values. For instance, if one values positive impact on others, meaning at work can be achieved if their job allows them to practice their values. Participants also construed meaning at work as making a positive difference in the organisation and society. Further, participants elaborated on how meaning at work allowed them to experience affective well-being, specifically, from a range of positive emotions such as satisfaction, a general sense of happiness, and excitement.

Regarding the trust and altruism at work and doing "good" work theme, participants shared how instances of organisational virtuousness contributes to their experience of meaning at work. Participants disclosed that organisational virtuousness such as trust, altruism, and doing good, positively impact their day-to-day roles, consequently allowing them to achieve meaning at work. In contrast, participants who experienced a lack of virtuousness, such as a lack of compassion, care and integrity, experienced less meaning at work. The subsequent theme, doing "good" in society, illustrates how organisations striving to positively impact society and organisational altruism from a charitable context allows one to derive meaning at work. Typically the altruistic act would be of no direct benefit or profit to the organisation,

however, such virtues enable employees to derive meaning at work. Lastly, virtuousness through interpersonal relationships in the form of care and compassion manifests in the relationships between direct supervisors, management, and colleagues, facilitating the experience of meaning at work.

In summary, this study explored participants' understanding and definitions of meaning at work; and showed how their definitions align with definitions and constructs available in previous studies (as discussed in chapter 6). Further, participants described how meaning at work allowed them to experience affective well-being, which is essential as it forms part of the conceptual framework for study 3. Since no previous study has established the relationship between organisational virtuousness and meaning at work, this qualitative study is significant as it explores and explains the possible mechanisms surrounding this link. For instance, the themes looks at how instances of virtuousness (such as trust, altruism, care, compassion, and integrity) within organisations positively impacts participant's day-to-day role, which facilitates conducive conditions for participants to experience meaning at work. This study also lends support to the amplifying and buffering effect of virtuousness such that virtuousness can amplify and buffer employees to experience meaning at work.

8.4   Study 3: Investigating the Antecedents and Mediator of Affective Wellbeing at Worrk

In study 3, a quantitative study, we found that all four hypotheses of this study are supported. Specifically, the hypothesis that 1) Organisation virtuousness (OV) will significantly and positively predict job-related affective well-being (JAWS), 2) OV will significantly and positively predict meaning at work (MW), 3) MW will significantly and positively predict JAWS and 4) MW will fully mediate the relationship between OV and JAWS are all supported. This quantitative study is essential as it confirms the conceptual framework

derived from the first two qualitative studies of this thesis. The first qualitative study found that organisational virtuousness constructs allowed participants to experience affective well-being, while the second qualitative study alluded to the role of meaning at work as a potential mediator between organisational virtuousness and affective well-being. Consequently, study 3 confirmed the relationships and variables identified in studies 1 and 2 through a quantitative design.

Further, this quantitative study contributes to the literature on the subject matter, as the review of literature revealed that it had not received sufficient attention. On a related note, the study's findings shed light on what predicts SME employees' affective well-being in Malaysia, where SMEs play a pivotal economic and social role (Razak et al., 2018). Further, SME's employment relationship which is often information and ad hoc, which is due to SMEs being smaller in nature (Lai et al., 2017), could thrive on variables such as organisational virtuousness which requires a more genuine and congruent interpersonal interaction to thrive. The significant findings of this quantitative study also explain how SMEs can improve employee affective well-being, thus allowing human resource practitioners and organisational psychologists to devise appropriate and focused well-being strategies for SMEs. Lastly, the study supports the amplifying and buffering effect of virtuousness on employee's affective well-being from a quantitative lens. Further, it shows that the amplifying and buffering effects of virtuousness extend to employees' perception of meaning at work, which is the first finding in the existing quantitative literature.

8.5   Theoretical Implications

This study fills the gap in literature on individual affect, which is often neglected and is not considered a primary focus in organisational research (Munchinsky, 2000). Further, as most management theories are developed and tested on large organisations, little is known

about their applicability to small or medium-sized firms such as SMEs (Heneman et al., 2000). Hence, since there is a lack of research on affective well-being among SMEs in Malaysia, this study's qualitative and quantitative findings have addressed the gap in the current literature. Ahmed et al. (2018) found a significant relationship between virtuousness and affective well-being. To explain this relationship, they used the Organisational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al. 1986), which presumes that fulfilling employees' socio-emotional needs creates positive feelings for the organisation (Ahmed et al., 2018). Further, they used the social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977) which states that vicarious reinforcement would increase one's learning, psychological and emotional state (Ahmed et al., 2018). Hence, this study's significant findings on organisational virtuousness and affective well-being further affirm the organisational support and social learning theory. Further, the self determination theory (SDT) posits that we have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan, 2009). When these three basic needs are met, one is said to experience increased well-being (Ryan, 2009). Although meaning is not part of the three core needs identified above, meaning can be investigated through the lens of SDT. This is as researchers such as Weinstein et al. (2012) have argued that the motivated processes of assimilation, integration, and symbolisation in achieving an individual's core needs, as defined in SDT are central to meaning-making. Given the significant direct relationship between meaning at work and affective well-being, this study supports SDT theory, at least in relation to meaning-making and one's well-being.

Essentially, this study was anchored upon the theoretical framework of the amplifying and buffering effects of virtuousness. Hence, the study's significant findings has lent support to this theory accordingly. Specifically, this study supports the amplifying effect of virtuousness, in relation to positive emotions (Cameron et al., 2004, Rego et al., 2011). The amplifying effect states that employees who observe a sense of virtuousness through observing

virtues such as compassion, forgiveness, and experiencing gratitude would, as a result, experience positive emotions, which consequently allows for a mutually reinforcing cycle (Cameron & Caza, 2013). Further, given that there is a significant relationship between OV and meaning at work in this study, these results support the amplifying effect of virtuousness on meaning at work, for which previous studies had not yet found the link. This study also supports the role of virtuousness as a buffering mechanism to protect, inoculate, and create resilience for organisations to rise from challenges (Cameron et al., 2004, Meyer, 2018). Further, this buffering mechanism allows organisations to recover from negative events and counteract decreasing happiness among employees (Cameron & Caza, 2013, Rego et al., 2011). Hence, this research proves that the amplifying and buffering effects of virtuousness; extends upon to the constructs of meaning at work and affective wellbeing; in which past literature has yet to examine.

The significant findings of this study have shown that the amplifying and buffering effect of virtuousness is evident in SMEs. This finding aligns with Cameron et al. (2004) that propounded the theory of amplifying and buffering effects of virtuousness based on empirical research on 18 organisations. Hence, it is assumed that these are mostly large organisations where variance and dynamics might differ from SMEs. Given that scholars have cautioned on existing management theories being developed and tested on large organisations (whose applicability on SMEs is questionable) (Heneman et al., 2000), this study has helped address this concern and gap accordingly.

Lastly, there are methodological implications for this study. Firstly, this study has implications for SME sampling, as previous studies have alluded to the inaccessibility of this sample type. Scholars have opined that the inaccessibility of this sample type may be connected with the size of small businesses. Some of the reasons include that access to the population of small businesses is limited due to resource constraints experienced by small businesses

(Murphy, 2007). Secondly, some have argued that the benefits of engaging small organisations are limited given their complexity in participant number, division variety, and job titles (Murphy, 2007). Further, scholars have advocated adopting more qualitative approaches in studying small organisations (Glendon et al., 2007). Also, researchers should attempt to identify the relationship between predictor and explanatory variables and understand the unique circumstances in which those relationships occur (Glendon et al., 2007). This is as relationships that exist in large organisations might differ or may not be sustained in smaller organisations (Glendon et al., 2007). Hence, this study's combined mixed method approaches has helped address the above concern accordingly.

