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Meaning, Mission, and Measurement: How Organizational Performance Measurement Shapes Perceptions of Work as Worthy

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MEANING, MISSION, AND MEASUREMENT: HOW ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SHAPES PERCEPTIONS OF WORK AS WORTHY

ABSTRACT

A compelling organizational mission can contribute to employees' sense of work as worthy and thereby meaningful. Yet realizing this potential depends on whether and how the mission is conveyed to employees and connected to their day-to-day work, with organizational performance measurement practices playing a critical but poorly understood role. To develop empirically grounded insights into how measurement practices shape individuals' perceptions of work as worthy, we leverage a qualitative, inductive study of two UK social enterprises. We find that employees' encounters with measurement practices both affirm and challenge perceptions of work as worthy by influencing whether employees can accomplish their work tasks, see the impact of their work, and have a credible and valued voice in their interpersonal interactions. Building on these findings, we develop a model that theorizes practical, existential, and relational pathways through which measurement encounters create ongoing expansions and contractions of work worthiness. Taken together, our findings and model broaden understandings of the sources and processes of meaningful work, develop a dynamic conception of meaningfulness, and point toward a more agentic view of organizational performance measurement processes.

Individuals increasingly seek work that provides a sense of worth and is thereby meaningful (Feintzeig, 2015; Kelly Global Workforce Index, 2009; Malesic, 2021). While perceptions of work worthiness may come from many sources (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017), a compelling organizational mission offers particular potential as it can inspire people to feel that they are contributing to a valued collective goal (Barnard, 1938; Besharov & Khurana, 2015; Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2004). This may be especially likely when an organization's mission invokes a higher purpose beyond profits, such as reducing economic inequality, promoting environmental sustainability, or improving public health (Kouamé, Hafsi, Oliver, & Langley, forthcoming; Minkoff & Powell, 2006; Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). Individuals are attracted to such organizations and often join them because they share the same goals and values (Besharov, 2014; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Turban & Greening, 1997), creating the potential for experiencing work as worthy.

Whether and how this potential is realized depends on organizational practices for communicating the mission and linking it with employees' day-to-day work (Carton, 2018). Much prior research has shown how sensegiving and sensemaking practices involving leaders and co-workers can contribute to perceptions of work worthiness (e.g., Pratt, 2000; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003), and some recent studies highlight the role of leadership practices that foster emotional energy and interaction rituals around a shared mission (Lepisto, forthcoming). Yet formalized and standardized practices, such as those involved in organizational performance measurement, may also be critical. In recent years, measurement tools such as financial or social return on investment, cost-benefit ratios, key performance indicators, and case studies have become widespread in non-profit as well as for-profit organizations (Barman, 2007; Bromley & Powell, 2012; Ebrahim, 2019; Koufteros, Verghese, & Lucianetti, 2014; Power, 2021). Such tools can serve to convey an organization's mission to employees (Chenhall, Hall, & Smith, 2017; Micheli & Manzoni, 2010; Simons, 1994) and connect individuals' behaviors with organizational outcomes (Denisi & Smith, 2014), suggesting they could play a role in fostering positive perceptions of work's worth. However, performance measurement practices can also generate anxiety and other negative experiences for employees (e.g., Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Hallett, 2010; Townley, 2002), implying they might undermine rather than contribute to perceptions of work's worth.

To develop an empirically grounded explanation of how performance measurement practices shape perceptions of work as worthy, we leverage a qualitative, inductive study of two social enterprises in the United Kingdom: Youth Futures (YF), which seeks to reduce homelessness and poverty by helping at-risk youth become economically independent, and Organic Earth (OE), which pursues health and environmental sustainability by promoting organic growing.[1] We find that employees' experiences in day-to-day encounters with measurement practices – i.e., how they felt and reacted when they engaged with measurement tools in the context of their work and interpersonal interactions – serve to challenge and affirm work worthiness through three pathways. First, measurement encounters influence whether employees can accomplish their work tasks, creating practical challenges to work worthiness when they interfere with their work tasks and offering practical affirmation of work worthiness when they enable employees to gain traction on work tasks and make progress toward the mission. Second, measurement encounters influence whether employees can see the impact of their work, creating existential challenges to work worthiness when they miss the mark and fail to capture the organization's mission or progress toward it, and offering existential affirmation when they convey impact by providing evidence of human, social, or environmental transformations and the employee's contributions to these changes. Third, measurement encounters influence whether employees have a credible and valued voice in their interpersonal interactions, creating relational challenges to work worthiness when employees are excluded from or silenced in processes of designing, implementing, or using measurement tools, and offering relational affirmation when they are included and have an active role in such processes.

Building on these findings, we develop a model that theorizes mechanisms through which perceptions of work worthiness continually contract and expand as measurement encounters create practical, existential, and relational challenges and affirmations. By showing how the poetics of meaningfulness can be grounded in the precision of measurement, and the precision of measurement can enable the poetic search for meaning, our model unpacks and explains interdependencies between expressive and instrumental aspects of organizational life that are

[1] For confidentiality reasons, organization names have been anonymized.

often treated as separate, distinct, and even incompatible in much contemporary organizational research (cf., Besharov & Khurana, 2015; March & Weil, 2005; Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019). In doing so, our model broadens understandings of the sources and processes of meaningful work (cf., Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010), develops a dynamic conception of meaningfulness (cf., Jiang, 2021; Shepherd, Maitlis, Parida, Wincent, & Lawrence, forthcoming), and points toward a more agentic view of organizational performance measurement (cf., Beer & Micheli, 2018; Hall, Millo, & Barman, 2015).

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Meaningful Work

The term "meaningful work" refers to work that is experienced as especially significant and has a strong positive valence (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Organizational research has primarily focused on meaningfulness that involves self-actualization (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). This form of meaningfulness comes from being able to fully realize one's self through work, as when tasks and roles are intrinsically motivating (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Shamir, 1991) or allow an individual to pursue an all-consuming passion or deeply held interest (Dobrow, 2013; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). Organizations can facilitate self-actualization by structuring jobs to draw on a variety of skills, allow employees to complete a whole task rather than just part of it, and involve tasks that impact others, thereby creating more rewarding, enriching, and intrinsically motivating work (Grant, 2007; Grant & Parker, 2009; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Individuals can also enhance self-actualization through "job crafting", as they alter their work tasks, relationships, or perceptions and cognitions so as to make their jobs more engaging and rewarding (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

While many contemporary organizational scholars understand meaningful work to involve self-actualization, others have long recognized that work meaningfulness can also be based on the perceived worth and value of one's work (Barnard, 1938; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; see also Podolny et al., 2004; Selznick, 1957; Thompson & Bunderson, 2019; Weber, 1930). For example, individuals may experience their work as fulfilling a moral or religious duty (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) or as contributing to personally or socially valued goals (Besharov, 2014; Jiang, 2021). Our study focuses on this form of meaningful work, which we refer to as "worthy work", "work worthiness", or "perceptions of work as worthy". Finding worthy work is increasingly important as as other sources of worth, such as religion and family, fracture and decline in many contemporary societies. Yet doing so is challenging, because work worthiness is not pre-determined by the nature of one's tasks nor by broader social structures. As Lepisto and Pratt emphasize, "[worth] is 'up for grabs' and must be interpreted and constructed" (2017: 108). Moreover, maintaining worthy work requires ongoing effort, as personal circumstances (Maitlis, 2020; Shepherd et al., forthcoming) and work conditions (Jiang, 2021; Tosti-Kharas, 2012) continually shift and evolve.

In the face of these challenges, employees draw on a variety of sources to develop and sustain work worthiness. Sociologists of culture highlight the role of broader cultural norms (e.g., Lamont, 1992, 2009; Wuthnow, 1998), while organizational behavior scholars emphasize an individual's own values and identity (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017), the attitudes and behaviors of one's coworkers (Pratt, 2000; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003), the behavior of managers and leaders (Besharov, 2014; Besharov & Khurana, 2015; Carton, 2018; Lepisto, forthcoming; Podolny et al., 2004; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015), or formal organizational practices (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Individuals are drawn to work in organizations that align with their personal values and identity (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), and an organization's espoused mission and values serve as a signal of this potential (Besharov, 2014; Turban & Greening, 1997). Inside the organization, leaders can convey mission and values to employees (Besharov & Khurana, 2015; Podolny et al., 2004; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2015), explain how their day-to-day work connects with and contributes to these ultimate ends (Carton, 2018), and create opportunites for employees to interact and emotionally connect to develop a shared sense of meaningfulness (Lepisto, forthcoming). Moreover, organizational practices and social interactions play a central role in reinforcing or undermining messages from leaders (Besharov, 2014; Lepisto, forthcoming; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Taken as a whole, this research indicates that a compelling organizational mission may be especially conducive to fostering work worthiness, and that realizing this potential depends on whether and how the mission is translated and enacted within the organization.

Empirical investigations of how such translation and enactment occurs have focused on sensegiving, sensemaking, and interaction rituals among leaders and employees (e.g., Carton, 2018; Lepisto, forthcoming; Pratt, 2000; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Yet formal, standardized organizational practices also play a critical role in translating and enacting an organization's mission (Besharov, 2014; Besharov & Khurana, 2015) and may thereby shape perceptions of work's worth (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). As we explain in the next section, performance measurement practices may be particularly relevant.

Organizational Performance Measurement

Performance measurement practices involve formally collecting and analyzing data about organizational processes, activities, or groups of people, as well as communicating the resulting information using measurement instruments, which can range from highly standardized, quantitative performance indicators to context-specific, qualitative case studies (Chenhall, Hall, & Smith, 2017; Micheli & Mari, 2014). Historically, instruments for assessing organizational performance focused on financial and operational dimensions such as revenues, costs, efficiency, reliability and quality (Drucker, 1954; Kaplan & Norton, 1992; Taylor, 1914). More recently, organizations have started to adopt instruments for capturing social and environmental aspects of performance as well (Delmas, Etzion, & Nairn-Birch, 2013; Marquis & Qian, 2014).

