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Arslan, Ahmad; Ahokangas, Petri; Haapanen, Lauri; Golgeci, Ismail; Tarba, Shlomo Y.; Bazel-Shoham, Ofra

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Generational differences in organizational leaders: an interpretive phenomenological analysis of work meaningfulness in the Nordic high-tech organizations

Ahmad Arslan [a,*], Petri Ahokangas [b], Lauri Haapanen [a], Ismail Golgeci [c], Shlomo Y. Tarba [d], Ofra Bazel-Shoham [e]

[a] Department of Marketing, Management & International Business, Oulu Business School, Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, 90014 Finland
[b] Martti Ahtisaari Institute, Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, Finland
[c] Department of Business Development and Technology, Aarhus University, Denmark
[d] Department of Strategy & International Business, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
[e] Fox School of Business, Temple University, USA

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the influences of generational differences in organizational leaders (founders) on work meaningfulness dynamics in the high-tech sector. Based on a novel interpretative phenomenological analysis of five Finnish case firms, we found that generational differences between leaders concerning work meaningfulness visibly existed. The differences manifested themselves in the form of different views concerning material well-being, house ownership, freedom, teamwork, and the general approach to working life (being a co-owner and being an employee). At the same time, we found that issues like job security, temporary contracts, part-time work, and gig working needed to be seen more in-depth instead of assuming their generic negative influence on well-being and work meaningfulness. Finally, the findings reveal that change is the name of the game for many millennial and post-millennial high-tech workers, and they may not necessarily associate these aspects negatively with work meaningfulness.

1. Introduction

It has been argued that meaningfulness is the most significant and valuable feature of work for workers at every level in organizations (e.g., Bailey *et al.,* 2019). Previous researchers have sought to explain work meaningfulness by attempting to offer a distinction between "meaning" and "meaningfulness" (e.g., Prat and Ashforth, 2003; Lysova *et al.,* 2019). "Meanings" are people's perceptions or interpretations of elements in their environment, and it is a cognitive process that people use to make sense of their experiences (e.g., Lysova *et al.,* 2019). In contrast to meaning, "meaningfulness" or "meaningful work" refers to "work experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals" (Rosso *et al.,* 2010: 95). Previous studies further stress that meaningfulness in work arises from what one does (i.e., one's work role) and infer that it arises in most cases from being a part of something bigger like one's membership in a professional community or culture (e.g., Cardador and Rupp, 2011; Bailey *et al.,* 2017).

Meaningful work reflects the personal significance of one of the most salient social activities for most people on the planet (e.g., Steger *et al.,* 2012). Whether they live in a developed or a developing economy, the typical adult spends a large part of their life in work-related situations (e.g., Allan, 2017). Hence, work meaningfulness is an important phenomenon to consider. Traditionally, work meaningfulness research was done from a work-centric perspective, in which elements like job design, starting with the classic work by Hackman and Oldham (1975), and other external (non-worker-related) factors were analyzed. In recent years, this external environment-related research has been criticized, because it tends to disregard meaningfulness from the perspective of a worker (employee or a manager), and understanding what they think of as meaningful is important for good performance in an organization (e.g., Johns, 2010; Bailey *et al.,* 2017). Furthermore, this recent worker-centric literature emphasizes the importance of the concept of the self and the identity-related mechanisms that underlie employees' meaning-making at work (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Rosso *et al.,* 2010;

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: ahmad.arslan@oulu.fi (A. Arslan).

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Allan, 2017; Lysova *et al.,* 2019).

In the context of the discussion of work meaningfulness, an increasingly relevant issue for organizations globally is the generational difference, particularly between baby boomers and millennials (Hoole and Bonnema, 2015; Lee, 2017; Weeks and Schaffert, 2019). As both groups are currently working in organizations, and in many cases side by side, diversity in their perspectives concerning meaningfulness can influence management dynamics at the operational, team, and strategic levels. However, previous studies of generational differences have focused on incorporating and understanding the perspectives of employees working in those organizations. In recent years, an increasing number of scholars has recognized the importance of organizational leaders and entrepreneurs in relation to work meaningfulness (e.g., Down and Reverly, 2004; Peng *et al.,* 2016; Lee *et al.,* 2017; Newbery *et al.,* 2018; Wang and Zhu, 2019). Despite this, research on the role of leaders in meaningfulness and perceptions of meaningfulness in an organizational context is rather limited. Yet the extant literature recognizes a significant difference in leadership attributes and styles between different generations (Sessa et al., 2007; Rudolph *et al.,* 2018). However, the role of generational difference in leaders in relation to work meaningfulness has not been addressed in previous studies (at least to our knowledge). Our paper, therefore, aims to plug this gap in the extant literature by focusing on work meaningfulness perceptions among leaders and founders of high-tech firms in Finland. The high-tech sector is a suitable terrain to undertake such an analysis, because leaders and founders of high-tech firms represent both baby boomers and millennials in Finland. Moreover, technology-focused firms have been referred to as a useful context for analyzing the various dynamics of work meaningfulness (e.g., Zuo *et al.,* 2019) due to the particular importance of innovation for them. This further justified the choice of an industrial context in our study.

Our paper contributes to the extant literature in three ways by undertaking such research. First, it is one of the first studies that empirically analyzes work meaningfulness in the Nordic context by linking it specifically to generational differences among leaders. Second, the focus on leaders' moral dilemmas in relation to employees' work meaningfulness adds further value to our study. Thus far, no previous study has specifically analyzed the moral dilemmas associated with work meaningfulness in either high-tech firms generally or in the Nordic context, which further solidifies our contribution to the extant literature. Finally, our paper is one of the pioneering studies using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in work meaningfulness research, strengthening its contribution and applicability in the Finnish (Nordic) context.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a literature overview followed by a discussion of our study's empirical research design. The case firms are then introduced, and the study's findings are discussed. The paper concludes with a presentation of implications and future research directions.

2. Literature review

Work is one of the most important human activities that has been linked to meaningfulness in life generally by previous researchers (Allan, 2017; Rosso et al., 2010). Work meaningfulness research has its roots in seminal studies of issues like job design and work specificities undertaken since the mid-1960s (e.g., Turner and Lawrence, 1965; Fried and Ferris, 1987; Dik *et al.,* 2013). In this research stream, work meaningfulness has been described as the "degree to which the employee experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile" (Hackman and Oldham, 1975: 162). The classic job characteristics model developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975:160) consisted of three dimensions: skill variety, task identity, and task significance. Significant research in this stream of literature has been undertaken, which focuses on issues like the structure of tasks and features of jobs, as well as how individuals perceive their tasks and jobs, and the role of work contexts on workers' motivation (e.g., Hackman, 1980; Grant, 2007; Yeoman, 2014).