8.6   Practical Implications

8.6.1 Trust Virtue

Employers and organisations should empower their employees by trusting them to perform tasks without micromanaging and trust them to make important decisions for the organisation. This recommendation is consistent with participants' experience of trust and affective well-being, as noted in study 1. Given the small nature of SMEs, this could be a strength compared to large organisations (Galabova & Mckie, 2013) where hierarchies are more imminent. SMEs can also develop training to educate their supervisors and managers to allow autonomy and freedom to their employees. Some supervisors and managers might be prone to micromanaging, which could lead to decreased affective well-being among employees. Further, organisations should hire supervisors who are more inclined to trust their employees and empower them in the process. In some instances, individuals in larger and more traditional organisations might be used to a more rigid and hierarchical line of communication (as formalisation of employee management practices used for large organisations is comparatively different (Lai et al., 2017)), if translated to SMEs, employees could have

decreased affective well-being. Hence, it would be essential for SMEs to take note of the profile of candidates to ascertain if they could work well and be adaptable to the small nature of SMEs.

Essentially, whenever supervisors or organisations withhold information from their employees, employees might feel that they are not being trusted and, in the process, they might experience decreased affective well-being. Although SMEs face economic challenges (Lu et al., 2020), they need to be transparent, as the small nature of SMEs could lead to false or negative information being widely spread. Though there are no existing theories on a lack of virtuousness and its amplifying effect, one might deduce that acts of lack of virtuousness could seemingly be "amplified" given the small nature of SMEs.

8.6.2 Compassionate Virtue

Based on the findings of a compassionate and caring environment theme, supervisors could be encouraged to show compassion and care to their subordinates. Such acts of compassion would help them not to feel like an "end product" or a cog in the wheel. Essentially, this compassion and care should manifest above and beyond the traditional employer–employee relationship, and it should ideally extend to non–work-related issues such as attaining future career goals and overcoming general life challenges (Stachowicz-Stanusch & Amann, 2018, Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). Employers and organisations can also initiate gatherings such as free meals to show that they care for their employees. They could also allow employees to meet outside work, get to know each other and form closer bonds. This form of care and compassion allows employees to feel a sense of togetherness, which helps make their work challenges much more bearable in line with the buffering effect of virtuousness. In study 1, participants also mentioned on how the smaller nature of SMEs makes acts of compassion and care much more obvious, and the converse of it such as backstabbing behaviours also as obvious, which makes such negative instances less likely as well. Importantly, acts of

compassion and care that go above comfortable boundaries can also lead to a reverse effect. As such, employers and managers need to be mindful of overbearing acts of compassion.

8.6.3 Altruism Virtue

In line with the altruistic behaviours theme, organisations should use altruistic behaviours to imbue positive effects on their employees instead of relying on their innate motivation to do good. Organisations could tap into their core values, determine their profound purpose, and render help to their employees and others. Doing so would influence employees to derive altruistic tendencies and amplify their positive affect. The study's participants noted that a lack of organisational altruism is apparent in SMEs and leads to decreased affective well-being. This altruism can also extend to doing good in general, such as by supervisors imparting their knowledge and being altruistic in employee welfare and development. This is essential as previous studies (Brotherton et al., 2009, Johnson, 2011) have found that SMEs lack requisite resources for employees. This altruism can also be extended to social missions as when employees are assigned tasks with a social missions, they are more likely to feel that their actions are socially significant (Cassar & Meier, (2018). Essentially, this study has shown that a lack of altruism can negatively influence employees' affective well-being.

8.6.4 Integrity Virtue

SMEs must practice integrity and be mindful that although they want to save resources, they must not compromise on integrity, as doing so could lead to decreased affective well-being among employees. Some practical suggestions would be encouraging a culture of work that avoids shortcuts but focuses on delivering one's best and not taking advantage of clients. For example, a participant mentioned that not taking advantage of vulnerable populations, such as those needing therapeutic services, increased their affective well-being. Integrity is also essential in relation to justice in the work role itself; as integrity ensures honesty and buffers

against unfairness which decreases possible feelings of injustice at work (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020).

8.6.5 Forgiveness Virtue

One implication of the forgiveness sub-theme is that organisations should have more gatherings and activities to encourage employee bonding. When employees are closer, they tend to be more tolerant. Hence, a more forgiving environment emerges by enacting closer bonds, allowing for increased affective well-being. Forgiveness also decreases work stress as employees are in a "safe space" to make mistakes in the collective pursuit of organisational goals (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). Consequently, organisations should be mindful when supervisors, managers, or colleagues engage in toxic behaviours such as hurling verbal abuse, as this affects not only the targeted employees but other employees in the organisation.

8.6.6 Optimism Virtue

To foster optimism in the workplace, organisations can apply reinforcement and encouragement strategies. Such strategies are explicit as they show that an organisation or employer recognises the value of its employees' contributions. Organisational optimism also helps employees gauge their contribution to a company's successes, making them feel enthusiastic about their role in the organisation. Optimism further allows employees to be more constructive; and positively influences their relationships with others due to its role in instilling confidence in the future (Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020). Further, a culture of blame and unaccountability diminishes optimism levels among employees. Lastly, when employees are filled with negativity to try new things or move the organisation forward, they are likely to be experiencing decreased affctive well-being.

8.7   Practical Implications for Improving Meaning at Work

Study 2 showed that instances of an organisation's virtuousness helps employees achieve meaning at work. Based on the study's findings, organisations can encourage their employees to develop meaning at work by being more trusting. They can also be more proactive in their support for employee development. For example, they could sponsor employees' education, and this form of altruism can allow employees to derive meaning at work. Sometimes, employee development might not necessarily be related to general training or organisational day out, but can be something as personal as allowing employees to advance their educational goals. This would be beneficial especially if the knowledge acquired would benefit the organisation in the long run, as employees are after all, the knowledge centre of the organisation.

Similarly, this study shows that an organisation's lack of integrity or unethical shortcuts would diminish its employees' meaning at work. Although SMEs might lack resources and might want to find ways to cut costs, there will be negative consequences to employees, which would negatively impact the organisation in the long run (Johnson, 2011). Organisations should be caring and compassionate to their employees, as feelings of neglect lead to decreased meaning at work. Some practical implications from the theme of doing "good" in society show that when organisations positively impact society through pro bono projects, the employees also derive meaning at work. Based on this finding, organisations should be more charitable and encourage their employees to partake in altruistic activities. Lastly, the theme of care and compassion highlights the importance of having a virtuous environment and culture such as compassion within the organisation. This culture should be examined from all aspects, including direct supervisors, management, and colleagues. Conversely, a lack of a virtuous environment, such as toxic behaviours or bullying, should be examined and checked carefully.

8.8   Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

There are some limitations of this study. Firstly, this study could not explain why only certain constructs of virtuousness (trust, compassion, altruism, integrity, forgiveness, and optimism) exist in this study. One might deduce that there could be other constructs or elements of virtuousness that are yet to be studied, and other studies could also decipher which constructs of virtuousness might be essential to employees. Also, this is a cross-sectional study, so the results do not indicate causation (Cummings, 2018) and could be influenced by other confounding variables. However, it is essential to note that experimental studies would not be ideal for organisational research. The reason is that in most organisations, it would not be feasible to run experimental studies which could negatively impact their day-to-day operations. Nevertheless, given the lack of a cause-and-effect deduction, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution.

Given that the variable of virtuousness in organisations is still a new construct in management research, there are considerable suggestions for future research. Future studies could look into how the various constructs of virtuousness would fit the different organisational elements. For example, the way in which trust permeates an organisation would be different if through communication with a supervisor and throughout an organisation at large. Future studies could also investigate which constructs of virtuousness might hold more importance under different circumstances. For example, one might assume that integrity and trust would hold more importance during unstable organisational conditions, such as mergers and acquisitions.