Most empirical research on performance measurement practices focuses on their role in improving organizational and individual performance. At the organizational level, studies find that measurement practices can facilitate strategy implementation and alignment, innovation, learning, service improvement, and communication and coordination with stakeholders (Franco-Santos et al., 2012; Henri, 2006; Kolehmainen, 2010; Koufteros et al., 2014; Micheli & Manzoni, 2010). At the individual level, studies find positive effects of organizational measurement practices on performance through mechanisms of psychological empowerment, goal commitment, role clarity, job satisfaction, and perceptions of trust and justice (Burney, Henle, & Widener, 2009; Cheng, Luckett, & Mahama, 2007; Hall, 2008). In the context of organizations pursuing social and environmental missions, there is also evidence that measurement practices help social entrepreneurs to garner resources and establish legitimacy for their nascent ventures (Nicholls, 2009). Moreover, as such organizations grow and evolve, measurement practices can help leaders to maintain their strategic focus on both social impact and financial viability (Battilana, Pache, Sengul, & Model, 2015; Ebrahim, 2019; Smith & Besharov, 2019). For example, Seelos and Mair (2017) describe how leaders of the social enterprise Aravind, whose mission is to “eliminate needless blindness”, engage in extensive measurement of both processes and outcomes, using the information generated to improve the efficiency of its cataract surgery services and thereby serve greater numbers of poor people who would otherwise not have access to this critical treatment.

Although research on performance measurement practices has not directly examined meaningfulness, it offers support for the possibility that such practices may play a role in shaping work worthiness. First, some theoretical work argues that measurement instruments are not merely technical tools for assessing performance; they also serve to communicate – implicitly or explicitly – an organization's mission and values, whether those focus on social and environmental objectives, more financially oriented ones, or a combination of them (Chenhall et al., 2017; Micheli & Manzoni, 2010; Simons, 1994). Consistent with this argument, other studies suggest that organizations use measurement tools to convey the importance of particular aspects of their mission, as illustrated by firms' promotion of B Corp certification indicators to communicate their commitment to social and environmental causes (Gehman & Grimes, 2017; Grimes, Gehman, & Cao, 2018). Second, to the extent that measurement practices link organization-level performance information to individual-level performance appraisals (Schleicher et al., 2018), they can help employees to see connections between their behaviors and the organization's goals (Denisi & Smith, 2014; Power, 2021). For example, comprehensive performance measurement systems have been found to enable individual managers to clarify their own roles within the organization (Hall, 2008) and to better understand the contributions of their unit (Hall, 2011). While empirical studies have focused on how these outcomes contribute to improved individual, unit, and organizational performance, it is possible they may also help employees see their work as meaningful (e.g., Kubiak, 2020). In summary, consistent with classic organizational theorizing on the role of managerial practices in conveying culture, purpose and identity (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985; Schein, 2004; Selznick, 1957), research on measurement practices indicates they may play a powerful role in communicating organizational mission and values and helping employees to see how their day-to-day work connects with these. As such, measurement practices appear to have the potential to contribute to work worthiness.

Yet other studies suggest it is difficult to realize this potential. First, particularly in the context of organizations pursuing social and environmental missions, measurement practices often end up assessing internal activities and financial results rather than ultimate social outcomes and impacts – that is, they focus on “means” rather than “ends” (Bromley & Powell, 2012; Hwang & Powell, 2009). This, in turn, can lead to “mission drift” as measurement practices focus individuals’ attention on operational efficiency and revenue generation and organizations deviate from their original social or environmental goals (Grimes, Williams, & Zhao, 2019). External pressures and managerial demands can further compound this problem and encourage procedural compliance, gaming, and selective reporting (Townley, 2002). Thus, even if measurement practices can in theory capture an organization’s mission and values, in practice they may end up pulling an organization further away from its intended purpose. Second, there is some indication that employees’ subjective experiences of measurement practices are often quite negative. Studying a transitional housing organization, for example, Binder (2007) describes how performance indicators and other imposed managerial practices diminished individuals’ creativity and sense of agency. Other studies find that an emphasis on performance measurement can produce anxiety, obsession with hitting targets, and infighting, leading to “epistemic distress” and “turmoil” among employees (Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Hallett, 2010; Keevers et al., 2012). While not explicitly focused on meaningfulness, this research suggests that far from contributing to work worthiness, measurement practices may actually detract from it.

In summary, performance measurement practices can convey an organization’s mission and values to employees and might thereby help them to perceive their work as worthy. Yet these links remain tentative and poorly understood, and there is some indication that measurement practices impede rather than facilitate work worthiness. Thus, our study investigates the following research question: how do performance measurement practices shape employees' perceptions of work as worthy?

METHODS

We adopted a qualitative, inductive approach appropriate for understanding phenomena that are not well explained by existing research (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Because Youth Futures (YF) and Organic Earth (OE) have strong social and environmental missions and operate in an institutional context in which measurement practices are well-developed (HM Treasury, 2020; Nicholls, 2018), they offer "unusually revelatory" cases for this inquiry, allowing us to develop insights that would be less visible in other settings (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007: 27; Siggelkow, 2007). At the same time, the substantive content of their missions is quite different: YF provides immediate support to individuals who are in crisis, whereas OE promotes long-term changes in communities and the planet. In addition, YF makes more extensive use of formal measurement practices, potentially creating more challenges to work worthiness but also more opportunities for strengthening it. These differences enable us to develop an explanation that is robust to variation in the specific kinds of collective goals being pursued and the extent to which performance relative to these goals is formally measured (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011; O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006).

Youth Futures

Founded in 1972 and operating in the Midlands region of the UK, YF's mission is to reduce homelessness and poverty by helping at-risk youth become economically independent. To do so, YF offers accommodation and support services to 16-25 year-olds, helping them overcome mental health and behavioral challenges and move toward progressively more independent living.

At the time of data collection, YF employed 250 staff members and served approximately 4,500 young people per year, with annual revenues of over £8.5 million. Funding came primarily from the UK government, supplemented by private grants and rent from beneficiaries. Due to its contractual relationship with the government, YF was required to report on multiple aspects of its performance, including employee activities, beneficiary demographics, services provision, and outcomes, and had adopted formal measurement tools in nearly all aspects of its operations.

YF's services were delivered across 27 different accommodation buildings, termed "projects", located in mixed residential neighborhoods so as to facilitate beneficiaries' social integration in the local community. During their time at YF, beneficiaries moved from projects offering emergency shelter and full support to those providing semi-independent and ultimately independent living. Two interdependent direct service units – support and housing – worked to help beneficiaries make this transition. Support workers, who tended to have a social work background, provided emotional support and counselling, meeting individually with beneficiaries to develop a customized plan for addressing their many challenges. Housing workers were responsible for managing each beneficiary's rent, property, and tenancy, and focused primarily on holding beneficiaries accountable for their actions.

Organic Earth

OE was founded in 1958 by an organic gardening advocate with a mission to address issues of health and environmental sustainability by promoting organic growing. At the time of data collection, OE employed around 50 full-time staff and had 900 volunteers and approximately 40,000 active supporters around the UK. Annual revenues were £2.2 million. Similar to YF, OE's funding came primarily from UK and EU government entities as well as various private foundations and donors. Since the 1980s, OE has been based in a 22-acre property encompassing 10 acres of gardens, as well as a heritage seed library, gardening museum, "all-natural" café, training facility, and office buildings. In addition to programs run on its property, OE operated school-based and regional projects across the UK in order to extend the physical and mental wellbeing benefits of organic gardening to students, communities, and marginalized groups. Historically, OE relied mainly on informal means to assess organizational performance. In the few years prior to our study, however, OE had adopted some formal measurement practices to establish the legitimacy of its programs and demonstrate their impact.

Three programs were particularly important to OE's operations at the time of data collection. The longest running one, Compost Leader, was an internally designed education program that trained volunteers to disseminate organic gardening practices across the country. The second program, Eating Right, involved a consortium of government entities and gardening charities that worked with schools and communities to develop and deliver educational programs about food, health, and nutrition. The third program, Garden and Grow, used gardening as a means of helping young adults with developmental disabilities re-engage in education.

Data Collection

The first author gathered interview, observation, and archival data at YF and OE, including information on specific measurement tools, the ways in which employees engaged with them in a variety of contexts, and the kinds of experiences and reactions they had in these encounters. Table 1 summarizes the data gathered. Data collected at YF were also used as part of a separate study on how performance measurement tools influence stakeholders' understanding of organizational performance goals (Beer & Micheli, 2017). Throughout data collection, the first author wrote memos to capture emerging insights, which she regularly shared and discussed with the second and third authors. These researchers were familiar with the general empirical context and relevant academic literatures, yet sufficiently distant from the field to offer an outsider perspective that complemented the first author's deep insider understanding of employees' experiences with measurement practices.

------------ Insert Table 1 about here ------------

Interviews. The first author conducted 53 semi-structured interviews with board members, managers, frontline staff, and external stakeholders, each one lasting between 30 and 120 minutes with an average duration of 50 minutes. This included 33 interviews at YF with 31 unique individuals, and 20 at OE with 18 unique individuals. At each organization, interviews began with the senior manager(s) who served as the principal contact for the study (the Director of Operations at Youth Futures and the Director of Finance and Head of Finance at Organic Earth), followed by other members of the senior management team. We then used purposeful snowball sampling to identify additional participants. In particular, because we wanted to understand experiences of measurement practices from multiple vantage points within each organization, we sought out individuals from different hierarchical levels and functional and programmatic areas. This approach resulted in a higher proportion of interviewees to total employees at OE compared to YF due to the larger number of programs operated at OE and its smaller total employee population.[2] Questions covered topics such as work roles, values, and priorities; experiences with performance measurement practices in general; involvement in specific aspects of measurement (e.g., collecting and analyzing data, communicating and using information); and perceptions of and reactions to particular measurement instruments (see Appendix). We did not ask explicitly about meaningfulness or worth, as this was not our focus a priori; it emerged as we analyzed the data and engaged with the literature. All but four interviews were recorded and transcribed. For those that were not recorded, the first author took extensive

[2] We did not include volunteers in this study as they were only marginally involved in performance measurement.

notes and typed them up immediately afterwards. In the findings section, we refer to interviewees by their role and include a number to distinguish among multiple informants who occupy the same role.