This research has been further complemented by scholars who have focused on the meaning of work and the role job characteristics play in it (Rosso *et al.,* 2010; Barrick *et al.,* 2013; Tims *et al.,* 2016). The literature focusing on the meaning of work has gone beyond analyzing only individual workers and their perceptions. Some studies have addressed meaningfulness as an intraorganizational phenomenon, in which co-workers and an organization's leaders also play an important role (e.g., Podolny *et al.,* 2005; Peng *et al.,* 2016; Lee *et al.,* 2017; Wang and Zhu, 2019). In the specific context of the role of leaders in work meaningfulness in their organizations, empowering leadership style positively and significantly influences work meaningfulness (Vecchino *et al.,* 2010: 531). Amundsen and Martinsen (2014) developed a model with two dimensions of (empowering) leadership, which can significantly influence employees' work meaningfulness in the organization. These two dimensions are autonomy support (supporting subordinates' autonomous activities through delegation, encouraging initiative, and enhancing efficacy) and development support (supporting subordinates' learning and development through leaders' role modeling and guidance). We argue that both leadership dimensions (characteristics) are important in the context of work meaningfulness in organizations, because they can directly influence individual workers' perceptions.

Furthermore, leaders can contribute to the work meaningfulness of employees (workers) by offering psychological safety (Lee *et al.,* 2017), and encouraging proactive behavior (Dik *et al.,* 2013; Peng *et al.,* 2016). Researchers have stated that leaders who are easy to access have a positive (sympathetic) approach and give employees a voice in contributing to work meaningfulness in their organizations (Stephens and Carmeli, 2017; Wang and Xu, 2019). Despite all this, it is important to emphasize that leaders in modern organizations face unprecedented challenges, with increased global competition in all sectors and changing economic realities entailing difficult decisions and in many cases, moral (ethical) dilemmas (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2016). Some examples of this concern are the use of temporary contracts, agency workers, and gig economy contractors. These options offer organizations flexibility, as well as a possibility of increased profitability in many cases. However, these strategies can have a detrimental influence on work meaningfulness for the workers in those organizations. Hence, a key moral dilemma for the leaders essentially stems from the need to balance organizational goals like profitability with workers' work meaningfulness. In some recent studies, technology has also been highlighted as a factor that can raise moral dilemmas for leaders (Kvalnes, 2019), because increased automation and machine-human interaction can negatively influence work meaningfulness. That said, in the specific context of technologically advanced or high-tech firms, technology is intertwined with meaningfulness from another angle, which is the need for innovation and creativity to survive (Yitshai and Kropp, 2016; Zuo *et al.,* 2019). This can further complicate the moral dilemmas and moral identities of leaders of technologically advanced firms.

Moral identity related to one's standards of behavior or beliefs concerning what is and is not acceptable are central to one's definition of the self (e.g., Aquino and Reed, 2002). In the context of work meaningfulness, a leader's moral identities are linked to social values, where taking care of others, including employees in organizations, is an important consideration (e.g., Zhu, 2008). Leaders with a strong moral identity manifesting itself in an empowering and positive leadership style tend to positively influence organizational attractiveness (Van Prooijen et al., 2015), the prosocial orientation of employees (Weber *et al.,* 2009), and job satisfaction, as well as commitment (Bennis, 2006; Van Prooijen et al., 2015). This paper, therefore, aims to explore these leadership (of entrepreneurs/founders) elements by linking them to work meaningfulness, because such an analysis has yet to be undertaken, especially in technologically advanced firms.

The extant literature has also established that substantive and eloquent generational differences exist between individuals in today's

workplaces (Macky et al., 2008). These differences also manifest themselves in leaders and founders of organizations, and several studies have sought to address the influences of these differences in different contexts (Sessa *et al.,* 2007; Salahuddin, 2010; Rudolph *et al.,* 2018). Previous studies of generational differences in management have offered some rather stereotypical paradigms. The Silent (Traditional or Mature) generation is labeled conservative and disciplined (Strauss and Howe, 1991; Costanza *et al.,* 2012). Baby Boomers are called time-stressed and materialistic (Strauss and Howe, 1991; Costanza *et al.,* 2012). Millennials are believed to be socially conscious yet highly cynical (Burstein, 2013). The core argument behind the generational differences is that historical events and cultural phenomena influence individuals during their key developmental stages (Noble and Schewe, 2003). These experiences result in impactful collective memories and personality characteristics, including the leadership styles of individuals in that generational cohort (Caspi and Roberts, 2001; Boyle *et al.,* 2008).

Furthermore, intergenerational differences tend to receive far more attention in the popular press than academic research (e.g., Costanza *et al.,* 2012), because they can be linked to the politically sensitive topics of material well-being and the possibilities to achieve life goals, including in workplaces (Gough, 2017). Changing economic realities and the rise of emerging economies have meant that organizations in Western firms face unprecedented competition, which has resulted in increasingly limited opportunities for millennial and post-millennial workers (Gough, 2017; Buchs and Koch, 2019). This is an important point the focus of the current paper, because it influences work meaningfulness and its perceptions. It is, therefore, logical to expect that leaders and founders representing different generational cohorts may view these issues differently and adopt varying strategies to deal with the moral dilemmas associated with work meaningfulness in their organizations.

3. Methods

3.1. Choice of research method

As noted above, the previous literature on meaningfulness offers rather simplistic explanations (see, e.g., Strauss and Howe, 1991), and generational differences are discussed more broadly in non-academic forums (e.g., Costanza *et al.*, 2012). We, therefore, use an exploratory qualitative case study approach. In general, the qualitative research method is recommendable on such occasions, in which the aim is to add theoretical knowledge concerning phenomena that are still deserving of more detailed research (Eisenhardt, 1989). This research is grounded in IPA, with five owners/founders of Finnish high-tech firms.

This research and analytical approach are based on the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology, and hermeneutics (Gill, 2014; Jayawardena-Willis et al., 2021; Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The core premise of IPA is to explore the individualized meanings and perceptions of participants' experiences rather than reporting objective findings (Smith & Eatough, 2016). As such, it enables researchers to understand how research participants make sense of their experiences. IPA is gaining momentum within management (Cope, 2011; Lewis, 2015; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010) and business ethics (Jayawardena--Willis et al., 2021; Suh, Sweeney, Linke, & Wall, 2020) research fields but has yet to be applied in the context of meaningfulness in high-tech firms.

The power of IPA resides in its potential to provide contextualized insights and thorough descriptions (Smith & Eatough, 2016). Such empirical richness is enabled by concentrating on both context and process. Likewise, in IPA, researchers undertake a dual role. First, they immerse themselves in and internalize participants' meaning as they make sense of it. Second, they make sense of participants' meaning as independent people (Smith & Eatough, 2016).

As part of a research inquiry involving the Finnish context, the research aimed to develop a detailed "phenomenological hermeneutical" understanding of the real-life experiences of meaningfulness (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). As such, IPA allowed us to develop interpretative accounts that did "not negate the use of theoretical orientation or conceptual framework as a component of inquiry" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730). This research seeks to provide theoretical insights into the concept of meaningfulness and generational differences and leaders' moral dilemmas concerning work meaningfulness through the perspectives of the owners/founders of Finnish high-tech firms. Thus, as developed by Smith and Eatough (2016); Smith and Shinebourne (2012), IPA is deemed appropriate for informing research design and analysis.