Other studies could explore if there is an even higher-order construct of virtuousness which can measure virtuousness at a general level. Currently, the only virtuousness scale in the literature (Cameron et al., 2004), measures virtuousness through five different sub-constructs,

but this scale does not have an overarching construct of virtuousness. However, the overarching construct of virtuousness needs to be explored even further as it is uncertain if virtue can exist as a context or an overarching construct. Future research could also benefit from exploring other dimensions of affect at work. Specifically, there could be other type of affect at work which could be considered. At the moment, there are only two scales measuring the context specific of affect at work (Van Katwyk et al. , 2000 & Warr, 1990).

This study had found the direct and significant relationship between organisational virtuousness and meaning at work. Meaning at work has been said to be an ongoing and fluid process that is influenced by factors such as job characteristics and the work environment itself (Salleh et al., 2020). Hence, future studies could expound on the specific mechanisms and process in which the various aspects of virtue could be embedded and permeated in the specific job and work characteristics respectively. Importantly, this study found that meaning at work was a significant mediator (and OV positively predicts meaning at work) among SME employees in Malaysia. As there have been no studies investigating the link between the above variables, future studies can look into replicating this to ascertain if significant links exist in large organisations as well. This rationale for this proposed approach is that in large organisations where communication is formal and hierarchies are more rigid, constructs which thrive on a more personal level, such as OV and meaning at work, might not show significant variance.

Also, Malaysia is largely collectivistic (Sumari et al., 2020), so this study should be replicated in countries with individualistic societies to ascertain if the results are significant. Communication in the workplace differs from individualistic and collectivistic cultures, so the manifestation of virtues could also show differences. Future studies could also focus on specific industries within SMEs. For example, the challenges and variances associated with the manufacturing and food and beverages sectors could differ. Given that existing research on

SMEs has focused on SME and entrepreneur well-being, research can also extend beyond this by exploring if the demonstration of virtues by SME owners could lead them to experience affective well-being. This hypothesis is consistent with the amplifying effect whereby one can experience affective well-being by demonstrating virtuous acts (Cameron & Caza, 2013). Other research can also look into the manifestation of virtues through different positions. This is because the type of essential virtues might differ between superiors and subordinates.

Past research had also found that wellbeing advices offered to SME owner in seminars might not be relevant as it is often tailored to large scale organisations (Brotherton et al., 2009). These challenges is compounded with SME owners themselves wanting to take on every task and opportunity; which often results in less role clarify and burnout challenges (Brotherton et al., 2009). Given the significant findings of this study, future research could also look into how SME owners and managers could disseminate elements of virtue in the workplace; which would allow for better affective wellbeing at work. Further, given the amplifying effect of virtue, this might also allow for a two directional influence; in which the demonstrations of virtue by the SME owners and managers might allow for them experiencing increased positive affect themselves. Future research could examine this link empirically; especially given that SME employees foster high quality interactions and are well positioned to take advantage of group level interactions within the organisation (Brotherton et al., 2009).

Future research could also benefit from examining if the virtues could have a negative affect if demonstrated after a certain baseline. This is as in this study, participants have spoken on instances of excessive compassion and care could be construed negatively, as it was interpreted as intruding on one's privacy. This mechanism is aligned with the vitamin model which states that certain work features (such as a personal control, opportunity for skill use, variety) have a curvilinear effect on affective wellbeing (Warr, 1987, 2007; Makikangas et al.,

2011). Future research could benefit to see if virtues in organisation might have a similar mechanism i.e after a certain level, it no longer holds advantages.

8.9   Conclusion

It is pivotal for organisations to pay importance to the affective wellbeing of employees. Nevertheless, the existing research on this subject has been minimal. Besides, meaning at work is also a construct that is pivotal to employees; but currently there are no literature on meaning at work among SME employees. Given that it is necessary to have focused research on the context of SMEs; this formed the backdrop of this current study. This formed the basis for the qualitative research designs to be adopted in regards to the first two empirical studies of this thesis. The first empirical study of this thesis study seeks to explore the affective well-being of SME employees while the second study examines how participants define meaning at work, and how their respective organisations allow or does not allow them to have meaning at work. Essentially, from the findings of empirical study 1 and study 1, a conceptual framework was devised, and the corresponding variables were tested in a quantitative design which is the empirical study 3. In a nutshell, the mixed methods study of this research has allowed for the context of affective well-being among SME employees in Malaysia to be examined further. Consequently, this study's findings have also lent imperative practical and theoretical implications on this subject.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Study 1: Exploring affective wellbeing among SME employees

<u>Interview type: Semi-structured interview</u>

<u>Study 1: Affective wellbeing among SME employees</u>

1. Tell me about yourself and a brief detail about your work.
    a. In what industry you are working at present? (follow up question if it wasn't touched on much)
    b. Can you elaborate?
2. In your opinion, does your current organization enables you to feel positive emotions in the workplace?
    a. What do you think of it?
        i. Depending on the answer, ask participant to elaborate
    b. Do you have any specific example in regard to this?
3. What about your current organization that enables you to feel negative emotions in the workplace?
    a. Can you elaborate?
    b. Do you have any specific example or scenario in regard to this?
4. In your opinion, how can your current organization further enable you to experience more positive emotions in the workplace? Why?
5. In your opinion, how can your current organization further enable you reduce negative emotions in the workplace? Why?

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Study 2: Exploring meaning at work among SME employees

<u>Interview type: Semi-structured interview</u>

<u>Study 2: Meaning at work among SME employees</u>

1. Tell us about what you perceive about meaning at work
2. In your opinion, how do you think you could experience meaning at work?
   a. Depending on the answer, ask participant to elaborate
3. Following to what you have said and from your own perspective, what makes your work meaningful?
   a. Depending on the answer, ask participant to elaborate.
4. Does your current organization allow you to derive meaning at work?
   a. If yes: Continue to b and c.
   b. Could you elaborate further?
   c. In your opinion, how can your current organization further enable you to have and develop more meaning at work?
   d. If no: Move to question 5
5. What are the factors which hinders you to achieve meaning at work at your current organisation?
   a. Depending on the answer, ask participant to elaborate.
   b. Following to these mentioned challenges, how do you think your current organization could further enable you to derive meaning at work?

Appendix C

Organizational Virtuousness (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004)

15 items, Six-point Likert scale

Optimism, trust, compassion, integrity, forgiveness

Optimism

1. We are optimistic that we will succeed, even when faced with major challenges
2. In this organization, we are dedicated to doing good in addition to doing well
3. A sense of profound purpose is associated with what we do here

Trust

4. Employees trust one another in this organization
5. People are treated with courtesy, consideration, and respect in this organization
6. People trust the leadership of this organization

Compassion

7. Acts of compassion are common here
8. This organization is characterized by many acts of concern and caring for other people
9. Many stories of compassion and concern circulate among organization members

Integrity

10. This organization demonstrates the highest levels of integrity
11. This organization would be described as virtuous and honorable
12. Honesty and trustworthiness are hallmarks of this organization

Forgiveness

13. We try to learn from our mistakes here, consequently, missteps are quickly forgiven
14. This is a forgiving, compassionate organization in which to work
15. We have very high standards of performance, yet we forgive mistakes when they are acknowledged and corrected

Appendix D

<u>Work as Meaning Inventory</u>

Please circle one answer to each of the following statements based on this scale:

10 items, 7 point Likert scale

1. I have found a meaningful career.

2. I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning.

3. I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful.

4. I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose.

5. I view my work as contributing to my personal growth

6. My work helps me better understand myself.

7. My work helps me make sense of the world around me.

8. My work really makes no difference to the world. (R)

9. I know my work makes a positive difference in the world.

10. The work I do serves a greater purpose.

Appendix E

Job-related Affective Well-being Scale, JAWS

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20 items, 5 point Likert scale

Please check **one** response for each item that best indicates how often you've experienced each emotion at work over the past 30 days.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Quite often	Extremely often
1. My job made me feel angry.					
2. My job made me feel anxious.					
3. My job made me feel at ease.					
4. My job made me feel bored.					
5. My job made me feel calm.					
6. My job made me feel content.					
7. My job made me feel depressed.					
8. My job made me feel discouraged.					
9. My job made me feel disgusted.					
10. My job made me feel ecstatic.					
11. My job made me feel energetic.					
12. My job made me feel enthusiastic.					
13. My job made me feel excited.					
14. My job made me feel fatigued.					
15. My job made me feel frightened.					
16. My job made me feel furious.					