Observation. In order to develop a more complete understanding of employees' experiences of measurement practices, the first author observed board members, managers, and frontline workers in their day-to-day activities (14 days at YF, 12 days at OE) and during formal meetings at which performance reports were (or had the potential to be) reviewed and discussed (15 at YF, 2 at OE).[3] At YF, she sat in on monthly management briefings, team meetings in individual housing projects, and partner meetings with representatives from local government agencies involved in serving homeless youth. At OE, she observed monthly senior management meetings and program activities involving staff and beneficiaries. She took extensive field notes during all observation periods and typed them up as soon as possible after each session so that they could be combined with the interview and archival data for systematic analysis using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

Archival data. We collected 86 internal documents related to performance measurement practices, including meeting minutes, newsletters, business plans, and all performance reports created during the data collection period. These documents served to provide additional detail on the structure and characteristics of the measurement instruments that employees described in the interviews and that the first author observed during her field work. They also enabled us to triangulate information from interviews and observations about the organizational and relational contexts in which employees encountered and used each instrument.

[3] OE rarely held formal performance meetings.

Data Analysis

All three authors worked collaboratively on data analysis, adopting established analytical techniques for developing grounded theory (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The initial purpose of the study was to explain how employees experience and use performance measurement instruments in their day-to-day work, particularly when measurement involves capturing complex and ambiguous phenomena such as social or environmental impact. We therefore started our analysis by drawing on the interview, observation, and archival data to write thick descriptions of each organization's measurement practices and the ways in which employees encountered and responded to them (Langley, 1999). As explained below, our focus on how these encounters challenged and affirmed employees' perceptions of work as worthy emerged as the analysis process unfolded.

The case descriptions surfaced two key insights that guided our subsequent approach to data analysis. First, as we compared and contrasted cases, we noted that the similarities in employees' experiences of measurement across the two organizations were much more profound than the differences. We therefore focused on unpacking these similarities to develop a common explanation that applied across both cases. Second, it was evident from the case descriptions that employees' experiences of measurement were grounded in day-to-day encounters they had with measurement tools in the course of their work activities and interpersonal interactions. For example, frontline employees sometimes directly interacted with beneficiaries during data collection, and both frontline and managerial employees discussed performance information in internal meetings with co-workers and in conversations with funders and other external stakeholders. This insight led us to focus on measurement encounters as the core unit of analysis.

In the second analytic stage, we engaged in open (first-order) coding and then axial (second-order) coding to systematically identify and analyze each measurement encounter (see

Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As an initial step, the first author compiled brief summaries and corresponding data excerpts for each encounter described in the interview and observation data, using the archival data as relevant to include information on the particular measurement instrument or setting. This resulted in a total of 184 encounter "cases", which we grouped by employee. All three authors then independently coded the data for a subset of the encounters, and we met as a group to compare and discuss our coding. It was at this point that our focus on meaningfulness emerged, as we found that what we had initially understood to be simply positive and negative experiences of measurement were in fact serving to affirm or challenge employees' perceptions of work as worthy. Therefore, the first author returned to the raw data to identify material that spoke to the meaning and value that employees derived from their work. All three authors then coded another subset of the encounters and the corresponding supplementary data on meaningfulness. Our aim was to characterize what each encounter entailed at the level of actions and interactions, how it was experienced by the employee, and how those experiences shaped the employee's perceptions of work as worthy.

As we reached consensus on our interpretations, we developed a relatively stable set of first- and second-order codes covering the core aspects of encounters, the different types of experiences employees had in them, and their implications for perceptions of work worthiness. The first author then coded the remaining encounters and supplementary data on meaningfulness using this coding scheme. All three authors met regularly to review the coding, discuss any differences in interperetation, and revise the coding scheme as needed. The data structure that emerged from this process is depicted in Figure 1. The first aggregate dimension captures core aspects of measurement encounters – the work activities themselves (e.g., frontline or managerial, client-facing or operational support), the measurement tools involved in these activities (e.g., SROI, Key Performance Indicators, Outcome Star), and the interpersonal interactions surrounding them (e.g., meeting with funders to discuss program outcomes, giving or receiving performance feedback or coaching). The remaining aggregate dimensions capture the three pathways through which experiences in measurement encounters challenged and affirmed work worthiness.

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In the third stage of analysis, we built on the second-order codes and aggregate dimensions represented in the data structure to develop a theoretical explanation of the process through which measurement encounters shape work worthiness. We selectively returned to the encounter data at this stage to check their fit with our emerging explanation, adapting our model as needed to ensure it remained faithful to the data. We also revisited research on meaningful work and performance measurement and sought feedback from experts in these areas, in order to ground our explanation in relevant concepts from the literature and identify areas where our model challenged or moved beyond existing research (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, we sought to ensure trustworthiness by establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Pratt, Kaplan, & Whittington, 2020; Shah & Corley, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, to establish credibility we triangulated across multiple data sources, engaged in peer debriefings by having all three authors independently discuss and seek feedback on emerging insights from colleagues, and conducted member checks by sharing our preliminary findings with informants in both organizations. Second, to establish transferability, we created detailed, thick descriptions to “show” the key concepts and relationships through our data and facilitate future comparisons with other contexts. Third, to establish dependability we engaged in “stepwise replication” with each author independently coding segments of the data and then meeting to discuss and compare our interpretations. Finally, to establish confirmability, we kept a detailed record of the interview protocol, raw data, field notes, interpretive memos, data summaries, coding tables, and notes on key data collection and analysis decisions.

FINDINGS

At both OE and YF, employees believed strongly in their organization's mission, creating the potential for finding a sense of worth from their work. YF's Senior Manager 3 explained:

> No one is coming to this kind of organization to just keep the organization going, it's about the young people. It's about what difference are we making to their lives and to really, you know, go towards this aim of ending youth homelessness.

Even employees who had not initially joined their organization because of the mission described it as a potential source of fulfillment. For example, OE's Senior Manager 7 acknowledged: "There is something about being here that makes you start to think 'what am I doing?' and 'how am I doing things?'." Employees also recognized that being able to connect their own work with the organization's mission was critical to finding the work meaningful. As YF's Senior Manager 2 noted:

> One of the things that we have as our principles to work by is the young people first. And I think if you could constantly revisit the fact that actually what you're doing, even if you don't have contact with young people, is to benefit a young person living in this organization, you're halfway there.

The role of performance measurement practices in shaping this potential for worthy work centered on "measurement encounters" – instances in which employees engaged with specific measurement tools in the context of their day-to-day work activities and interpersonal interactions. Our analysis surfaced three pathways through which measurement encounters challenged and affirmed work worthiness: a practical pathway involving the role of measurement encounters in enabling progress on work activities; an existential pathway involving the role of measurement encounters in conveying the impact of one's work; and a relational pathway involving the role of measurement encounters in giving employees a credible and valued voice in their interpersonal interactions. In the sections that follow, we first describe the key components of measurement encounters and then explain how these encounters served to challenge or affirm work worthiness along each pathway. For analytical clarity, we describe each pathway separately, but they were not mutually exclusive. Employees had multiple and varied experiences, sometimes with the same measurement instrument and at the same moment in time, implying ongoing challenges to and affirmations of work worthiness along all three pathways.

Measurement Encounters

At both OE and YF, employees across nearly all functions and levels came into contact with a variety of different measurement tools in the course of their work, ranging from KPIs that provide highly aggregated quantitative data to instruments that offer more disaggregated information at the level of individuals. These encounters occurred at various stages of the measurement process, from instrument design to data collection and analysis, review, and dissemination of information, and they frequently entailed interpersonal interactions with co-workers, managers, beneficiaries or outside stakeholders. We describe below the main measurement instruments used in each organization as well as the kinds of work activities and interpersonal interactions through which employees encountered these tools. Table 2 provides additional supporting details on the main measurement instruments in use.

------------ Insert Table 2 about here ------------

Encounters at OE centered primarily on five different instruments that the organization used to measure its overall performance and that of several key programs (see Table 2). Some of these instruments were mandated by external funders or the Board of Directors, others were selected by OE staff, and still others emerged from collaborative initiatives involving both OE staff and funders. First, the Board of Directors had created a set of Strategic KPIs that members of the senior management team were required to report on quarterly. These included indicators such as funds raised, press releases, cash reserves, volunteer hours, visitor levels, members recruited and retained, and monetary value of new projects. Managers gathered data from their units for the Strategic Priority KPIs and then discussed the indicators at monthly senior manager meetings and shared them with the board of trustees. Second, OE's managers had proactively chosen to adopt the Social Return on Investment (SROI) to assess program outcomes and accommodate perceived funder expectations for more standardized performance information. Drawing from stakeholder consultations, outcome maps, financial proxies, and other inputs, the SROI consists of a ratio intended to express an intervention's social value relative to its cost (Millar & Hall, 2013). Research staff were responsible for calculating the SROI for each program, but many other individuals were involved in the process, as research specialists gathered data from employees and beneficiaries on each program and the resulting information was discussed amongst managers and shared with current and potential funders.