3.2. Sample selection and data collection

Purposive sampling—selecting research participants who serve a specific purpose consistent with the research's main objective (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008)—is at the heart of IPA (Roberts, 2013). IPA promotes the utilization of small samples that allows the development of a proficient theoretical perspective on the condition that sufficient contextualization is maintained (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Accordingly, as purposive sampling enables sampling concepts rather than persons, we selected the research participants based on the fact that they could provide our research with unique and firsthand insights into the focal phenomena (Jayawardena-Willis *et al.*, 2021), i.e., meaningfulness, generational differences, and leaders' moral dilemmas concerning work meaningfulness. Our existing relationships with our case firms and their owner-founders, easy access to them, and informants willing to participate in our study support the convenience sampling method (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, many management studies use nonprobability sampling, at least in some form (Albaum and Peterson, 1984; Reynolds *et al.*, 2003; Rowley, 2014).

A distinct aspect of IPA is the assurance of producing a fine-grained interpretative account based on giving each participant's unique lived experiences their due (Cope, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Six to eight participants are typically recommended as an appropriate number of participants for research adopting the IPA approach (Smith & Eatough, 2016). IPA is particularly relevant when the focal research problem is rare. Issues of accessibility and willingness to participate are challenging (Cope, 2011), as in the case of work meaningfulness that is not conveniently disclosed or discussed in normal circumstances. Accordingly, the credibility and the key asset of IPA's purposive sample selection hinge on theoretical, rather than empirical, generalizability (Ram, Theodorakopoulos, & Jones, 2008).

To gain an in-depth insight into meaningfulness in the context of generational differences, we collected our data from five Finnish firms. In doing this, we selected our firms and key informants to represent a continuum of different generations. The founder of Lipasu was born in the 1990s; the founder of CubiCasa was born in the early 1960s; and the remaining informants were born between these years. We conducted five in-person interviews with these firms' owner-founders, who still have key managerial roles in their firms. We deliberately selected these firms and people, because we were able to ensure they had the required information to shed light on the phenomenon (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, and Washburn, 2000).

We primarily followed the phenomenological interviewing style during data collection. Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) describe phenomenological interviewing as "the most powerful means of attaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences" (p. 138). In line with the key principle of phenomenological interviewing, we loosely structured the interviews to gain a first-person description of work meaningfulness as the primary domain of experience, in which participants primarily set the course of the dialog (Cope, 2005). Accordingly, we did not follow a structured interview protocol and let the participants lead the conversation following an introductory question— "*Could you please tell us about your understanding and experiences of*

meaningfulness at your work?"

3.3. Data analysis

As an emergent research approach, IPA offers a clear set of comprehensive and attainable guidelines for data analysis (Smith & Eatough, 2016; Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA is not a strictly prescriptive methodology and allows for individuality and flexibility in qualitative data analysis. Despite its flexibility and room for individuality, IPA still adopts a systematic approach to data analysis procedures. However, while "there is a basic process to IPA (moving from the descriptive to the interpretative), the method does not claim objectivity through the use of a detailed, formulaic procedure" (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 97). IPA is an inductive and idiographic approach that starts with an in-depth, nuanced analysis of one case and then moves forward with a diligent analysis of the following cases (Smith, 2004).

The six-step IPA previously implemented by (Cope, 2011) was adopted to analyze the qualitative data in this research. During the first step, reading the case, we read and reread the transcripts while listening to the interviews' audio recording (Cope, 2011; Jayawardena-Willis et al., 2021; Smith & Eatough, 2016). This step assisted the researchers in recollecting the research participants' experiences and allowed the overall flow and rhythm of the interviews to become evident, while enabling the reflection on the bottom line of the participants' experiences. During the second step, diagnosis of the case, we kept an open mind and noted anything interesting in the transcripts to produce comprehensive notes and comments on the data by interpreting the previously made descriptive comments (Cope, 2011; Smith & Eatough, 2016). Likewise, we maintained an analytical dialog with the transcript. We attempted to make sense of what the words, phrases, or sentences the participant used meant to them within their accustomed context (Jayawardena-Willis *et al.*, 2021), which made this level of analysis relatively interpretative. During the third step, developing intra-case themes, surfacing themes were developed by working with the initial notes taken during the fieldwork (Cope, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008). We followed qualitative content analysis procedures as suggested by the extant literature on qualitative research (Strauss and Corbin, 2014 ; Miles and Huberman, 1994) and continuously arranged and rearranged our primary interview data and the secondary data according to the early emergent themes arising from the data. We then cross-analyzed the previously revealed intra-themes during the fourth step of developing inter-case themes (Cope, 2011; Jayawardena-Willis et al., 2021). We iterated between the primary and secondary data until we were confident that the main themes and constructs were clearly demarcated. During the fifth step, writing up, we interpreted and aggregated the inter-case themes. During the final step, enfolding the literature, we connected the empirical findings to the extant literature on meaningfulness to develop a holistic and in-depth understanding of the work meaningfulness of Finnish high-tech firm founders and CEOs.

We start with a phenomenological description of each case firm. We then present our themes from the research. Within these themes, each data section in which participant narratives are presented is followed by theoretical analysis and interpretation, exploring the major processes of work meaningfulness and their intricate links to generational differences, leaders, and their moral dilemmas. While presenting our findings, we follow the suggestions of Eisenhardt (1989), Eisenhardt and Graebner, (2007), and Davis and Eisenhardt, (2011) especially concerning the use of interview quotations. Finally, we draw our conclusions, in which we concentrate on wider theoretical and managerial implications and future research directions in the following chapter.

4. Findings

Table 1 below summarizes the key aspects of the case firms. It is evident that our sample includes founders (CEOs, owners) from generations X, Y, and Z, so the findings incorporate the approaches of all these generations, which is in line with the focus of our study.

The first case firm, CubiCasa, is a firm designing software solutions for the real estate business, in some areas for real estate agencies, in some areas, for example, in the USA, for real estate photographers. The owner-founder of CubiCasa belongs to generation X. After working for a major mobile phone manufacturer for almost twelve years, he established CubiCasa in his 40s with some colleagues.

The second case firm, SciAR, is a Finnish start-up firm and is developing augmented reality applications, mainly for bio-scientific laboratory environments. The SciAR application combines headset cameras, machine intelligence, and digital models to mitigate human errors in lab work, thus ensuring that individuals in laboratories follow the process steps correctly. The founders are targeting the application at cancer research and other life science fields. The owner-founder of SciAR belongs to generation Y and has been an entrepreneur for two years.