17. My job made me feel gloomy.					
18. My job made me feel inspired.					
19. My job made me feel relaxed.					
20. My job made me feel satisfied.					

Appendix F

Informed Consent (Study 1 & 2)

University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Division of Organisational and Applied Psychology

Project Title: Exploring affective wellbeing and meaning at work among SME employees

Ethics Approval Reference Number: *18023969*

1. I confirm I have read and understood the participant information sheet (version 1) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study. I have received satisfactory answers to my questions YES/NO

2. I know how to contact the researcher if I have further questions about this study YES/NO

3. I agree to take part in an interview that will be recorded YES/NO

4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason YES/NO

5. I understand that once I have been interviewed, it may not be technically possible to withdraw my data from this study unless requested within a two-week period. In case of withdrawn consent, I can request that all recorded interviews with me be destroyed to prevent further analysis in future studies YES/NO

6. I consent to the storage, including electronic, of personal information for the purposes of this study. I understand that any information that could identify me will be kept strictly confidential and that non-identifiable data from this study might be included in academic research reports or other publications. YES/NO

7. I agree to the above points and I agree to participate in the above study YES/NO

8. The data collected during this study is a valuable resource for future research. I therefore agree for the data I provide to be archived, and that other genuine researchers at the University of Nottingham Malaysia will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. My data may be used in analysis to answer future research questions, but no personal information will be included in the study report or other publication. YES/NO

Name of participant _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Name of person taking consent _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Original to be retained and filed; 1 copy to be given to the participant

Appendix G

Informed Consent Study 3

Project Title: Affective Wellbeing among SME employees in Malaysia

Researcher: Yap Wai Meng (ksax5ywm@nottingham.edu.my)

Supervisor: Dr. Siti Khadijah Zainal Badri (SitiKhadijah.Zainal@nottingham.edu.my), Dr. Michael Mustafa, and Dr. Hazel Melanie Ramos.

This is an invitation to take part in a research study on **affective wellbeing among employees working in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) based in Malaysia.** This information is designed to tell you what it will involve.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may change your mind about being involved, or decline to answer a particular question without giving a reason. You are free to withdraw at any point before or during the study. For anonymous questionnaires, once you have finished the questionnaire and submitted your answers it is not possible to withdraw the data.

What is the project about?

The project aims to look at exploring affective wellbeing among employees working in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Who is being asked to take part, and why?

Participants are required to be currently working in a small and medium sized enterprise (SME) for at least three months.

What will I be asked to do?

In this study, the participant will complete a questionnaire of 125 items that will take around 20 minutes to complete. All the information collected through the questionnaire will be anonymous and participants will not be identifiable throughout this process.

Will the research be of any personal benefit to me?

The research will not be of any personal benefit to the participant. However, it will help the researchers in having a greater understanding on what constitutes and may influence affective wellbeing of SME employees. Participants are also welcomed to contact the researcher if they would like to know about their results.

What will happen to the information I provide?

The information given will be collected and only accessed by the researcher and supervisor. The participants will be coded by numbers and the identity of the participant will be anonymous and untraceable. The data will be stored by the researcher and supervisor for as long as it is needed for research. If the data is reused in other research, anonymity is still assured and any demographics that may compromise the participants will be removed. However, if the data is no longer needed, it will be deleted and all documents will be destroyed.

What will you do with the data?

The data will be used for the researcher's PhD Research Project. The data may be used for further journal writings by the academics in The University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus. Any future publications can be accessed by searching for the names of the researcher or supervisor.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask. We can be contacted before and after your participation at the above address.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

If you have any queries or complaints about this study, please contact the student's supervisor in the first instance. If this does not resolve the query to your satisfaction, please write to the Administrator to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee who will pass your query to the Chair of the Committee.

I have read and understood the Participant Information, and agree to fully complete all items in the set of questionnaires provided. I also know how to contact the researcher should I have any questions. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study without giving a reason, and that once I have submitted my questionnaire, my data cannot be withdrawn. I give

permission for my data from this study to be shared with other researchers in the future, with my anonymity guaranteed, and understand that non-identifiable data from this study might be used in academic research reports or publications.

I agree

Appendix H

Statistics Related to Study 3

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
MeaningatWork	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.968	.101	9.616	***	
JAWS1	<---	MeaningatWork	.263	.062	4.213	***	
JAWS1	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.030	.051	.584	.559	
Optimism	<---	OrgVirtuousness	1.000				
Trust	<---	OrgVirtuousness	1.129	.091	12.444	***	
Compassion	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.990	.088	11.257	***	
Integrity	<---	OrgVirtuousness	1.050	.085	12.339	***	
Forgiveness	<---	OrgVirtuousness	1.026	.087	11.729	***	
PA	<---	JAWS1	1.000				
NA	<---	JAWS1	1.000				
Q112	<---	Optimism	1.000				
Q111	<---	Optimism	.956	.073	13.135	***	
Q15	<---	Optimism	.898	.076	11.792	***	
Q115	<---	Trust	1.000				
Q114	<---	Trust	.983	.063	15.630	***	
Q113	<---	Trust	.985	.063	15.545	***	
Q118	<---	Compassion	1.000				
Q117	<---	Compassion	1.190	.086	13.915	***	
Q116	<---	Compassion	1.021	.080	12.770	***	
Q121	<---	Integrity	1.000				
Q120	<---	Integrity	1.030	.057	18.099	***	
Q119	<---	Integrity	1.061	.060	17.575	***	
Q124	<---	Forgiveness	1.000				
Q123	<---	Forgiveness	1.057	.060	17.587	***	
Q122	<---	Forgiveness	.982	.062	15.728	***	
Q46	<---	MeaningatWork	1.000				
Q45	<---	MeaningatWork	1.005	.063	15.893	***	
Q43	<---	MeaningatWork	.986	.090	10.921	***	
Q42	<---	MeaningatWork	.812	.080	10.120	***	
Q41	<---	MeaningatWork	1.035	.088	11.803	***	
Q40	<---	MeaningatWork	1.307	.092	14.240	***	
Q39	<---	MeaningatWork	1.043	.080	12.988	***	
Q38	<---	MeaningatWork	1.288	.091	14.103	***	
Q37	<---	MeaningatWork	1.209	.091	13.312	***	
Q69	<---	PA	1.289	.294	4.386	***	
Q70	<---	PA	1.300	.287	4.533	***	
Q79	<---	PA	1.617	.344	4.697	***	

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Q80	<---	PA	1.608	.343	4.693	***	
Q81	<---	PA	1.763	.375	4.708	***	
Q89	<---	PA	1.455	.314	4.636	***	
Q90	<---	PA	1.332	.300	4.435	***	
Q88	<---	NA	1.000				
Q87	<---	NA	.863	.079	10.890	***	
Q83	<---	NA	.900	.095	9.445	***	
Q82	<---	NA	.743	.087	8.536	***	
Q75	<---	NA	.987	.100	9.857	***	
Q74	<---	NA	1.098	.096	11.450	***	
Q72	<---	NA	1.120	.100	11.205	***	
Q66	<---	NA	.749	.086	8.731	***	
Q64	<---	NA	.758	.092	8.265	***	