The remaining measurement instruments were developed collaboratively between staff and funders to capture activities and outcomes for OE's three main programs. The Eating Right report took the form of a newsletter including both qualitative and quantitative data, while the Compost Leader report included the number of volunteer hours devoted to the project, as well as a sample of case studies describing volunteers' dissemination activities and assessing their service quality. The performance of Garden and Grow was reported through a monthly blog post. The manager of the program had collaborated with Senior Manager 1 and the program's funders to co-design this unusual reporting format, jointly settling on a set of performance indicators, observational notes, and photographs of participants that were reported via the blog. Across all three programs, employees engaged with beneficiaries to gather data, and later discussed the information generated in conversations with funders.

Similarly to OE, YF employees across multiple functional areas and levels encountered measurement practices in the course of their day-to-day work, these encounters occurred at various stages of the measurement process, and they involved a mix of externally mandated and internally selected measurement instruments. Five instruments figured most prominently in the encounters (see Table 2). First, the UK government required a set of KPIs detailing the number of beneficiaries who had accessed different types of services (e.g., volunteer opportunities, education and training, primary health care, social, leisure, and cultural activities), and who had completed their transition through YF's services – a stage called "move-on". We refer to these as the "Funder KPIs" to distinguish them from two internally designed sets of KPIs that managers used to assess performance of the two key units involved in direct delivery of YF's mission – Support and Housing. The Support KPIs captured the demographics of beneficiaries accessing, being admitted to, receiving, and "moving on" from YF's services, while the Housing KPIs summarized the number of move-ins, vacancy rates, room turnaround time, and rent collection. Frontline support and housing workers collected data for all three sets of KPIs. The information generated was discussed in regular internal meetings both within and across the housing and support units. Senior managers also discussed the Funder KPIs with outside stakeholders.

In addition to the three sets of KPIs, two other instruments figured prominently in measurement encounters: Case Studies and the Outcome Star. Managers in Support Services had developed the Case Studies as a way to gain richer information on the trajectories of individual beneficiaries and the ways in which YF staff helped them move toward independent living. To create a case study narrative, Support Services employees worked collaboratively with beneficiaries, with the latter often contributing some of the writing. These were then shared with managers, who used the narratives internally in coaching sessions with employees and externally in meetings with funders. The Outcome Star, developed by a consulting firm, captured a beneficiary's transformation along physical, mental, and emotional dimensions, with specific assessments of responsibility taken, self-care, living skills, budgeting skills, time management, and tenancy management. YF's Support Services unit had chosen to adopt this instrument as another means of capturing progress for individual beneficiaries. Frontline Support Services employees completed the Outcome Star on a monthly or weekly basis in one-on-one meetings with beneficiaries. Support Services employees met regularly to discuss information from both instruments, and they often brought this information into cross-unit meetings as well, as a means of supplementing the highly aggregated information provided by the KPIs.

Practical Pathway

By influencing whether employees could accomplish work activities, measurement encounters shaped perceptions of work as worthy along a "practical pathway". When measurement encounters interfered with work activities, this created practical challenges to work worthiness, as employees felt ineffective in making progress toward the mission. In contrast, when measurement encounters helped employees to gain traction on work activities, this offered practical affirmation of work worthiness by fostering a sense of accomplishment and efficacy. We describe each process below and provide additional representative data in Table 3.

------------ Insert Table 3 about here ------------

Interfering with work. Measurement encounters interfered with work when they involved extensive and seemingly mundane data collection and reporting tasks that employees found burdensome and wasteful. For example, Senior Manager 3 described OE's "onerous" funder reporting requirements as "a duplication of efforts" and "a complete waste of time and paper and everything else." At YF, staff emphasized that the administrative burden of measurement had increased significantly over time. The Housing Services Manager explained:

> When I started 11 years ago, our policies were on two A4 sheets of paper and color coded. There were no standard operating procedures. Now there is a folder that is this big [motions with hands the size of a meter]. Since [Funder X] introduced their assessment framework which pinpointed and benchmarked standards for the organization and the sector to achieve [we are expected to measure and report on a lot more things].

Other YF staff noted that funder requirements had also shifted to include not just reports on current performance but also revisions to historical reports. The Operations Manager, who coordinated internal data collection and performance reporting, explained that funders now requested up to six months of backdated performance information several times a year: "Within 12 months, the [funder KPIs] are out of date because they've changed their requirements and you've not got the information they need, and it's a bit of a roller coaster at times". Describing the current situation, the Housing Services Manager noted: "We get audited to death… You become a drone to paperwork."

Measurement encounters also interfered with work when the information generated from measurement tools did not help employees to make progress with work tasks or was not used for action, either because it was irrelevant or because it was ignored. At OE, for example, members of the senior management team noted that discussions of the Strategic KPIs in team meetings did not stimulate strategic thinking or guide action. Senior Manager 1 explained:

> [At SMT] we do talk about where we are at. I think we don't necessarily translate that into what we are going to do next, in terms of visioning the strategy, those sorts of things… which can be a bit frustrating at times, because it can feel like an information sharing rather than a Senior Management Meeting.

At YF, there were similar encounters involving one of the Housing KPIs, which measured the monetary value of beneficiaries' overdue rent. Senior managers acknowledged that this KPI was important for understanding the organization's financial position and for assessing whether beneficiaries were learning to effectively manage their economic obligations. Yet it had been consistently 'red' (i.e., underperforming) the entire length of time it had been used. Even though senior managers regularly reviewed performance information at monthly manager meetings, no action was taken to address the problem. As Senior Manager 5 explained:

> The rent collection now is at £700,000 + in arrears. Well, at what point are we going to get started doing something? … I think everyone is so complacent because it's been so bad for so long and nobody will really do anything.

When measurement encounters interfered with work, this created a practical challenge to work worthiness, as employees felt ineffective and unable to accomplish activities that they personally valued and that contributed to accomplishing their organization's mission. OE's Researcher explained the risks as follows:

> I think in a charity you have to think that you need to positively motivate people, and if you have too many performance indicators, that doesn't happen. Motivation is really key for us, because we don't pay as highly. People work here, they say 'Well I am paid less, but my job is good, I can do what I want'. This kind of freedom, degrees of freedom, is really important for us, and if we would over performance monitor those things, I think there would be risk for us to lose the motivation of the staff.

Consistent with this concern, employees in both organizations described feeling mentally "exhausted" due to "the amount of effort and the amount of repetition you have to go through in order to make small gains" (Housing Worker 1, YF) and found themselves asking, "What's the point of it all?" (Senior Manager 5, OE).

Providing traction. In constrast, when measurement encounters "provided traction" by helping employees to make progress on work activities, this served to affirm perceptions of work as worthy. Providing traction occurred when employees used measurement tools to plan, understand, focus, or collaborate with others on their work activities. At OE, managers at multiple levels described using KPIs to guide others' behavior toward organizational goals. Comparing his job to conducting an orchestra, for example, Senior Manager 6 at OE explained how the KPIs helped him to “make sure that everybody [in the organization] is playing their appropriate part to achieve the symphony of sound at the end”. Similarly, OE’s Compost Leader Manager described how the Strategic KPIs for which he was responsible helped him to understand and guide the behavior of program volunteers:

> The [performance] information is key to really seeing how we move forward... If there’s a low amount of hours recorded, we might consider recruiting a new group of volunteers. Also, we’re able to see where people are spending their hours volunteering. People promote home composting in different ways which are all great, but if they want to go to more events and we’re not putting on enough events for them, then we might consider trying to find more.

At YF, providing traction was especially evident in support workers’ use of the Outcome Star during monthly meetings with individual beneficiaries. In these encounters, employees found that the very process of engaging with beneficiaries to collect the required data facilitated their progress toward independent living. Support Worker 4 explained: “They might ask, ‘Why am I a number 2 [in Budgeting]? I should be number 7’. We probably tell them why they are a number 2 [lists reasons, laughing]... Then they realize, ‘Oh, you’re right’ and they will start to improve”. YF’s support and housing workers also experienced gaining traction in encounters with one another around their departmental KPIs. These encounters were notable because members of each group held divergent views about what was most important for accomplishing YF’s mission. While support workers emphasized counselling young people and addressing their socio-emotional needs, housing workers focused on holding them accountable for paying rent and taking care of their property. Housing staff members even went so far as to describe support workers as being “on another planet”. Yet every two weeks, staff from both departments held joint Case Review Meetings where they discussed the Support and Housing KPIs in relation to each young person. These meetings allowed employees to articulate their views on what was most important for supporting beneficiaries and, equally important, to hear alternative perspectives and gather additional contextual information from members of the other department.

The meetings gave support staff "more confidence" in being able to help beneficiaries, as "you will know what is going on with their situation… and then you might be able to offer advice and support" (Support Worker 3). Likewise, housing workers noted how the meetings helped them identify clear next steps to support beneficiaries: "I'm finding [the Case Review Meetings] more and more helpful because I can then take actions away from that," Housing Worker 1 explained.

When measurement encounters provided traction, this offered practical affirmation of work's worth, as employees felt a sense of accomplishment and efficacy from being able to make progress toward a valued end goal. This was evident at YF, for example, in Senior Manager 5's reaction to an initiative in which she worked with her team to reduce eviction rates by using information in the Housing KPIs. Given that beneficiaries were almost always on the verge of a crisis and very slow to change habits, they often did not meet basic expectations such as paying rent on time and were sometimes evicted as a result. When the Housing KPIs showed a concerning increase in eviction rates, Senior Manager 5 worked with frontline housing workers to investigate whether this was due to genuine lack of progress by beneficiaries or instead to insufficient support from the organization. The team identified the use of temporary staff during night shifts as the source of the problem: different staff might be sent each night, creating inconsistency for beneficiaries. When she discontinued the use of temporary staff, "the antisocial behaviour" and rate of evictions declined significantly. The sense of accomplishment that came from making progress was clear: "We went within the year from red [underperforming] to green [meeting targets], one hundred percent! I was thrilled."