Lipasu, the third case firm, is a Finnish start-up firm focusing on developing and manufacturing vegan ice cream. The firm was established by seven students, representing generation Z, with a background in the Department of Food and Nutrition at Helsinki University. In this regard, the owner-founder says that the youngest persons involved in Lipasu were born in 1997, the oldest was born in 1992. Today, Lipasu is the holder of the trademark Härtelö and has a manufacturing and distribution agreement with a major Finnish food manufacturer, Valio. The firm thus mainly focuses on product development and social media marketing. The firm's ice cream has often won awards, and their ice cream packaging has won design prizes.

Kuulu, the fourth case firm, was founded in 2012. Kuulu is a Finnish digital marketing service provider that combines training, consultancy, content creation (videos), hands-on digital marketing, and technical support beyond traditional marketing communications and advertising agencies. The firm was founded when digital marketing started to grow in importance, and the founders, from generation X, realized that they had the experience and competences to provide multichannel digital marketing aids and services to all kinds of firms. The original idea did not include content creation, but quite soon after the firm was founded, the entrepreneur met another entrepreneur focusing on video

Table 1
Case firms and the interviewees' background.

Case firm	CubiCasa	SciAR	Lipasu	Kuulu	Spark Sustainability
Founded	2014	2018	2018	2012	2017
Number of employees	20 in Finland and USA + 70 in Vietnam	8	7	30	7
Industry	Software applications for real estate business	Augmented reality-based software solutions	Food industry	Digital marketing services	Software, consulting
Locus of operations	Finland, USA, Vietnam	Finland	Finland	Finland	Finland
Interviewee	Owner-founder Gen X (1965–1979)	Owner-founder Gen Y (1980–1994)	Owner-founder Gen Z (1995–2015)	Owner-founder Gen X (1965–1979)	CEO, owner-founder Gen Y (1980–1994)

productions with whom the activities were merged.

Spark Sustainability, the fifth case firm, was founded to connect climate-smart businesses to climate-aware individuals. The firm's mobile application provides people with hints to make environmentally sustainable decisions. In doing this, the firm aims to impact carbon emissions and climate change. Some of the hints connect to firms providing environmentally favorable goods and services and sharing and circular economy solutions. The mobile application is free for the end-users, yet firms pay for their presence on the Spark Sustainability platform. In doing this, Spark Sustainability enables sustainable firms to increase their market share. Spark Sustainability also offers consulting services for firms on emission calculations.

The owner-founder of CubiCasa belongs to generation X, the owner-founders of SciAR and Spark Sustainability belong to generation Y, the owner-founder of Lipasu belongs to generation Z, and the owner-founders of Kuulu belong to generation X. Our interviewees were born in five different decades, as summarized in Table 1. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, we conducted the interviews over the web using Zoom. We recorded all the interviews and collected additional secondary data from the firms' webpages, newspapers, and the informants' social media channels such as LinkedIn. The resulting triangulated primary data (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Eisenhardt, 1989) provides a good insight into the phenomenon.

In the following, we thematically present the cross-case findings as done in IPA analysis.

4.1. Original reasons for starting up one's own business

Three interviewees explicitly referred to the passion that drove them. The owner-founder of CubiCasa explained his reasons for leaving his job in a major mobile phone manufacturer and establishing the firm as follows: "I *had this crazy passion and energy […] I had a desire to do something really interesting with a good team. […] Fascinating things, growing business with a good team.*" Similarly, the owner-founder of Kuulu realized that she had special digital marketing competences, but there was no demand for these skills in the region where she lived. By founding Kuulu, the owner-founder felt that "*I could do what I'm good at, and nobody could tell me I couldn't do something how I wanted to do it, or that this didn't work that way.*" The motivation to establish the firm was to "[…] *create the best possible workplace for me.*"

Whereas the owner-founders of CubiCasa and Kuulu had a strong desire to set up firms in which they were able to optimally exploit their skills and capabilities, the paramount motivation to establish Spark Sustainability was more ideological. The CEO of Spark Sustainability observed: "*I considered that this was a smart way to test if climate change could be solved, or if we could participate in solving climate change with this idea, so setting up a firm per se was not the main idea. The idea was that I wanted to take up this cause, and how I could do so as agilely and easily as possible, without someone telling me all the time this didn't make sense. Now I can do exactly what I want to, as long as I can get funding for it.*"

Meanwhile, different circumstances and incidents led to the establishment of SciAR and Lipasu. In this respect, the owner-founder of SciAR recalled: "*By coincidence … me and my two mates, we thought that a career as a researcher might be less interesting than establishing some kind of firm. We chucked ideas around for different kinds of equipment for biology. Then, by chance, we came across AR [augmented reality].*" SciAR's founders were students at the time and knew each other. Similarly, Lipasu was born out of coursework in the Department of Food and Nutrition at Helsinki University. The owner-founder said: "*Six of us were from the same class, and one of us had started one or two years earlier. We ended up in the same group […]. We had all the freedom to do whatever we wanted, and we had nothing to lose. Someone just said let's make ice cream.*" She continued: "*The Restaurant Day came, all the ice cream was gone. After that, we decided why not take this further.*" Two months later, Lipasu Oy was registered.

SciAR and Lipasu were not set up merely due to coincidences but also the founder's drive for meaningful work. The owner-founder of Lipasu phrased the meaningfulness a little differently: "*I need to have thousands of things going on […] Being an entrepreneur is so versatile—it's not just sitting in the office calculating the same things. The entrepreneur's week can vary so much. It's rewarding that you can do the things you like. Sure, there's also … calculating inventories … real work, but you can decide what you do. This makes it attractive.*"

4.2. Vision

The owner-founder of CubiCasa described his expectations when he was setting up the firm with his co-founders: *"If we had the entire world's floor plans, their value would be insane. There'd be several ways to utilize them … We had no idea how to use them […] and after ten years, people think back and recall that it was this firm, CubiCasa, which changed the rules in this industry."* The firm had succeeded in its endeavors, and the owner-founder of CubiCasa described the current situation as follows: *"We've already changed how the photographers do their job. In the Nordic countries, all the major photography firms either use or are inclined to use our solution. In the USA, our share is still quite small, but we can see the trend changing."*

The owner-founder of SciAR said: "*We've been able to come up with a common vision we're aiming for. In the beginning, we had a greater vision concerning our product. It's still the same, yet some of the features didn't work with the current technologies … The vision is the same, but the roadmap is now clearer. […] It would be nice if we could make the firm world-class … and so on … yet the odds of failing in this field are bigger according to the statistics. At the time, we just decided to keep doing this. We were confident we could do this."* Concerning the firm's vision, the owner-founder of Lipasu mentioned that *"Even though we're only talking about two years, […] there was caution and excitement. […] Before the Valio agreement, people thought if they had capabilities and wanted to continue in this business … then the business started to go on. It permanently changed all the attitudes: I want to do this, and I can do this."* The owner-founder of Lipasu noted that they convinced the rest of the team: *"We stressed the possibility. What if this grows big? […] Let's do this. It was quite exciting."*