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
MeaningatWork	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.779
JAWS1	<---	MeaningatWork	.926
JAWS1	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.085
Optimism	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.880
Trust	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.953
Compassion	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.963
Integrity	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.915
Forgiveness	<---	OrgVirtuousness	.888
PA	<---	JAWS1	.636
NA	<---	JAWS1	.389
Q112	<---	Optimism	.848
Q111	<---	Optimism	.790
Q15	<---	Optimism	.729
Q115	<---	Trust	.848
Q114	<---	Trust	.847
Q113	<---	Trust	.844
Q118	<---	Compassion	.767
Q117	<---	Compassion	.877
Q116	<---	Compassion	.816
Q121	<---	Integrity	.870
Q120	<---	Integrity	.891
Q119	<---	Integrity	.878
Q124	<---	Forgiveness	.854
Q123	<---	Forgiveness	.905
Q122	<---	Forgiveness	.845
Q46	<---	MeaningatWork	.763
Q45	<---	MeaningatWork	.745
Q43	<---	MeaningatWork	.711
Q42	<---	MeaningatWork	.665
Q41	<---	MeaningatWork	.759
Q40	<---	MeaningatWork	.887
Q39	<---	MeaningatWork	.823
Q38	<---	MeaningatWork	.880
Q37	<---	MeaningatWork	.840
Q69	<---	PA	.606
Q70	<---	PA	.695
Q79	<---	PA	.843
Q80	<---	PA	.839
Q81	<---	PA	.856
Q89	<---	PA	.779

			Estimate
Q90	<---	PA	.632
Q88	<---	NA	.726
Q87	<---	NA	.648
Q83	<---	NA	.672
Q82	<---	NA	.607
Q75	<---	NA	.701
Q74	<---	NA	.816
Q72	<---	NA	.798
Q66	<---	NA	.621
Q64	<---	NA	.672

Covariances: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
e88	<-->	e99	.430	.076	5.687	***	
e77	<-->	e66	.378	.076	4.962	***	
e66	<-->	e55	.333	.070	4.787	***	
e21	<-->	e911	.227	.051	4.468	***	
e121	<-->	e131	.214	.047	4.566	***	
e1111	<-->	e121	.191	.047	4.104	***	
e11	<-->	e14	.105	.027	3.840	***	
e1111	<-->	e201	-.158	.037	-4.269	***	

Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
e88	<-->	e99	.471
e77	<-->	e66	.354
e66	<-->	e55	.344
e21	<-->	e911	.345
e121	<-->	e131	.334
e1111	<-->	e121	.312
e11	<-->	e14	.391
e1111	<-->	e201	-.313

Variances: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
OrgVirtuousness	.776	.122	6.379	***	
e31	.472	.079	6.007	***	
e912	.001	.022	.058	.954	
e16	.225	.050	4.480	***	
e17	.101	.033	3.006	.003	
e18	.060	.026	2.306	.021	
e19	.165	.033	4.977	***	
e20	.219	.040	5.478	***	
e212	.142	.066	2.144	.032	
e22	.540	.094	5.718	***	
e1	.391	.057	6.831	***	
e2	.552	.068	8.133	***	
e3	.713	.080	8.874	***	
e4	.425	.052	8.198	***	
e5	.414	.050	8.219	***	
e6	.426	.051	8.273	***	
e7	.573	.062	9.180	***	
e8	.349	.048	7.310	***	
e9	.428	.049	8.660	***	
e10	.327	.041	7.993	***	
e11	.280	.038	7.368	***	
e12	.341	.044	7.799	***	
e13	.386	.048	8.099	***	
e14	.255	.040	6.428	***	
e15	.399	.048	8.264	***	
e88	.861	.090	9.553	***	
e99	.970	.101	9.634	***	
e77	1.143	.117	9.792	***	
e66	.993	.098	10.110	***	
e55	.942	.098	9.589	***	
e44	.555	.068	8.203	***	
e33	.623	.068	9.154	***	
e222	.579	.069	8.355	***	
e111	.733	.082	8.978	***	
e21	.684	.069	9.852	***	
e311	.433	.045	9.547	***	
e51	.255	.031	8.140	***	
e61	.260	.032	8.211	***	
e71	.271	.034	7.877	***	
e81	.327	.036	8.980	***	
e911	.636	.065	9.776	***	
e1111	.572	.064	8.955	***	

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
e121	.656	.068	9.675	***	
e131	.627	.066	9.503	***	
e141	.600	.061	9.763	***	
e151	.641	.069	9.347	***	
e161	.385	.047	8.208	***	
e171	.456	.054	8.478	***	
e191	.569	.059	9.716	***	
e201	.445	.048	9.321	***	

Appendix I

Online Survey (As Appeared to Participants)

Survey Completion
0% ———————— 100%

Project Title: Affective Wellbeing among SME employees in Malaysia

Researcher: Yap Wai Meng (ksax5ywm@nottingham.edu.my)

Supervisor: Dr. Siti Khadijah Zainal Badri (SitiKhadijah.Zainal@nottingham.edu.my), Dr. Michael Mustafa, and Dr. Hazel Melanie Ramos.

This is an invitation to take part in a research study on **affective wellbeing among employees working in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) based in Malaysia .** This information is designed to tell you what it will involve.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may change your mind about being involved, or decline to answer a particular question without giving a reason. You are free to withdraw at any point before or during the study. For anonymous questionnaires, once you have finished the questionnaire and submitted your answers it is not possible to withdraw the data.

What is the project about?

The project aims to look at exploring affective wellbeing among employees working in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Who is being asked to take part, and why?

Participants are required to be currently working in a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) for at least three months.

What will I be asked to do?

In this study, the participant will complete a questionnaire of 125 items that will take around 20 minutes to complete. All the information collected through the questionnaire will be anonymous and participants will not be identifiable throughout this process.

Will the research be of any personal benefit to me?

The research will not be of any personal benefit to the participant. However, it will help the researchers in having a greater understanding on what constitutes and may influence affective wellbeing of SME employees. Participants are also welcomed to contact the researcher if they would like to know about their results.

What will happen to the information I provide?

The information given will be collected and only accessed by the researcher and supervisor. The participants will be coded by numbers and the identity of the participant will be anonymous and untraceable. The data will be stored by the researcher and supervisor for as long as it is needed for research. If the data is reused in other research, anonymity is still assured and any demographics that may compromise the participants will be removed. However, if the data is no longer needed, it will be deleted and all documents will be destroyed.

What will you do with the data?

The data will be used for the researcher's PhD Research Project. The data may be used for further journal writings by the academics in The University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus. Any future publications can be accessed by searching for the names of the researcher or supervisor.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask. We can be contacted before and after your participation at the above address.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

If you have any queries or complaints about this study, please contact the student's supervisor in the first instance. If this does not resolve the query to your satisfaction, please write to the Administrator to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee who will pass your query to the Chair of the Committee.

Survey Completion
0% ——————— 100%

I have read and understo Press F11 to exit full screen nd agree to fully complete all items in the set of questionnaires provided. I also know how to contact the researcher should I have any questions. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study without giving a reason, and that once I have submitted my questionnaire, my data cannot be withdrawn. I give permission for my data from this study to be shared with other researchers in the future, with my anonymity guaranteed, and understand that non-identifiable data from this study might be used in academic research reports or publications.

○ I agree

Kindly do not participate in this survey again if you had participated in this survey before

○ I had not participated in this survey before

← →

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Survey Completion
0% ——————— 100%

Kindly note that you need Press F11 to exit full screen participate in this study. If you do not fulfill any of them below, kindly exit the survey. Thank you for your time.