Existential Pathway

By influencing whether employees could see the impact of their work, measurement encounters shaped work worthiness along an "existential pathway". When measurement encounters "missed the mark" by not capturing mission-related outcomes or the employee's role in enabling them, they created existential challenges to work worthiness as employees felt uncertain about their contributions and impact. In contrast, when measurement encounters provided evidence of progress toward the mission and the employee's role in making such progress, thereby "conveying impact", they offered existential affirmation of work worthiness as employees felt proud of themselves and their organizations. We explain these processes below and provide additional representative data in Table 4.

------------ Insert Table 4 about here ------------

Missing the mark. Measurement encounters missed the mark when they did not capture the human, social, or environmental changes that were core to the organization's mission, the process through which these changes were accomplished, or the focal employee's contributions to these changes. At OE, for example, it was not always clear whether and how the varied educational programs on offer contributed to improvements in human behavior at the community, national, or global level, as these could take years to materialize and were influenced by a host of factors well beyond OE's control. In this respect, OE's goals were like "a bit of a wobbly jelly that we can't quite grab a hold of" (Senior Manager 7). Senior Manager 4 explained the difficulties this created for measuring impact:

> At the end of the day, we are not here to employ lots of people, or to run a profitable business. We are here to change people – and that is the most difficult to monitor… I think that's where the difficulty lies: the organization as a whole, what impact does that have?... I think we have quite business-like targets, or KPIs. I mean the ultimate measure for us [would be]: to what extent do we influence people in the UK and wider to adopt organic growing? That is our ultimate target. You could say that everything we do should ultimately move on to change the world to being organic. Now, we don't measure that, and we have never found a good way of measuring that.

Encounters that "missed the mark" were even more pronounced at YF. Helping at-risk youth become economically independent required addressing a host of deep-rooted and interdependent social and emotional issues that could not be easily measured or quickly resolved. When beneficiaries arrived at YF they were often "so far removed from being ready for work…

they're not even able to get up in the morning and function as a member of society, let alone hold a full-time job down" (Fundraising Manager). As staff sought to help these young people transform their lives, they confronted numerous "vulnerabilities" (Youth Activities Coordinator 1) including past traumas, anger, psychotic episodes, and other mental disorders as well as drug addictions and suicidal tendencies. In this context, frontline workers and managers alike struggled to see how some of YF's measurement instruments, particularly indicators that focused on "how many young people we've got into work", could adequately capture the ways in which staff were having an impact and contributing to the mission. Referencing the Support KPIs, for example, the Fundraising Manager explained that the instrument did not allow them to convey the aspects of their work that were critical to helping beneficiaries become independent:

> So, this many people came to us not engaged in education, and they've left being this engaged in education. And to me, [that KPI] doesn't measure anything, because it's the tiny little steps that they do that is the impact of our jobs. Yet that is what we're measured on, how many people and how many not.

Senior Manager 3 questioned: "What are we actually doing that's still making a real difference to young, vulnerable people? That's just about what's really making a difference and doing something brilliant in society, rather than what's ticking a box for our funding?"

Missing the mark created existential challenges to work worthiness, as it led employees to question the value of their work and, by extension, of their selves. While positive changes might be happening, when measurement encounters failed to capture and convey these changes, employees felt uncertain of their contributions and impact. OE's Senior Manager 7 commented:

> I think the world is becoming more aware of… I'm not sure if the word is organic, but certainly natural and environmental, and sustainable and all those sorts of words. But how much of that is because of what we are doing as opposed to everything that is happening?

Taking these doubts a step further, YF's Placement Officer 2 questioned the meaning of success and whether it was even possible to achieve and measure:

> We are very good at finding places for people to live [but]… this thing about success is very difficult, isn't it? Now, what is success? Is it someone finding somewhere to live? Is it someone finding somewhere to live that keeps it for six months? Is it someone kept somewhere for six months, and while they are doing that, they are getting the right support, the right employment and training? We haven't actually got the capacity to do those kinds of follow-ups.

Conveying impact. In contrast to encounters that missed the mark, measurement encounters that "conveyed impact" offered existential affirmation of work's worth. Conveying impact occurred when measurement encounters provided powerful and genuine representations of the magnitude of human, social, or environmental changes, the processes involved in these changes, and employees' contributions to them. At OE, for example, Senior Manager 4 described with pride some of the health and well-being outcome measures that the organization had proactively adopted to meet funder demands:

> "We [measure impact] by monitoring behavioural change amongst participants of those schemes… If we are talking about the good work we do, and as a charity we are here to have an impact on peoples' behaviour in relation to growing, that provides very useful information."

Senior Manager 5 similarly highlighted how project-specific outcome measures captured the "fundamental things" that conveyed impact:

> "I mean, that's where you get into these measures of things like the Compost Leader, what sort of long-term impact they have on the people that they mentor in terms of their behaviours, in terms of the type and the amount of fruit and veg that they eat, and do they garden at home as a result of [participation]? Do they have a more productive garden at home as a result and all these sorts of things? Those are really the sort of fundamental things."

As the encounters from YF indicate, conveying impact could involve a variety of different instruments. For example, Youth Activities Coordinator 2 described how the portfolios that provided visual, written, or audio-recorded evidence of beneficiaries' educational attainment powerfully conveyed the impact of her work: "One of the best parts of my job is when the folders start coming in… Staff put lots of different photographs in so you can really see how the work has been done, and what has come back at the end, the result." While this encounter involved in-depth, qualitative information on positive changes in individuals, other instances of conveying impact involved instruments that showed the scale of changes across an entire program or the organization as a whole. For example, YF's Senior Manager 3 described how powerful it was to see performance reports from the LIFT project, which focused on the most vulnerable, hard-to-reach beneficiaries:

> Because of the level I am in the organization, I've got a lot of exposure to some of the reports… [I get to see] all the fabulous stuff – like the LIFT Project. [Seeing the reports] helps…just in terms of general goodwill for the business and feeling that you're in a really great place.

When measurement encounters conveyed impact, employees had tangible evidence of their own and their organization's contributions, enabling them to feel proud of who they were as individuals and as organizational members. In this way, conveying impact offered existential affirmation of work's worth. At OE, for example, the Garden and Grow Manager explained that she was "dancing inside" when collecting and preparing information for the funder blog as it allowed her to see positive beneficiary changes such as an increased ownership of the gardens:

> I could write pages and pages about everything that we're doing and everything that we're enjoying like the nutes in the pond and elderflower cordial and all the plants that we've done and the first peas that we've eaten…It makes me happy and it makes them happy.

This opportunity to reflect on and record beneficiary progress through the blog gave her a direct indication of work's worth: "[It's] just incredibly rewarding for me, because I can see them all really starting to take ownership over the space."

The existential affirmation that conveying impact provided was especially important at YF given the organization's challenging working conditions. Youth Activities Coordinator 1, for example, recalled "a life-threatening situation" in which an employee was "attacked by young people". During one of the interviews that the first author conducted with a support worker, a youth for whom she was responsible was restrained and arrested in the middle of the interview, requiring her urgent attention, while the parent of another youth called with a mundane question about some of their child's possessions and refused to get off the phone. In this context, being able to see the impact of one's work helped to shift attention and emotions away from the stress, frustration, and often overwhelming day-to-day demands. For example, the Placement Services Manager described how it felt to look at her program's KPIs with colleagues:

> We could be all stressed and all frustrated, but then when we talk about, 'During this period we have had x amount of young people referred, x amount have come, x amount were roofless, x were planned…' You start to understand the busy-ness and quantify that busy-ness… When you say, 'Well that amounts to 200 young people', everyone is like 'Ohhh'.

Relational Pathway

By influencing whether employees had a credible and valued voice in their interpersonal interactions, measurement encounters shaped work worthiness along a "relational pathway". When measurement encounters silenced employees by monitoring and evaluating performance without providing opportunities for input, this created relational challenges to work worthiness, as employees did not feel respected and valued by others. In contrast, when measurement encounters gave employees voice by including them in the design, implementation, and active use of measurement tools, this offered relational affirmation of work worthiness. We describe these processes below and provide additional representative data in Table 5.

------------ Insert Table 5 about here ------------

Silencing. Silencing occurred when measurement encounters involved tools that were designed and implemented without employee involvement or when interaction partners used information from measurement tools to monitor and critically evaluate the focal employee's behavior and outcomes for which they were responsible without providing opportunities for input. This experience was quite rare in our data from OE. Only Senior Manager 2 described an encounter where she felt silenced, which involved her interactions with other senior managers and the board around the Strategic Priority KPIs. Senior Manager 2 was responsible for the membership KPI, yet because other departments played a role in recruiting and retaining members, she sought to engage her colleagues on the senior management team in meeting the membership target. They were unresponsive to her efforts, however, and ultimately she was held accountable for this target by the board of directors, without her concerns being incorporated or addressed. She described with frustration the experience of not being heard or having her perspective incorporated:

> [It is] an ongoing struggle to try and get it across the whole organization that bringing in new members and keeping members is the responsibility of everyone, because there will be all sorts of opportunities with projects in which they could say 'We're going out and talking to these families, and when we finish talking to these families we should be trying to get them to join.'

Silencing was more widespread in the data from YF. One reason may be the extensive safeguards and regulations that YF had to follow due to the nature of the beneficiaries they served, which led to the adoption and use of some measurement tools that allowed only very limited opportunities for employees participation and input. For example, lower level employees described how managers and funders used the various KPIs to monitor and critically evaluate their work. Placement Officer 2 explained:

> There is a sense of self-preservation going on in the work that we do… On the one hand it is making sure that people get the service… and on the other hand it is: I don't want to be left holding the baby if something goes wrong here…We have to justify ourselves, there is no two ways about it. All of these targets and reports are in some way justifying our existence.

YF's senior managers also had encounters in which their interaction partners used performance information to monitor their work outcomes without engaging them in a discussion about the process that contributed to these outcomes. For example, Senior Manager 6 described interacting with funders around KPIs:

> Funders tend to demand a lot of things; you're not really sure what they do with it, but they do demand a lot from you [in regards to measurement]…You may get [a young person] into work, which is fantastic, but then they don't sustain it for the length of time required… something happened in their life and they gave up the job, or it didn't suit

> them in the end or something. You have done an awful lot of work with that person to get them to that stage, but that's not recognized; it's only that particular outcome [of sustained employment that matters for funders].