4.3. Founder background

Some of the founders are from families in which their parents and/or relatives are entrepreneurs. In this respect, the owner-founder of SciAR explained how easy it was to become an entrepreneur: "*One reason is that my parents and my grandparents, uncles, almost all my near relatives have been entrepreneurs. This told me entrepreneurship was one possibility among others.*" Regarding the team, SciAR's owner-founder observed: "*No one had any experience. If I had to choose a team to do this, I might not pick the people with no competences on paper, but we thought that we would do it […] We had an intriguing vision, and I had the impression that working in a good team was rewarding.*"

When discussing her background, Lipasu's owner-founder said: *"Both of my parents owned a takeaway shop—as long as I can remember, my parents have been entrepreneurs. I had a ready-made attitude. When I was young, I remember thinking that other kids' parents had real jobs. Later, I realized what it meant to be an entrepreneur. I had already thought about becoming an entrepreneur before.*" She noted that some of the other founders also had entrepreneurs in their families, while some did not: *"Not everyone had an entrepreneurial background in their family […] I sensed the caution."* The CEO of Spark Sustainability also came from an entrepreneurial family: *"I come from a family of entrepreneurs, so it was natural—I've seen this since I was small. […] The decision to do this with a firm is related to the fact that I had this entrepreneurial family background, so I knew how this world functioned … This is how we can carry it [fight against climate change] out."*

4.4. Material well-being

CubiCasa's owner-founder resigned from his job at a mobile phone

manufacturer. He became an entrepreneur: *"There were no promises of a salary. […] Money has never really been a motivation for me. In my previous job, I earned quite well."* He continued: *"My main motivation for doing these long hours is that I have a desire to change how people act. Sure, money is a motivator, too. Occasionally money is on my mind, but then again, I realize that it's very short-sighted to think about it."* When discussing a possible exit, he phrased it laconically: *"I know that it will happen. I don't have any specific plan for when it happens. I might have already left the firm."*

The owner-founder of SciAR explained that setting up the firm did not present any financial risks: *"Me and one of our co-founders, we didn't have any financial problems when we were setting up this firm. This made things easier for us—for example, we've been able to work full-time for the past six months without getting paid. […] We haven't taken big financial risks—we've thought that if this doesn't work, we'll go back to school."* Like the founder of CubiCasa, SciAR's founder was not just aiming for the possible exit: "*Since day one we've thought we're not just looking for an exit, but we've both shared the idea that we'll make this a firm we can stay in as long as we like."* The owner-founder of Lipasu observed: *"We considered if this was something we should do when there was this registration fee—we really needed to invest our study loans. We realized the risks—we nearly didn't establish the firm. […] Everyone had the chance to get out, but I think that in the back of everyone's head, there was this what if. Anyway, there were so many of us, so there was support and safety in numbers."*

4.5. Taking the next step

The owner-founder of Lipasu pointed out that success fortified: *"First, we succeeded during the Restaurant Day, then we established this firm, we got to the finals in the Hit Recipe Competition and in doing so, we got access to the shops. Then Valio contacted us. The timing of everything was great."* Yet Lipasu's founder noted that no one in the firm really had an idea what growing bigger would mean. The firm was no longer producing ice cream itself. The owner-founder explained: *"We have a subcontractor—they produce the ice cream several times a month […] Valio came along last August. We own the firm, they help us out with other things—for example, in the production. We're involved in product development and marketing. […] Our current cooperation with Valio, for example, is already much bigger than we could have imagined … We gained nationwide distribution after one year. All this has completely surprised us."* Lipasu's ice cream packaging was shortlisted in Grafia's non-profit Vuoden Huiput creative design competition. Concerning this, the owner-founder observed: *"We're so proud that our packaging was designed by such a talent. I don't think that even this person knew at the time […] they'd end up designing packaging for Valio."* She continued: *"I'm afraid that all this has come too effortlessly, considering that two years is a short time. Personally, I'm always afraid that when the big failure comes, we really won't have faced any major difficulties."* The firm's innovation, good taste, great package, and success in getting their ice cream delivered nationwide had been a success story. The owner-founder conceded: *"Yes, this is a great achievement."*

SciAR has been able to maintain its growth. The SciAR owner-founder noted: *"A couple of weeks ago, we got the Tempo funding […] I'd say that during this second year, we've done real business. More funding would mean that some of our team could quit their other jobs."* Kuulu has also been hiring. As the firm grew, the owner-founder's husband increasingly started to help with practicalities in the firm and eventually joined it: *"And he had the technical know-how as an engineer to implement things."* In addition, a third entrepreneur joined Kuulu three years later. *"I was then working in a local co-space and saw this guy Ville working incredibly long days, and producing incredibly high-quality videos that nobody saw, and we kind of got to know each other."*

4.6. Being an entrepreneur

The owner-founder of CubiCasa considered his and co-founders' motives: *"Maybe they would phrase this differently, but we all had a desire to leave our mark."* He continued: *"I will never be a serial entrepreneur. However, I if I have to leave CubiCasa one day, I don't think I'll be establishing a new start-up. The only thing I could consider would be connected with sports—I almost have a master's degree in sports, so it would be the field if I needed to start over again."*

Lipasu's owner-founder observed: *"Later, I realized what it means to be an entrepreneur. I'd already considered becoming an entrepreneur earlier […] In this firm, I've seen all the things connected with it […] This has confirmed that I could imagine myself being a full-time entrepreneur."*

As an entrepreneur, the CEO of Spark Sustainability considered: *"I do enjoy starting a firm up—it's a fun phase, yet I still do not see myself as an entrepreneur. I got into the research world, because I'm not an entrepreneur."*

4.7. Serving a bigger purpose

The reasons for setting up Spark Sustainability were quite ideological. In this respect, the CEO stressed: *"I face big question marks every day … The whole reason for having this firm is very ideological. We're on the verge of solving the world's biggest problem—we're aiming to find an answer to the question of whether this idea of ours might be part of this solution. As the problem is solving climate change, this feels very meaningful. I considered this to be a smart way to test if climate change could be solved, so setting up a firm per se wasn't the main idea."* She continued: *"I've seen this since I was small, so I've understood the role of a firm in society—how you can use a firm to exercise influence."* The owner-founder of SciAR pointed out: *"Grasping big entities instead of completing something small as a small piece in some system—that's absolutely what makes it meaningful."*

4.8. Satisfaction

Meaningfulness for the owner-founder of CubiCasa comes from other things. He explained: *"To me, this is a kind of game, like a play. This work comes with loads of freedom, but also with things that aren't so pleasant. And we have such a fantastic team with young professionals in their 30s, who are given the opportunity to develop and do international business. I wish I'd had a similar opportunity."* He continued: *"I'm providing these people with this opportunity. I'm a coach—I stay out of their way, I give them space, I let them make mistakes."*

For the owner-founder of Kuulu, the meaningfulness of work came from interaction with people. *"To me, training is super-motivational when you see people getting something, seeing the light, realizing and learning new things."* In the same way, customer relationships provided opportunities to influence people. *"I just had a sales meeting with one of the biggest […] associations in the country and came up with 15 improvement ideas we could offer. Of course, they aren't buying everything, but there's a big opportunity."* It also seemed important for the Kuulu owner-founder to recognize what motivated the other players in the firm. *"For Ville, won sales cases are victories, and he's exceptional at concept creation and strategic planning. My husband gets energy from solving technical and organizational problems and describing these solutions in innovative ways."* For the owner-manager, a team of entrepreneurs sharing the vision, mission, and workload and providing mutual support was important.