Are you currently working in a small – medium enterprise in Malaysia? (Based on the criteria of number of employees) *For the manufacturing sector, SMEs are defined as firms with number of full-time employees not exceeding 200. For the services and other sectors, SMEs are defined as firms with number of full-time employees not exceeding 75 (SME Corp Malaysia))

○ Yes, I am working for a SME and Yes, this SME is located in Malaysia

Have you been in the current organization for at least 3 months?

○ Yes

← →

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Survey Completion
0% — 100%

Kindly note that you need Press F11 to exit full screen participate in this study.
If you do not fulfill any of them below, kindly exit the survey. Thank you for your
time.

Are you currently working in a small – medium enterprise in Malaysia? (Based on
the criteria of number of employees) *For the manufacturing sector, SMEs are
defined as firms with number of full-time employees not exceeding 200. For the
services and other sectors, SMEs are defined as firms with number of full-time
employees not exceeding 75 (SME Corp Malaysia))

○ Yes, I am working for a SME and Yes, this SME is located in Malaysia

Have you been in the current organization for at least 3 months?

○ Yes

←   →

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Survey Completion
0% — 100%

Age:

Gender:

○ Male

○ Female

○ Other

Nationality

○ Malaysian

○ Others. Please specify below

Marital Status:

○ Single

○ Married

○ Separated

○ Other

Please indicate your highest qualification and major:

Please indicate your highest qualification and major:

○ No formal qualification

○ Secondary education

○ High school diploma/A-levels

○ Undergraduate degree

○ Graduate degree (Masters, PhD, others)

○ Not applicable or others

Which state are you currently working in?

The industry you are working in:

○ Agriculture

○ Communications

○ Construction

○ Education

○ Energy

○ Entertainment

○ Finance

○ Health care

○ Hospitality

○ Information technology

○ Manufacturing

○ Manufacturing

○ Pharmaceutical

○ Retail

○ Services

○ Transportation

○ Others. Please specify below.

Number of years/months in your current company (tenure). Indicate number followed by years or months eg., "2 years"/ "2 months" / "2 years and 2 months":

Position in your current company (e.g., executive, assistant manager, manager):

Are you a permanent or contract employee?

○ Permanent employee

○ Contract employee

How many number of employees are in your current company? (approximate)

Are you currently working from home?

Press F11 to exit full screen

○ Yes, I am working from home

○ No, I am not working from home

○ I am partially working from home and with some days, I work in the office

Has there been any salary cut in your current role because of the pandemic?

○ Yes

○ No

Do you think your company is severely affected by the pandemic?

○ Yes

○ No

Are you worried about job security (in relation to your current role) given the economic challenges due to the pandemic?

○ Yes

○ No

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0% ——————————— 100%

Kindly answer all the questions below in reference to your current employment and respective organization.

The following items are related with organizational virtuousness . Please rate the questions based on the scale below.
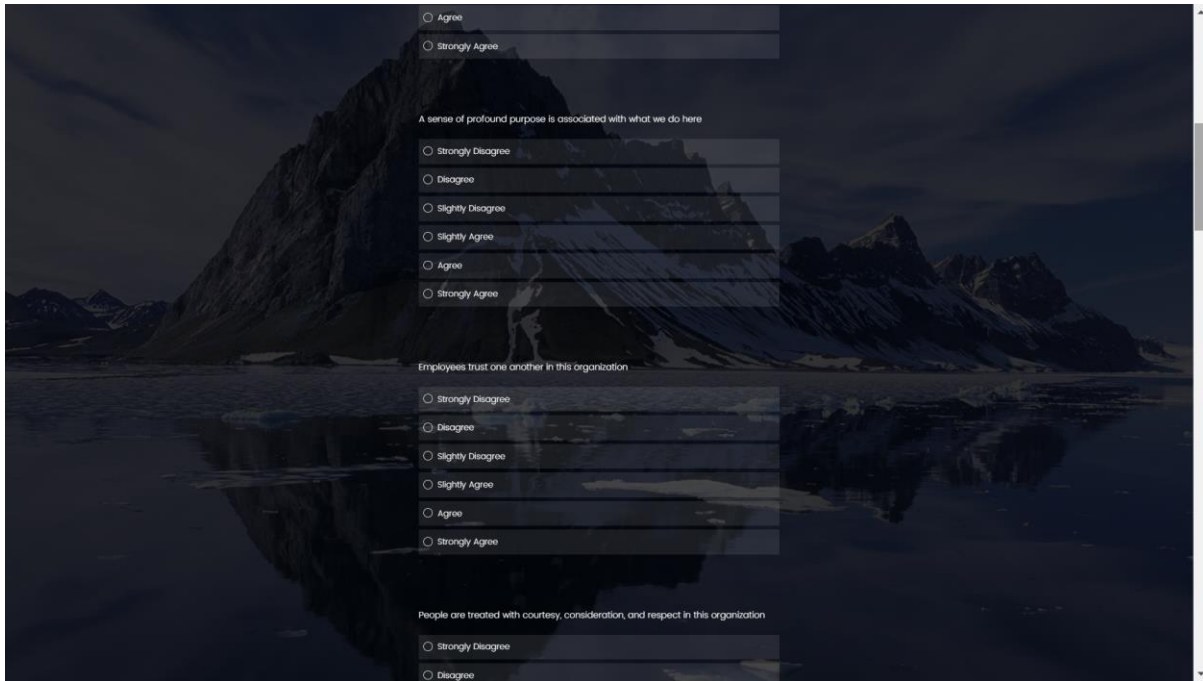
In this organization, we are optimistic that we will succeed, even when faced with major challenges

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

In this organization, we are dedicated to doing good (non-financial goals) in addition to doing well (financial goals)

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

A sense of profound purpose is associated with what we do here
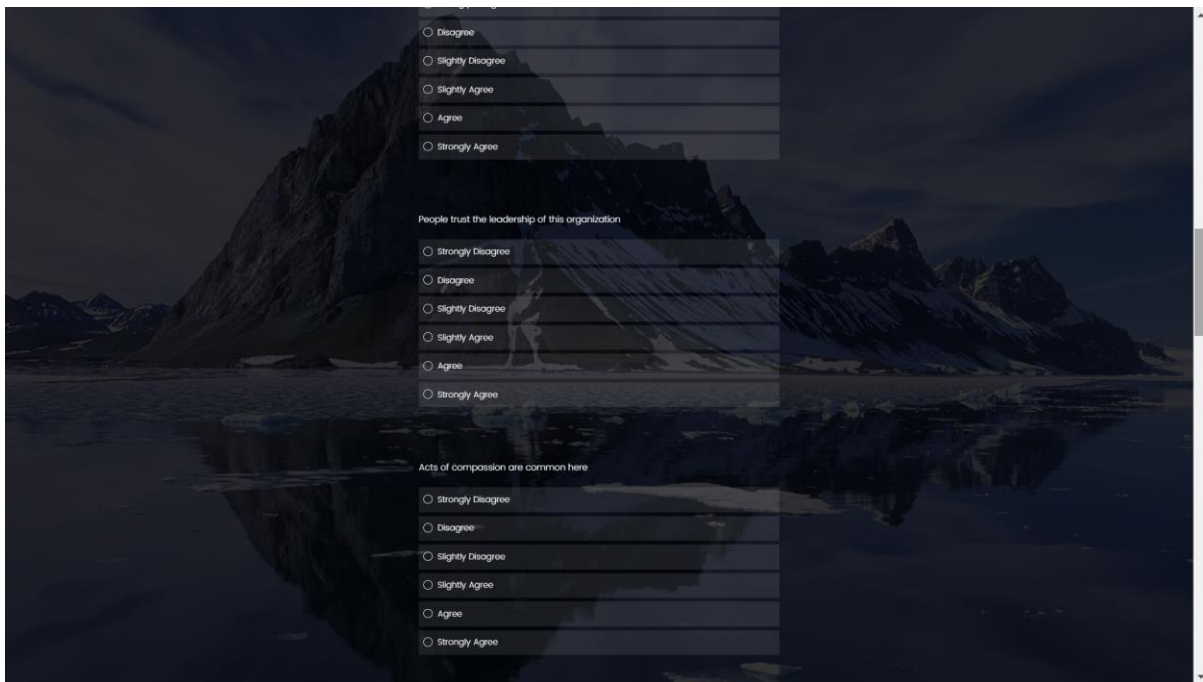
○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