As this quotation suggests, not only did Senior Manager 6 feel monitored, but she also felt this was being done with a tool that failed to capture the impact of YF's work – illustrating the experience of missing the mark. Morover, she went on to characterize the KPIs as an administrative burden to be avoided, suggesting the experience of interfering with work as well:

> [Doing anything with the Funder KPIs] becomes a bit of a Cinderella activity and I don't always prioritize it. When I look at my diary and I've got meetings left, right, and center, actually sitting down and analyzing your [Funder KPIs], it kind of gets left.

Silencing created a relational challenge to work worthiness, as employees did not feel respected or valued by their interaction partners. For example, Support Worker 5 bluntly told us that she "hate[d] going to" meet with one of YF's funders because of the suspicion and mistrust she felt in these interactions. Similarly, YF's Fundraising Manager described the contrast between senior managers' public celebration of YF's outcomes in reports to outside stakeholders and the absence of internal acknowledgements of staff: "We feel that it looks good to say externally we do all this stuff for young people around education [and] employment, but do you really? Do you really value it as much as you shout about out there, because you don't shout about it in here very much."

Giving voice. In contrast to silencing, when measurement encounters gave employees voice in their interpersonal interactions, this offered relational affirmation of work's worth. Giving voice occurred when measurement tools were designed and implemented with employee involvement and when performance information was discussed collaboratively, such that employees felt heard and were able to influence others' behavior in the measurement process.

At OE, encounters that gave employees voice were particularly evident amongst employees who had to communicate OE's purpose, potential, and impact to external stakeholders in order to obtain and maintain funding. Fundraiser 2 noted that claims about making a difference were increasingly met with skepticism, due to declining public trust in charitable organizations: "I think sometimes people are worried about commissioning the third sector because they may not see us as stable." In this context, using externally validated measurement tools provided employees with a powerful voice in interactions with funders. For example, Senior Manager 8 explained how the SROI "gives us more credibility of who we are and where we come from":

> We have just done our first SROI calculation, which was done externally for a project and that's coming in around 1:7… At the end of the contract or the end of two or three contracts, where somebody says, 'Why are we investing in this scheme? We have only got so much money, and it is either the walking scheme because that is good for health or a gardening scheme [because that one is good] for health'. So why would they invest in one over the other? Well, [with SROI, we can prove that] actually the gardening scheme is 1:7 SROI, the walking scheme is 1:4, so you are getting more bang for your bucks on the gardening.

These kinds of interactions were important for more than instrumental reasons; they conveyed to the employee that their work, and by extension their working selves, were valued by others. OE's Fundraiser 2 explained how she felt when interacting with funders to report on the organization's impact: "The credibility that comes with a university evaluation is massive… by having the evaluations I don't have to prove my integrity; it's done for me. Which is a massive thing".

At YF, giving voice was likewise evident in encounters involving external stakeholders, although it was not limited to these interactions. Describing her conversations with funders, for example, the Placement Services Manager explained that "they have listened to the [performance] information that we have given them over the years". She went on to recount her experience when YF decided to stop offering an additional support service for beneficiaries, and she was able to effectively convey this information to funders: "They don't question it, because they know: the trust is there and the respect is there, to know that if it was possible then it would be done." Giving voice was also evident in internal encounters amongst YF staff. For example, Placement Officer 1 described how her interactions around the Housing KPIs enabled her to gain trust and understanding from other staff. Part of her role involved managing the waitlist of beneficiaries seeking accommodation. She received many requests from staff and beneficiaries about their preferred placements, but accommodating these could jeopardize YF's commitment to fairly meeting the needs of other vulnerable people requiring assistance. She explained: "It's a very challenging role because I have to deal with different projects, different personalities, different objectives." In this context, the KPIs helped her to influence others by setting boundaries and limits on efforts to circumvent the standard allocation process: "I've set up all these systems to help me to collect, to produce, to report on what has occurred. Without that it would be impossible". Importantly, she not only used the KPIs to make decisions herself, she also discussed them regularly at the Housing Management meeting. Over time, these conversations had enabled her to gain the respect of other staff about the importance of being transparent and fair with regard to the waitlist: "My relationship with housing management has improved," she noted, explaining that staff were now much less likely to try to circumvent the process and would even urge their colleagues to use the waitlist to place beneficiaries: "They have more confidence [in me]… That's music to my ears."

Giving voice offered relational affirmation of work worthiness, as employees felt respected and valued by their interaction partners, where respect refers to the "worth accorded to one person by one or more others" (Spears, Ellemers, Doosje, & Branscombe, 2006: 179). For example, YF's Fundraising Manager described the collaborative approach that had emerged in her interactions with funders to develop performance indicators for the projects they supported:

> We have meetings, we do a lot of planning, we do a lot of checking. So, if the external provider writes the agenda, we've got to feed into it, or if we write it, we have them feed in, so it is a bit more collaborative than it used to be… I think sometimes you had that feeling of [something] being done to [you], but now we try to do it so that we are like a

> team, so the [YF] staff that are in the session and the outside organizations, we are just one collective team for that day.

Her account highlights the shift from "that feeling of [something] being done to [her]" toward a sense of being included, respected, and valued by funders, such that "we are like a team… just one collective team". Other employees described how important it was to them, personally, to have these kinds of relationships. YF's Operations Manager noted: "The people I have to report [performance information] to, I have a very good relationship. And I've worked really hard to get that and sustain it. That's important, very important to me."

DISCUSSION

Building on our findings and integrating them with extant research, we propose a model depicting how measurement encounters create ongoing expansions and contractions of work worthiness (see Figure 2). In focusing on measurement encounters, our model is consistent with research emphasizing that the implications of organizational practices and tools cannot be understood without taking into account the social and organizational situations in which individuals encounter them (Leonardi, Bailey, & Pierce, 2019; Mutch, 2013). In our context, measurement encounters involve three key components – measurement tools, employees' work activities, and their interpersonal interactions – represented in Figure 2 with three rectangular boxes connected by doubled-sided arrows. Consistent with phenomenological approaches in organization studies (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Gill, 2014; Sandberg & Pinnington, 2009), our model focuses on employees' experiences in these encounters and theorizes mechanisms through which these experiences serve to challenge or affirm work worthiness. As depicted in Figure 2 by the pairs of wide, shaded arrows, this process unfolds along three pathways, each one related to a particular component of the measurement encounter.

------------ Insert Figure 2 about here-----------

The practical pathway centers on the role of measurement encounters in enabling employees to accomplish work activities, and we therefore depict it as emanating from the work activities component in Figure 2. Our data indicate that measurement encounters interfere with work activities when the data collection process is burdensome, when information from measurement tools is not relevant for work activities, or when this information cannot be used to make decisions and take action. We theorize that this experience creates a practical challenge to work worthiness by reducing self-efficacy and impeding goal achievement (Bandura, 1982; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). In our data, this manifested in feelings of being ineffective and unable to accomplish one's work goals. In contrast, encounters provide traction when employees are able to use measurement tools for planning activities, understanding problems or challenges, or making decisions about allocating resources or time. We theorize that this experience offers practical affirmation of work's worth by enabling employees to learn, make progress, and ultimately have an impact on something that they value (Grant, 2008a; Rosso et al., 2010; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). In our data, this was evident in employees' sense of accomplishment for achieving work goals.

The existential pathway involves the role of measurement encounters in enabling employees to see the impact of their work. In Figure 2, we depict this pathway as emanating from the measurement tools component because it centers on whether and how the tools themselves convey impact within an encounter. Measurement encounters miss the mark when information from measurement tools is not relevant for assessing the organization's mission or progress toward it, or when it does not show the employee's contributions to the mission. Missions that involve complex human, social, or environmental changes, as in our case organizations, are especially difficult to measure, and instruments often focus on interim activities instead, creating "means-ends decoupling" (Bromley & Powell, 2012). While past research has focused on the institutional and organizational factors that contribute to means-ends decoupling (Dick, 2015; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Wijen, 2014), our model captures employees' experience of this phenomenon. We theorize that missing the mark creates an existential challenge to work worthiness, as employees have feelings of uncertainty about the contributions and impact they have through their work. In contrast, measurement encounters enable employees to see impact when the measurement tools involved in the encounter provide evidence of mission accomplishment, offer information about interim progress, or show the employee's contribution toward the mission. We theorize that the experience of seeing impact provides an indication of the employee's and the organization's value, similarly to the way in which leader sensegiving helps employees see the connection between their day-to-day work and the organization's mission (Besharov & Khurana, 2015; Carton, 2018) and contact with beneficiaries allows employees to see the impact of their work on others (Grant, 2008b). We refer to this as an existential affirmation of work worthiness because it centers on the worth of the self-at-work.

Finally, the relational pathway centers on the role of measurement encounters in giving employees a credible and valued voice in their interpersonal interactions, and we therefore depict it as emanating from the interpersonal interactions component in Figure 2. When employees gather and report performance information and are assessed and evaluated on it without opportunities for dialogue or input, they feel silenced in measurement encounters. We theorize that this creates a relational challenge to work worthiness because employees feel disrespected by others and their basic needs for competency, relatedness, and autonomy are not fulfilled (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). In contrast, when employees are involved, included, heard, and able to influence others, they have voice in measurement encounters. We theorize that this experience fosters high-quality connections (Dutton, 2003; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011; Lee, Mazmanian, & Perlow, 2020) and allows employees to feel respected and validated by others for their work (Carmeli, Dutton, & Hardin, 2015; Rogers, Corley, & Ashforth, 2017). We refer to this as a relational affirmation of work worthiness because it stems from one's relationships with others at work (see Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

While the practical, existential, and relational pathways in our model are analytically distinct, in practice they co-occur as employees have multiple encounters, sometimes simultaneously and/or with the same instrument. For some employees, experiences across multiple encounters may all be of the same valence, offering consistent affirmations of, or challenges to, work worthiness. For example, the manager of OE's Garden and Grow program had encounters that conveyed impact when assembling beneficiary portfolios for the blog used to report program performance, as we described above. Yet she also had encounters that provided traction, when she showed participants the blog report and observed how the evidence of their performance motivated them to further improve, and others that gave her voice, when she participated in discussions with funders about how to initially design the performance tool.