While discussing the drivers of work meaningfulness, the CEO of Spark Sustainability explained: *"I can do everyday work for a cause that I believe in one hundred percent. I've invented this thing—it really is the dream job. In practice, this is occasionally scary and difficult, and it comes with disappointments."*

4.9. Employees

The owner-founder of CubiCasa has several employees to supervise. When discussing the meaningfulness and motivation of his employees, he considered: "*I think it's the freedom. They can do their own things in their own sandboxes. For example, in R&D, we have three persons, part of our operating management with incentives by ownership, and they have a certain freedom and less time pressure […] I'm more involved in sales, and I'm*

coping with the solutions we have at hand—I'm avoiding bringing painful deadline pressure. Yet they understand the pain of customers, and they take the responsibility." He continued: "*People are allowed to work remotely, wherever they want.*" The owner-founder considered that the meaningfulness of workers arose from various things: "*As I see it, young people don't aim to own a house. This is typically the watershed between the generations. They prefer to keep all the doors open and don't commit to a single thing. They want to experience new things, change their jobs, and meet new people. Experiences, feelings, and flow over the number of house loans […] Older generations can check their life situations from their Excel sheet.*" He continued: "*Regarding our generation and older people, a person can ask if they're happy. First, they check how much of their house loan is left. Next, they go to the garage and check what car they have. Younger people don't act like this at all. I'm trying to understand how they think, and we aren't doing things in the same way as firms did in the 90s and at the beginning of the 2000s.*" When discussing how entrepreneurs from older generations might differ from their younger counterparts, the owner-founder of CubiCasa pointed out: "*Me and my founder colleague, together we two would never have had the means to take this firm where it is now. We'd have been stuck in the old [mobile phone manufacturer] firm's processes' thinking and so on. Thanks to our young people, we're more agile than average.*"

The owner-founder explained that many of the people working for SciAR had previously known each other earlier, but not everyone: "*Our CTO … we had another software architect who soon realized he lacked time to do this. We hadn't previously known him, but we were able to tempt him to join, so I think that the reason was that we were actually doing something that really mattered—we had an intriguing vision, and I got the impression that working in a good team was rewarding.*" The owner-founder of SciAR explained they had succeeded in building a sense of community. People came and helped when they were asked. The lack of resources has also had a positive effect. The owner-founder of SciAR explained: "*We've been working whenever we've had time, like working remotely all the time … At various times, it's been a challenge, but on the other hand, everyone has been responsible for their own field […] All the employers take responsibility for the whole concept, not just their own smaller tasks.*" He believed that an ability to see the big picture and freedom combined with responsibility were the factors that contributed positively to work meaningfulness.

Not everyone working for Spark Sustainability was an owner. The CEO remarked: "*We have two categories […] During the first eighteen months, we had several volunteers who were just seeking to work for us and sent a message asking if they could help. […] The last person we hired to work for us is a complete outsider and has been headhunted for making sales. They've been with us less than a month and are learning what it's all about. They're more like an employee […] In a totally different way from the rest of us, we offer work and a salary. I do believe we need both […]to grow—we need these realistic voices in our operating team.*"

The well-being of the employees, or its lack, appeared to create moral dilemmas for the case firms' leaders. For example, in Kuulu, "*due to the Covid situation, we've recently had an enormous amount of work to do, also involving a lot of thinking, and I started to burn out and considered selling out the whole shit and laying off everyone last week […] But I checked my calendar, and luckily the pressure is now getting easier: Maybe people can keep their jobs after all.*"

4.10. Managing employees

The owner-manager of Kuulu thought that "*as an entrepreneur, it's impossible for me to think that my rank is higher than that of the employees, and I've had to work on it. I've begun to grasp that I have some kind of authority around here, and that I need to behave accordingly, but I don't go fully into that game.*" When discussing unpleasant matters, for example, letting employees go, the owner-founder of CubiCasa pondered: "*If there's one good thing about me, it's the fact that I don't worry for a long time. After making a closure, I've forgotten the matter the next morning.*" Making short-term employment contracts is often a necessity from the perspective of a firm. The owner-founder explained: "*With agree a trial period first with everyone. I've sold this idea to the potential employee as a positive issue—it isn't only a question of whether we like them, but whether they like working with us. A trial period is a two-way street.*"

The owner-founder of CubiCasa explained that workers' freedom had been self-evident from the outset, and good motivation, a good team, and good team spirit guaranteed that no one had to doubt if employees were fulfilling their tasks. However, he mentioned that "*A number of people have come and found they don't fit. Frankly, if they don't get along with me, they won't stay for long. I'm a nice guy, but if my trust is abused, it can't easily be gotten back.*" He continued with an example of a failure: "*In the US, we've had difficulties finding good partners. We've had partners who haven't been able to take the required responsibility, and they've just vanished as a consequence.*"

The owner-founder of SciAR said: "*Whenever our financial situation allows, the current team will start working full-time.*" Regarding the reasons for hiring full-time employees, the owner-founder of SciAR stated: "*For most people, the full-time job is the most convenient option. Yet if someone wants to work part-time, it won't be a problem for us. However, it's easier to manage when people are in the same place for eight hours, and moreover, I'd be happy to offer full-time contracts to employees.*" Regarding gig workers, the CEO of Spark Sustainability observed: "*If we needed help on a specific issue, and especially during this coronavirus pandemic when haven't known where the economy's going, in these circumstances, it might be wise to use gig workers. However, we're at the beginning […] In this phase, we're just looking for team members. For example, we've just decided not to use IT consultants anymore, but we're hiring software developers. It's much better to have them on the team. They know the product well and will stay for a long time.*"

5. Discussion

The ten themes of the cross-case findings presented in the preceding sub-chapters give rise to notions related to Nordic high-tech leaders' perceptions, drivers, dynamics, and moral dilemmas regarding work meaningfulness.