Employees trust one another in this organization

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

People are treated with courtesy, consideration, and respect in this organization

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

People trust the leadership of this organization

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

Acts of compassion are common here

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

This organization is characterized by many acts of concern and caring for other people

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

Many stories of compassion and concern circulate among organization members

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

This organization demonstrates the highest levels of integrity

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

This organization would be described as virtuous and honorable
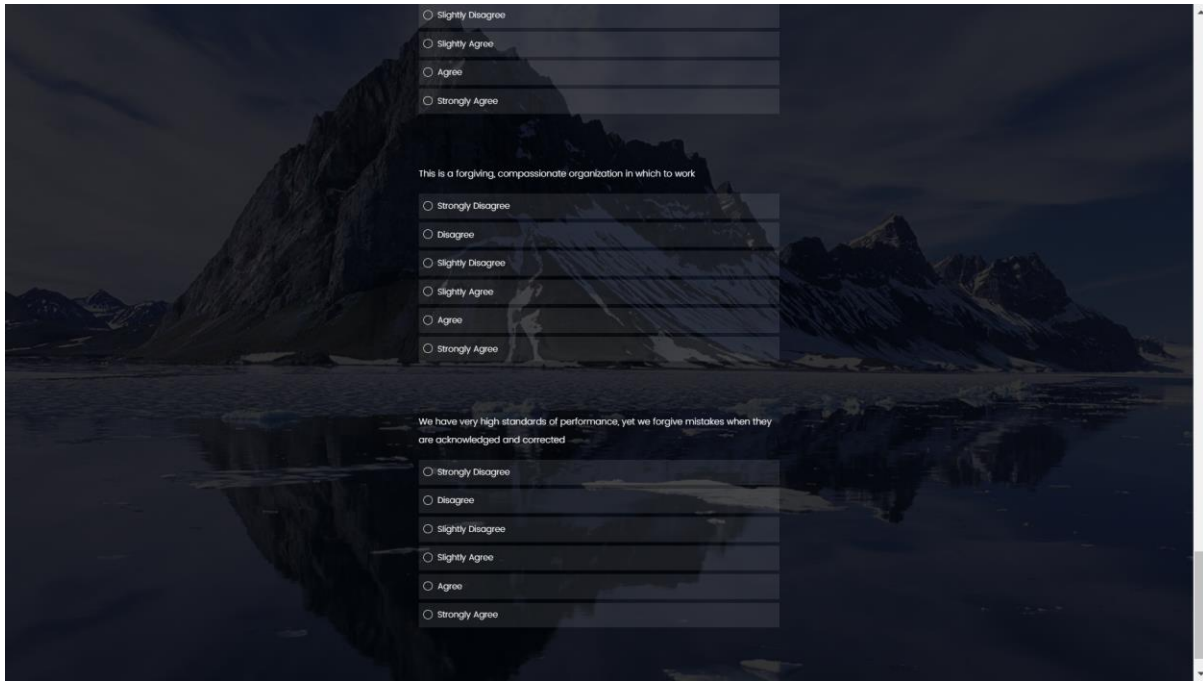
○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

Honesty and trustworthiness are hallmarks of this organization

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Slightly Agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

We try to learn from our mistakes here, consequently, missteps are quickly forgiven

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

This is a forgiving, compassionate organization in which to work

○ Strongly Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Slightly Disagree
○ Slightly Agree
○ Agree
○ Strongly Agree

We have very high standards of performance, yet we forgive mistakes when they are acknowledged and corrected
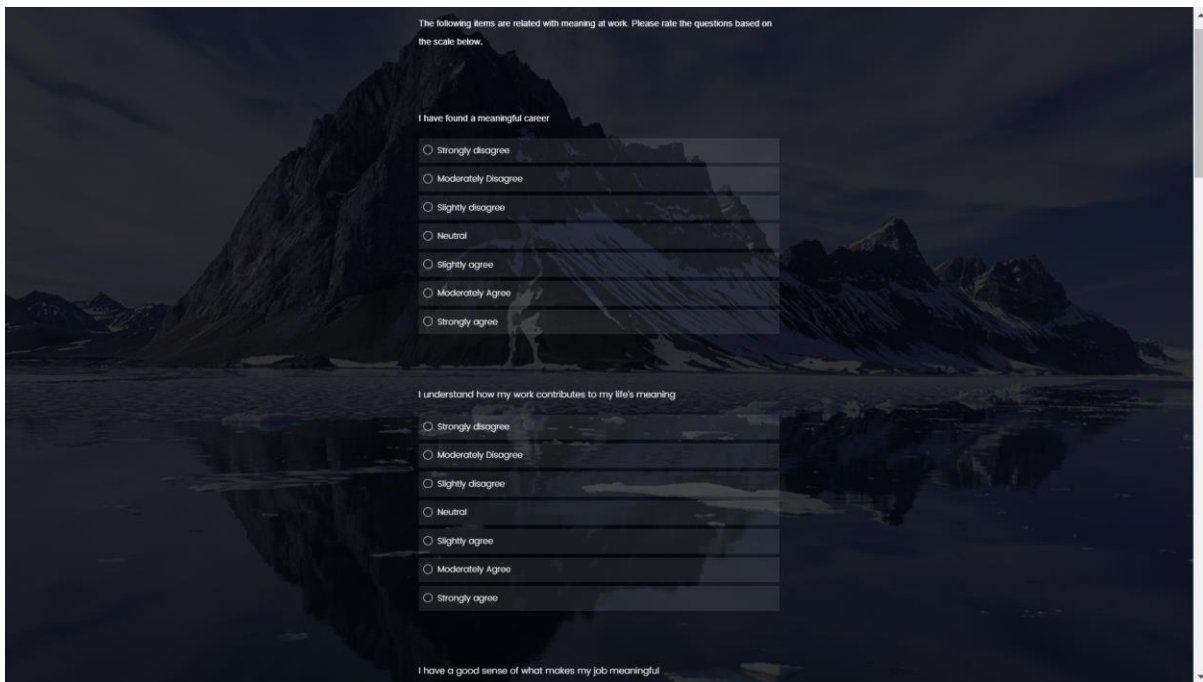
○ Strongly Disagree
○ Disagree
○ Slightly Disagree
○ Slightly Agree
○ Agree
○ Strongly Agree

The following items are related with meaning at work. Please rate the questions based on the scale below.