In many cases, though, individuals had a mix of positive and negative experiences across measurement encounters. At YF, for example, Youth Activities Coordinator 1 had encounters with the Support KPIs that involved missing the mark, as she found the KPIs too narrow to capture the impact of the programs her team offered. This created existential challenges to work worthiness, as she felt uncertain about her contributions and impact. Yet her encounters with the learning, skills, and work portfolios assembled by support workers and beneficiaries served to convey impact, thereby offering existential affirmation by enabling her to feel proud of her work and the organisation. Similarly, as shown in Table 5, YF's Fundraising Manager had some experiences that left her feeling disrespected and not valued for her work, creating relational challenges to work worthiness, and others that allowed her to feel respected and valued, offering relational affirmation. Building on these and other similar instances in our data, we theorize that employees experience ongoing practical, existential, and relational affirmations and challenges to worth. This implies a conception of work worthiness as continually expanding and contracting along the three pathways. In Figure 2, the outer and inner cloud-shaped boundaries capture this dynamic aspect of work worthiness.

Contributions and Theoretical Implications

By theorizing how measurement encounters shape perceptions of work as worthy through processes of practical, existential, and relational affirmation and challenge, our model unpacks interdependencies between two fundamental aspects of organizational life – the expressive and the instrumental – that tend to be treated as separate, distinct, and even incompatible in much contemporary organizational research (see Besharov & Khurana, 2015). Research on meaningfulness, and on work worthiness in particular, tends to emphasize the interpretive and symbolic aspects of organizational life, attending to values and identities and the ways in which those are shaped by sensemaking, sensegiving, and collective social interactions among organizational members (Carton, 2018; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lepisto, forthcoming; Rosso et al., 2010; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017; Thompson & Bunderson, 2019). Research on performance measurement, in contrast, tends to emphasize the technical features of measurement instruments (e.g., Kroeger & Weber, 2014) and the contributions of measurement practices and systems to individual (e.g., Hall, 2008, 2011) and organizational performance (e.g., Ebrahim, 2019; Franco-Santos et al., 2012), or alternatively to stress their negative implications for employees' experiences (e.g., Hallett, 2010; Townley, 2002). While some studies of meaningfulness acknowledge its basis in the material features of one's work (e.g., Berg, Wrzesniewski, &

Dutton, 2010; Jiang, 2021; Shepherd et al., forthcoming; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and some studies of measurement offer theoretical support for the idea that it could help to communicate an organization's mission and might thereby contribute to meaningfulness (Chenhall et al., 2017; Micheli & Manzoni, 2010; Simons, 1994), most empirical research tends to treat meaningfulness and measurement as separate if not antithetical.

Our model brings meaningfulness and measurement together by theorizing mechanisms through which formal performance measurement practices not only challenge but also affirm meaningfulness. In this respect, it resonates with the work of early organizational theorists such as Philip Selznick, who emphasized that values, identities, and meanings are deeply intertwined with and dependent on technical practices and economic performance (Besharov & Khurana, 2015; Kraatz, Ventresca, & Deng, 2010; Selznick, 1957). We add to this perspective by identifying measurement encounters – which involve interrelationships amongst measurement tools, work activities, and interpersonal interactions – as central to understanding interdependencies between the expressive and instrumental aspects of organizational life, and by explaining distinct pathways through which these encounters shape meaningfulness. In doing so, our model offers several key implications for research on meaningfulness and measurement.

First, while the literature on work meaningfulness has identified a broad range of sources and processes that contribute to meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010), much contemporary research focuses on how meaningfulness emerges from individual and collective efforts to customize and craft the tasks, relationships, and cognitions associated with one's work (e.g., Berg et al., 2010; Jiang, 2021; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017; Shepherd et al., forthcoming; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). In contrast, our model shows how highly standardized and formalized aspects of work – specifically, the tools and practices involved in organizational performance measurement – can serve as sources of meaningfulness. Moreover, the processes through which this occurs do not involve individuals customizing the material dimensions of tools themselves, as might be expected from a job crafting perspective (Wrzeniewski & Dutton, 2001), nor do they center on leaders engaging in sensegiving around the tools to connect employees' work with the mission (Carton, 2018). Rather, we show how measurement tools themselves contribute to work worthiness by helping employees to "see" the mission and their role in it, "do" their work and thereby experience a sense of self-efficacy for accomplishing the mission, and "connect" with others in ways that allow them to feel respected and valued.

Each of these mechanisms builds on and extends past work. For example, while theoretical work on performance measurement tools suggests they can be used to connect employees with the mission (Chenhall, Hall, & Smith, 2017; Micheli & Manzoni, 2010; Simons, 1994), our research provides empirical evidence of how they do so and demonstrates the implications for work worthiness. Likewise, while other studies suggest that accomplishing valued work activities (e.g., Hackman & Oldman, 1980; Jiang, 2021) and having positive relationships with others (e.g., Robertson, O'Reilly, & Hannah, 2020; Rogers, Corley, & Ashforth, 2017) may contribute to meaningfulness, our research shows how measurement practices facilitate these experiences and thereby foster work worthiness. Taken as a whole, our study broadens understandings of the role of measurement in meaningful work, to include not only symbolically conveying connections between employees' work and the organization's mission, but also practically enabling employees to accomplish the mission and relationally connecting individuals with others in pursuit of that mission.

Second, our model theorizes ongoing dynamism in meaningfulness itself. Much past research implies that meaningfulness based on perceptions of work as worthy is a higher-order, relatively stable cognition that people have or develop over time (e.g., Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Carton, 2018; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Rosso et al., 2010; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). Yet some studies recognize that work worthiness can be disrupted or challenged (Jiang, 2021; Maitlis, 2020; Tosti-Kharas, 2012), and others emphasize that individuals can alter and shape work worthiness through job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), interpersonal sensemaking (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), or constructing and holding multiple positive and negative meanings of their work (Shepherd et al., forthcoming). Building on these studies, our model advances a dynamic conception of work worthiness and unpacks mechanisms through which it continually expands and contracts. Moreover, by showing that ongoing shifts in work worthiness can emerge from multiple and potentially simultaneous mechanisms for any given person, we also extend past research emphasizing individual differences in the pathways through which meaningfulness develops and evolves (e.g., Robertson, O'Reilly, & Hannah, 2020; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017).

Collectively, these insights imply that work meaningfulness has an elastic quality such that its contours stretch and shrink even as it retains its overall shape, akin to conceptions of organizational identity and hybridity, which scholars now recognize as both stable and adaptive (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Gümüsay, Smets, & Morris, 2020; Kreiner, Hollensbe, Sheep, Smith, & Kataria, 2015; Smith & Besharov, 2019). Moreover, given the combination of practical, existential, and relational processes that contribute to this dynamism, the image of worth implied by our model is not one of a single-colored elastic band but rather a band comprised of multiple interwoven colors, even as the brightness or size of particular colors may differ across individuals. Conceptualizing work worthiness in this way opens up new questions about how multiple micro-processes may reinforce or interfere with one another as well as how they may collectively co-exist with stability of meaningfulness over time.

Third, our study points toward a more agentic view of measurement. Much research on organizational performance measurement has focused on identifying and tailoring measurement instruments so that they can be used to improve outcomes (e.g., Bourne, Mills, Wilcox, Neely, & Platts, 2000; Kroeger & Weber, 2014; Melnyk, Stewart, & Swink, 2004; Nason, Bacq, & Gras, 2018). The implication is that subjective elements are unwelcome influences – something that measurement tools and practices attempt to minimise or eliminate entirely. While sociological and organizational research on performance measurement acknowledges and often emphasizes subjective experiences, it tends to unpack the subjective in terms of individuals' negative reactions to measurement instruments and to emphasize their role in enacting forms of control (Hallett, 2010; Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Keevers et al., 2012; Mazmanian & Beckman, 2018).

In contrast, our study implies a conception of individuals as actively shaping, and benefiting from, measurement processes. In the encounters in our data, employees sought to engage with measurement tools in ways that allowed them to gain traction on work tasks, see the impact of their work, and have a credible and valued voice in their interactions with others. Measurement tools did not serve only or even primarily as mechanisms of control; rather, they represented one among multiple components with which employees engaged. Consistent with recent research emphasizing micro-processes of auditing and accounting (Power, 2021), these insights call for a shift from conceptions of measure*ment* as a noun to conceptions of measur*ing* as a verb. Yet they also depart from and challenge prior work by calling attention to the generative and enabling aspects of measuring processes and of employees' engagement in them, rather than their controlling function. This implies a shift in the focus of research on organizational performance measurement. Similarly to Latour's (1987) emphasis on 'science in action', we need research that attends not only to properties and effects of measurement tools but also to the varied ways in which agents 'act' while measuring, and the implications of those actions for expressive as well as instrumental aspects of organizational life.

Practical Implications

Our study has important practical implications as well. First, it demonstrates that performance measurement practices can be useful for fostering meaningful work and shows three ways they can do so. Second, while our findings show that the design of measurement tools is not determinative, on its own, of whether or not measurement encounters serve to affirm or challenge work worthiness, they do offer suggestive evidence of the kinds of tools and approaches that may be more likely to contribute to the former over the latter. As we observed with the Garden and Grow blog at OE, using collaborative, inclusive approaches to design measurement tools – for example, by engaging employees at multiple levels and across multiple functional areas, as well as resource providers and beneficiaries – can result in instruments that better reflect users' needs and priorities and thereby help employees to make progress toward the mission, contributing to practical affirmations of work worthiness. In addition, involving beneficiaries in data collection – as we observed with the Outcome Star at YF – can help to convey impact and thereby contribute to existential affirmations of work worthiness, because the very process of gathering data allows employees to see a positive effect on beneficiaries.