5.1. Perceptions of work meaningfulness

Work meaningfulness was visibly important for all the interviewees. In some cases, the founders' work meaningfulness (or lack of it) was the driver to start their businesses. Our findings support the notion highlighted in some of the previous studies in the high-tech sector, in which meaningfulness and following a passion were driving forces for the people establishing the start-ups (e.g., Yitshaki and Kropp, 2016; Zuo *et al.*, 2019). Meaningfulness was also a visible element in the decision to become an entrepreneur. For example, the owner-founder of CubiCasa mentioned: "*Money has never really been a motivation for me. In my previous job, I earned quite well. My main motivation for doing these long hours is that I have a desire to change how people act. In some industries, some segment changes how they do things, and after ten years, people think back and recall that it was this firm, CubiCasa, which changed the rules in this industry.* This entrepreneurial passion, as well as previous experience of working in different technology firms, has been found to positively influence overall work meaningfulness in the new ventures being established (e.g., Cardon, 2008; Symon and Whiting, 2019)

5.2. Drivers of work meaningfulness in the case firms (economic, well-being, and societal)

For the owner-manager, a team of entrepreneurs sharing the vision, mission, and workload and providing mutual support are important. In all the case firms, meaningfulness was linked to the leaders' understanding of the importance of psychological safety (e.g., Lee *et al.*, 2017), which encourages proactive behavior (e.g., Dik *et al.*, 2013; Peng *et al.*, 2016). As all case firms are operating in the high-tech sector where innovation is important, such psychological antecedents are important.

The leaders' understanding of them can positively contribute to the overall organizational performance.

5.3. Dynamics of employee work meaningfulness

The influences of generational differences on work meaningfulness dynamics, as highlighted in previous studies, were also visible here (e.g., Salahuddin, 2010; Rudolph *et al.*, 2018). Freedom combined with responsibility is a factor that contributes positively to work meaningfulness. This aspect is important, because previous studies have highlighted that freedom and less hierarchy are important for employee motivation among all generations in the high-tech sector (e.g., Tampoe, 1993; Cai *et al.*, 2018).

5.4. Moral dilemmas and employee work meaningfulness

Employee well-being or its lack appears to bring about moral dilemmas for the case firms' leaders. The founder of Kuulu is from Generation X. Some studies have argued that leaders from this generation value teamwork, loyalty, and trust their employees significantly, especially in the technology sector (e.g., Fismer, 2005). But the owner-manager thought that Kuulu was still what she had created for herself. *"I want to do this, and Kuulu is the world's best workplace for me."* Hierarchy was also highlighted as an ethical dilemma. We, therefore, found support for the notion that founders wished to keep an informal attitude in high-tech firms. However, after a certain level of growth, a more structured organization emerges that may result in some dilemmas. These aspects have also been stressed in previous studies (e.g., Grillitsch et al., 2019), though previous scholars have not directly linked them to work meaningfulness.

When discussing unpleasant matters like letting employees go, the owner-founder of CubiCasa pondered: *"If there's one good thing about me, it's the fact that I don't worry for a long time. After making a closure, the next morning I've forgotten the matter."* Making short-term employment contracts is often a necessity from a firm's perspective. The CubiCasa owner-founder explained that his parents had given him quite a traditional upbringing: *"Respect the employer and so on […] None of the rules I was raised with holds anymore. Young employees have a totally new way of thinking. They don't always commit themselves to one firm—for example, my father worked for the same firm for 42 years, but things don't work like this anymore."* This is an important aspect that supports the findings of some other studies concerning differences in perceptions of loyalty in employees across generations (e.g., Benson and Brown, 2011). Short-term work and its links to work meaningfulness, especially in the high-tech sector, therefore also needs to be seen from this angle, because for some millennials and post-millennial employees, the traditional link between job security and its positive influences on work meaningfulness may be less strong (e.g., Okros, 2019). The above discussions reflect the Nordic entrepreneurial culture, which does not aim to make high profits on the cost of hiring and firing employees, but which at the same time targets both profitable growth and employee well-being. Founders do respect their freedom, but at the same time, as their firms grow, they are very concerned about their employees' careers.

6. Conclusion

This paper focused on work meaningfulness dynamics in the high-tech sector and the influences of generational differences in leaders on it. Based on an IPA analysis of five Finnish (Nordic) case firms, we found that generational differences between leaders concerning the work meaningfulness of their employees as well for themselves, existed. These differences were manifested in different views concerning material well-being, house ownership, freedom, teamwork, and the general approach to working life (being a co-owner or an employee). Previous studies have also highlighted these aspects in some way (e.g., Macky *et al.*, 2008; Rudolph *et al.*, 2018).

When we examine the generational differences in our data, we specifically contribute to the extant research by highlighting three interrelated aspects that separated the generations regarding their perceptions of work meaningfulness: How the entrepreneurial *identity* of organizational founders (leaders) was constructed (e.g., Down and Revely, 2004), how this identity emerged (internal vs. external triggers), how the entrepreneurs perceived and acted on the *opportunities* to which they were exposed, and how they experienced entrepreneurial *commitment* and related themselves to the outcomes of starting a new organization or entrepreneurship (e.g., Yeoman, 2014; Newbery *et al.*, 2018). First, for older generations, becoming an entrepreneur in our data was about self-actualization, with a clear idea to establish a firm and then reflect the outcomes and success, or their lack, against their own expectations or the external world. For the younger generations, entrepreneurship appeared as serendipitous and acting on the emerging opportunity. Although entrepreneurship was not necessarily a pre-meditated act, it was often motivated by social or environmental sustainability causes with a wider meaning that translated into meaningfulness (e.g., Gough, 2017; Gregori *et al.*, 2021). These generational differences could be characterized as internal vs. external triggers of entrepreneurship and organizational leadership, such as starting the firm to create a meaningful workplace (Yeoman, 2014) or fighting climate change. However, it also extended to how different generations viewed time and commitment (e.g., Stewart *et al.*, 2017; Gregori *et al.*, 2021). Our data revealed that representatives of the younger generation did not think being an entrepreneur would be a life-long career. Rather, it was a decision for the occasion, and the decision might change in the future, depending on the venture's success or another reason. We interpret this as a commitment issue, a different perception of commitment, and what our respondents think they want to commit to. The older generations were committed to the firm as an outcome of entrepreneurial action for internal reasons. The younger generation of organizational leaders was more susceptible to committing themselves to a purpose and contributing to society and the environment rather than achieving material benefits or status (e.g., Dik *et al.*, 2013; Yeoman, 2014; Kvalnes, 2019). Thus, different generations seem to have different reference points regarding their definition of success and meaningfulness.

The extant literature acknowledges the relationship between work meaningfulness and the identity of both workers and organizational leaders, including entrepreneurial founders (e.g., Allan, 2017; Down and Revely, 2004; Yeoman, 2014; Newbery *et al.*, 2018; Lysova et al., 2019). As our data show, the perception and understanding of entrepreneurial identity may stem from family history, making the transition to adopting such an identity easier. However, being a founder or organization does not always mean accepting and having an entrepreneurial identity, especially for younger generations. For them, it is giving an idea linked to their interests a try. They are therefore more open to failure and moving on. We found that issues like job security, temporary contracts, part-time work, and gig working needed to be seen in more detail instead of assuming their generic negative influence on the employee's or leader's well-being or meaningfulness.