I have found a meaningful career

○ Strongly disagree
○ Moderately Disagree
○ Slightly disagree
○ Neutral
○ Slightly agree
○ Moderately Agree
○ Strongly agree

I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning

○ Strongly disagree
○ Moderately Disagree
○ Slightly disagree
○ Neutral
○ Slightly agree
○ Moderately Agree
○ Strongly agree

I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful

I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful

○ Strongly disagree

○ Moderately Disagree

○ Slightly disagree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Moderately Agree

○ Strongly agree

I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose

○ Strongly disagree

○ Moderately Disagree

○ Slightly disagree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Moderately Agree

○ Strongly agree

I view my work as contributing to my personal growth

○ Strongly disagree

○ Moderately Disagree

○ Slightly disagree

○ Neutral

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Moderately Agree

○ Strongly agree

My work helps me better understand myself

○ Strongly disagree

○ Moderately Disagree

○ Slightly disagree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Moderately Agree

○ Strongly agree

My work helps me make sense of the world around me

○ Strongly disagree

○ Moderately Disagree

○ Slightly disagree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Moderately Agree

○ Strongly agree

My work really makes no difference to the world

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Moderately Disagree
- ○ Slightly disagree
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Slightly agree
- ○ Moderately Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

I know my work makes a positive difference in the world

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Moderately Disagree
- ○ Slightly disagree
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Slightly agree
- ○ Moderately Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

The work I do serves a greater purpose

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Moderately Disagree
- ○ Slightly disagree
- ○ Neutral

- ○ Strongly agree

I know my work makes a positive difference in the world

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Moderately Disagree
- ○ Slightly disagree
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Slightly agree
- ○ Moderately Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

The work I do serves a greater purpose

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Moderately Disagree
- ○ Slightly disagree
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Slightly agree
- ○ Moderately Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

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Below are a number of statements that describe different emotions that a job can make a person feel. Please indicate the amount to which any part of your job (e.g., the work, co-workers, supervisor, clients, pay) has made you feel that emotion.

Please check one response for each item that best indicates how often you've experienced each emotion at work over the past 30 days.

My job made me feel angry

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Quite often

○ Extremely often

My job made me feel anxious

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Quite often

○ Extremely often

My job made me feel at ease

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Quite often

○ Extremely often

My job made me feel bored
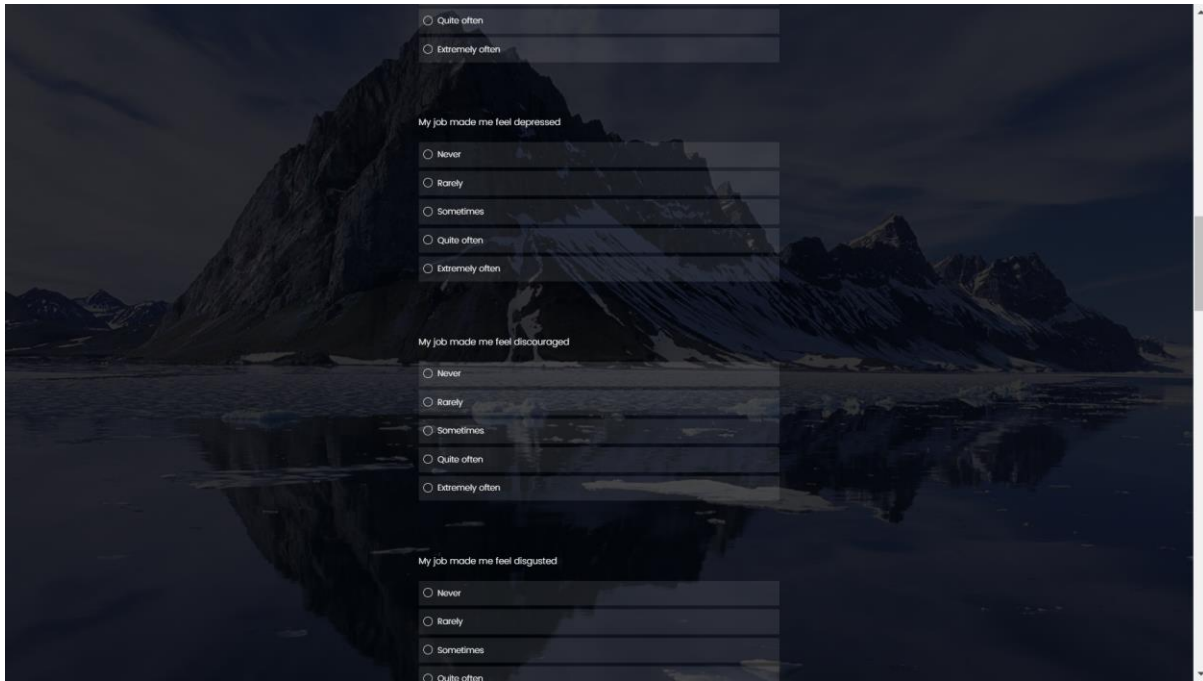
○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Quite often

○ Extremely often

My job made me feel calm

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Quite often

○ Extremely often

My job made me feel content

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

My job made me feel excited

- ○ Never
- ○ Rarely
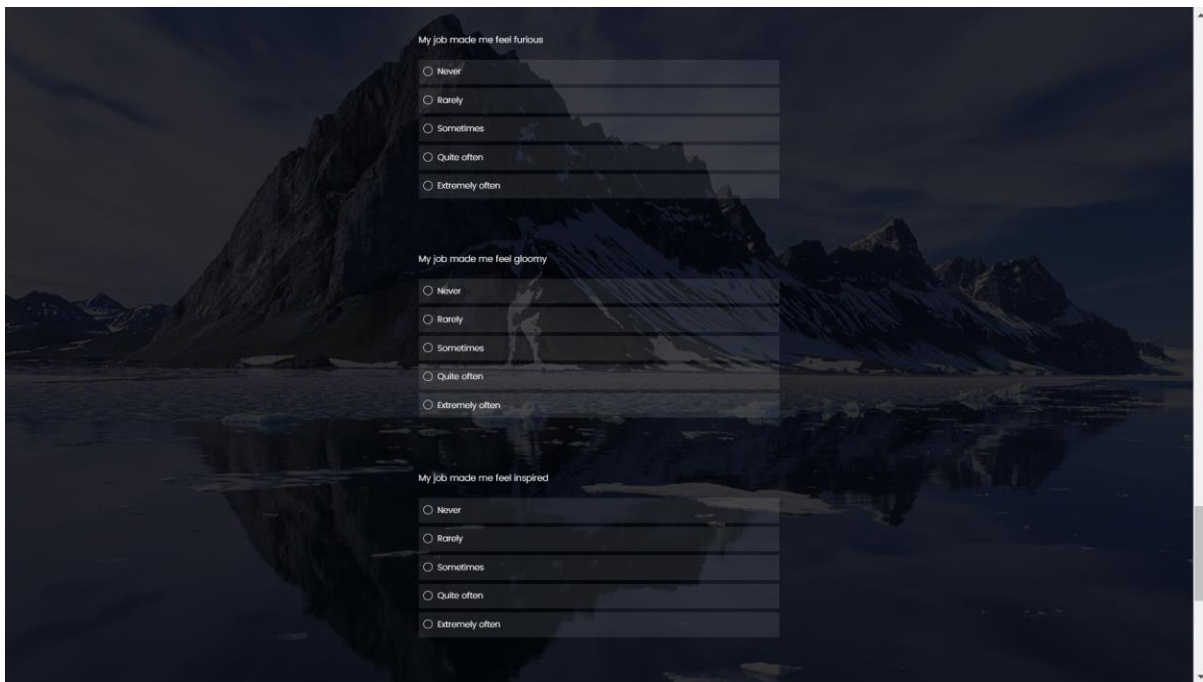- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Quite often
- ○ Extremely often

My job made me feel fatigued

- ○ Never
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Quite often
- ○ Extremely often

My job made me feel frightened

- ○ Never
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Quite often
- ○ Extremely often

My job made me feel furious

My job made me feel furious

- ○ Never
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Quite often
- ○ Extremely often

My job made me feel gloomy

- ○ Never
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Quite often
- ○ Extremely often

My job made me feel inspired

- ○ Never
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Quite often
- ○ Extremely often

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Quite often

○ Extremely often

My job made me feel relaxed

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Quite often

○ Extremely often

My job made me feel satisfied

○ Never

○ Rarely

○ Sometimes

○ Quite often

○ Extremely often

Powered by Qualtrics