During our qualitative analysis, it appeared that change was the name of the game for many millennial and post-millennial high-tech workers, and they might not necessarily associate these aspects negatively with work meaningfulness. We, therefore, conclude that the drivers and dynamics of work meaningfulness vary across the three generations of entrepreneurs analyzed in this research. However, it is also important to remember that differences within the same generational group make further generalization difficult. Similarly, few found that organizational leaders displayed certain commonalities such as informality and less interest in a hierarchy associated with high-tech sector leaders, especially in the Nordic working context (e.g., Arslan *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, our respondents of all generations were interested in developing their employees and saw it as achieving desired results. At the same time, there were visible differences concerning some

other aspects of work meaningfulness. For young entrepreneurs, work meaningfulness could be considered less connected to entrepreneurial identity than contributing to a wider social and/or environmental cause.

Our paper offers theoretical, managerial, and policy implications. From the theoretical perspective, a key implication concerns the need to incorporate generational differences and the industrial context as important elements in the larger theoretical construction of the work meaningfulness debate. As the dynamics and perceptions of temporary contract and gig work differ in sectors like high-tech (where they are not necessarily viewed negatively) compared to low-tech sectors like delivery services, the theorization of work meaningfulness needs to incorporate this. At the same time, post-millennials especially may not perceive long-term commitment to an organization and the aspects of settling down and purchasing a home early in working life as important. Therefore, the managerial audience (including organizational leaders) needs to better understand this increasingly visible group of employees to offer them works packages that satisfy meaningfulness in accordance with their own perceptions. Overall, we conclude that paying attention to and appreciating the differences across the generations is important for managers of all generations, ensuring employee well-being, productivity, efficiency, devotion, and development as potential new managers. From a policy perspective, our findings indicate that younger entrepreneurs may be more likely to help fight against global problems like climate change and support societal well-being via entrepreneurship. However, supporting younger entrepreneurs to succeed requires different approaches to exposing would-be entrepreneurs to opportunities and supporting the emergence of entrepreneurial activity and commitment to continuing firms that have already been started. Based on our findings, we propose further research on the kind of entrepreneurship development policies that might impact the younger generation of entrepreneurs.

Our paper has several limitations, as with any academic study. First, it consists of perceptions and views of organizational leaders (founders) from Finland operating in the high-tech sector. A direct generalization of their views is therefore impossible. Finland belongs to the Nordic countries, which share rather similar societal and cultural characteristics, lifestyles and values, and history. Our findings, therefore, resonate with the situation in the other Nordic countries. Nevertheless, our paper opens interesting avenues concerning different perceptions of issues like part-time work, gig work, loyalty to one firm for one's whole life, settling down, and the capability to buy a home earlier in life, which can be further theorized explored in various empirical contexts. We have also relied on the leaders' views about employees' work meaningfulness in their organization. Our data collection does not include employee views, which is a major limitation. Employees may well view the above-mentioned issue differently than the leaders. Future studies may build on our paper and explore the employees' perceptions and views using qualitative and quantitative research methods.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ahmad Arslan: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. **Petri Ahokangas:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing. **Lauri Haapanen:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing. **Ismail Golgeci:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. **Shlomo Y. Tarba:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **Ofra Bazel-Shoham:** Writing – review & editing.

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Professor Ahmad Arslan is currently working as a Professor at Department of Marketing, Management and International Business, Oulu Business School, University of Oulu, Finland. He also holds the position of Honorary Chair in Business Management at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, UK. Previously, he has worked in academia in different universities in the UK and Finland. His earlier research has been published in prestigious academic journals like *British Journal of Management, International Business Review, International Marketing Review, International Journal of Organizational Analysis, Journal of Business Research, Scandinavian Journal of Management, Journal of Strategic Marketing, Journal of Knowledge Management, Journal of Organizational Change Management, Production Planning & Control, Supply Chain Management, and Technological Forecasting & Social Change* among others. Moreover, he has also contributed book chapters to several edited handbooks addressing different management related topics. Finally, he holds several editorial board memberships and is currently a Senior Editor of *International Journal of Emerging Markets (Emerald)*.

Professor Petri Ahokangas is currently working as the Professor of Future Digital Business at Martti Ahtisaari Institute, Oulu Business School at University of Oulu. He holds the title ofAdjunct professor at Aalborg University, Denmark and University of Vaasa, Finland. His research focuses on future digital businesses and business models, especially in the telecommunications domain. Prior to his current work he has worked in several positions in the Academia and software industry. His publications are in the field of strategy, internationalization, entrepreneurship, and high technology.His earlier research has been published in prestigious journals such as *Journal of Business Research, Telecommunications Policy, IEEE Communications Magazine, and IEEE Wireless Communications Magazine, among others.*

Dr. Lauri Haapanen is Assistant Professor of International Business at the Oulu Business School, Finland. He has more than 20 years of international management experience, including CEO, COO, CFO, and board memberships in fast-growing firms from start-ups to multinational firms. His main research interests reside in firm key functions and digital marketing. In particular, he has been studying how the interplay between R&D, sales & marketing, and top management influences SMEs' international expansion, cross-border mergers and acquisitions, and MNEs' performance at international markets.

Dr. **Ismail Gölgeci** is an Associate Professor at Aarhus University, Herning, Denmark. Hisresearch has been published in *Journal of International Business Studies, Human Relations, International Journal of Operations & Production Management, Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Business Research, International Business Review, International Small Business Journal, International Marketing Review, Supply Chain Management: An International Journal, Production Planning & Control, Journal of Knowledge Management, International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management, Scandinavian Journal of Management, Technology Analysis & Strategic Management, Journal of Purchasing and Supply*

Management, and amongst others. He is an editorial review board member of *Journal of Business Research and Review of International Business and Strategy and guest editor at Industrial Marketing Management and European Journal of Marketing*. He is also senior associate editor of *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Managemen*t.

Professor Shlomo Y. Tarba is the Chair (Full Professor) and the former Head of Department of Strategy and International Business at the Business School, University of Birmingham, UK. Prof. Tarba is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. He is an Associate Editor of *Human Resource Management Review and Journal of Product Innovation Management*. He has served as a Guest-Editor for the special issues at *Journal of Organizational Behavior (US, Wiley), Human Resource Management (US), California Management Review, Journal of Product Innovation Management, International Business Review, and Management International Review*. His research interests include cross-border mergers and acquisition resilience, agility, and organizational ambidexterity. Prof. Tarba's research papers are published/forthcoming in journals, such as *Journal of Management (SAGE), Long Range Planning, Academy of Management Perspectives, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Human Relations, Human Resource Management (US, Wiley), British Journal of Management, Journal of Product Innovation Management, Journal of World Business, Management International Review, International Business Review, Journal of Corporate Finance, International Journal of Production & Economics*, and others.

Dr. **Ofra Bazel-Shoham** is an assistant professor and academic director PMBA at the Fox School of Business. She holds a doctorate and an MS from Temple University and an LL.M from Bar-Ilan University. Her research focuses on gender in the business environment. She published in the *Journal of World Business, Long Range Planning*, and awarded the best paper at the 2018 Engaged Management Scholarship Conference. Her research is motivated by fifteen years of management experience in a male-dominated environment.