These approaches to instrument design might be familiar to some practitioners, and they are consistent with recent theoretical work which argues that neither measurement's inputs (i.e., what is measured) nor its outputs (i.e., performance information) need be quantitative (Mari, Maul, Irribarra, & Wilson, 2017; Maul, Mari, Irribarra, & Wilson, 2018). However, they go well beyond the dominant conception of measurement in private firms and even in the social impact field, where funders and other stakeholders tend to treat measurement as a set of objective, quantitative tools (Hehenberger, Mair, & Metz, 2019). In contrast to this approach, our study calls for practitioners to adopt a more expansive view of the nature and functions of performance measurement, one that takes account of its expressive not just instrumental purposes and that includes a broader range of measurement instruments and processes.

Limitations and Future Research

To develop insight into the role of measurement practices in shaping employees' perceptions of work as worthy, we focused on organizations with social and environmental missions, as this setting is one in which measurement practices pose major challenges to work worthiness but also have significant potential to contribute it. Such "mission-driven organizations" are increasingly common (Grimes et al., 2019), and performance measurement practices are now widespread across not just for-profit but also non-profit and governmental organizations (e.g., Barman, 2007; Behn, 2003; Hwang & Powell, 2009). Nonetheless, our cases can be considered "extreme". This makes them useful for building new theory but raises questions about generalizability (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Siggelkow, 2007). We therefore encourage future research that refines and extends our insights across a wider variety of settings.

Even though the core mechanisms we uncovered are likely to apply to organizations with different kinds of missions, and with more or less extensive and formalized measurement practices, they may vary in their strength and prevalence across different contexts. For example, they may be less influential in settings with more limited and homogenous measurement practices, as there may be both fewer measurement encounters overall and diminished opportunities for having the kinds of experiences identified in this study. In addition, the mechanisms uncovered here may be more or less powerful depending on how strongly attached employees are to their organization’s mission and how pressing or urgent they perceive it to be. Differences in the content of an organization’s mission (e.g., more financially versus socially focused) and the extensiveness of its measurement practices may also influence the relative importance of each type of mechanism (i.e., practical, existential, and relational) and the balance between experiences that challenge and those that affirm work worthiness. In our data, for example, silencing was much more evident at YF than OE, perhaps due to the nature of YF’s mission and associated regulations, which may have curtailed opportunities for employee input into measurement processes. We encourage studies that examine these and other organizational differences to further specify contingencies and boundary conditions for our model.

Future research that leverages variation across organizations may also be useful for identifying managerial practices and individual differences that foster worth-affirming (vs. worth-challenging) encounters, thereby building on and extending our study’s practical as well as theoretical implications. For example, encounters that convey impact and give voice may be facilitated when managers or funders engage in sensegiving to communicate the rationale for particular instruments and their value to the organization, as this could help employees to understand their role in the measurement process and feel that their contributions to measurement activities are recognized. Individual differences may also play a role. For example, comfort with quantitative data and formal tools may make it more likely for individuals to have encounters that provide traction, while an individual’s expertise and status may increase the likelihood of having encounters that give voice.

Finally, future studies could explore in more depth the relationships among different kinds of affirming and challenging experiences and the ways in which they may interact to shape perceptions of work worthiness, as well as how this process unfolds over time. For example, does a single affirming experience counteract one or more challenging ones? Are practical, existential, and relational affirmations equally powerful in shaping work worthiness? How do experiences cumulate over time, and how do past experiences shape how individuals respond in the present? Perhaps perceptions of work worthiness developed from past experiences serve as a buffer when individuals encounter current challenges to work worthiness. Longitudinal studies will be especially useful for investigating these issues.

As individuals increasingly seek meaningful work that provides a sense of worth and standardized, formal practices for measuring organizational performance become more pervasive, it is critical to understand how the latter can both enable and constrain the former. Our study contributes to this effort by unpacking how employees' day-to-day encounters with performance measurement practices shape perceptions of work worthiness through processes of practical, existential, and relational affirmation and challenge. We hope future scholarship will build on our research to further advance understanding of meaningful work.

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Table 1. Data Collected

Data	Youth Futures	Organic Earth	Total
Semi-structured interviews	Senior Managers (8) Managers (6) Frontline workers (18) External partners (1) **Total=33**	Senior Managers (10) Managers (4) Frontline workers (5) External partners (1) **Total=20**	53 interviews
Observations	*Day-to-day activities* Head Office (10 days) Accommodation Projects (4 days) **Total=14 days**	*Day-to-day activities* Head Office/Gardens (12 days) Programs (1 day) **Total=13 days**	27 days
	Meetings Senior Management (3) Housing Management (2) Support Management (2) Project Team (2) Case Review (1) External Partners (3) **Total=13 meetings**	*Meetings* Senior Management (2) **Total=2 meetings**	15 meetings
Archival documents	Business Plans (4) KPI Reports (14) Feedback (4) External communications (7) Internal communications (10) **Total=39 documents**	Business and Strategy Plans (9) KPIs (9) Projects bids and evaluations (11) Member's survey (1) External communications (6) Internal communications (11) **Total=47 documents**	86 documents

Table 2. Main Organizational Performance Measurement Instruments Used at OE and YF

Instrument	Description
YF Funder KPIs	Quantitative information on the number of beneficiaries involved in volunteer opportunities, education and training, healthcare, and social, leisure, and cultural activities, as well as the staff hours associated with these activities
YF Support KPIs	Quantitative information on the number beneficiaries involved in education and work, the number of “move-ons” and evictions, and the staff hours associated with these activities and outcomes
YF Housing KPIs	Quantitative information on the quality and effectiveness of managing YF’s accommodation units (e.g., vacancies, turnaround time, rent payments)
YF Outcome Star	Quantiative ratings of individual beneficiary outcomes, including their mental, physical, and emotional condition
YF Case Studies	Qualitative narratives of individual beneficiary experiences of service provision and associated staff activities
OE Strategic Priority KPIs	Quantitative information on inputs, activities, and outputs related to fundraising (number of initiatives, money raised), finance (cash reserves, turnover), programs (number of volunteer hours, value of projects), and membership (number of visitors, members)
OE SROI	Ratio conveying the monetary value of a program’s social impact per unit spent
OE Eating Right Report	Quantitative information on program services covering inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, as well as qualitative narratives describing participants’ experiences
OE Compost Leader Report	Quantitative information on program activities and number of volunteers, as well as qualitative narratives describing participants’ experiences
OE Garden and Grow Blog	Qualitative narratives and photographs describing beneficiary and staff activities and experiences

Table 3. Practical Pathway: Additional Representative Data

Experiences leading to contraction of work worthiness	
Interfering with work	"The danger is, if you rely too much on [performance measurement], then it drives me away from doing those things which might be actually very useful for the organization." (Senior Manager 5, OE) "[Performance measurement] needs to be balanced to the size and scale of the organization, because you can overmeasure things… If you do too much you may restrict yourself, because you waste too much time or energy." (Researcher, OE) "Helping my staff develop, meeting with clients, nurturing, a back-up for difficult situations, is what I should be spending my time doing; yet pressure to complete risk assessments and reports by deadlines take a lot away from these duties." (Housing Services Manager, YF)
Practical challenges	"If we're not actually doing everything that the organization is about in the most effective way, [even if] we're getting sign-off from our funders for the next round of funding, you know, what's the point of it all?" (Senior Manager 5, OE) "I've sat here going, oh, my targets are so high, it's really hard work... When you've had one of those really, really hard days, [you need to know why] it's so worth it... And I think sometimes it can get a bit lost along the way and it just feels really hard." (Senior Manager 3, YF)
Experiences leading to expansion of work worthiness	
Providing traction	"Where it becomes useful is you actually have the time to say, 'Right, this is red, what are we all going to do about this?' or 'This is green, it has been really effective, why has that worked and not that?' You know, having some of those kind of conversations… sharing of that stuff takes it forward, doesn't it… build on experiences and those sorts of things." (Senior Manager 1, OE) "[The SROI] is a very good tool, I like it. It's a social type of accounting, and in reality, it has similar ways of benefiting – it makes you aware of what is important, and is what is less important, which you don't often know. So, it's a management tool, and it tells you where you are weak and where you are not, and it will tell you what you can develop in the future, better." (Researcher, OE) "I've used [the KPIs] to work out how many people are not engaged [in work, volunteering, or education], which is what I did at the beginning… We had quite a large amount of young people, and gradually I've whittled that down. So, there's about 75 percent of them doing something, you've got 25 percent who aren't. And of the 25 percent who aren't, I'll know why." (Senior Manager 4, YF)
Practical affirmation	"When it's nice and sunny and everybody's got a smile on their face in the gardens, there's members of the public walking around and you can point out baby newts in a pond that we've just been looking at, and come and smell this tree that has tiny, tiny flowers, but it smells absolutely amazing if you get anywhere near it. If you just sort of point it out to them and highlight things, it enriches their day… It's empowering, isn't it?" (Garden and Grow Manager, OE) "With the young people, the supervision, and the team meetings, all that combined – it is a good judge of how you are doing. [The young people] are happy about what is going on and they feel they are moving forward, so you are doing something positive." (Support Worker 3, YF)

Table 4. Existential Pathway: Additional Representative Data

Experiences leading to contraction of work worthiness	
Missing the mark	"[External sponsors] fund everything through measures, which all have outputs. So, I am constantly measuring against those. With social projects that is often quite difficult. When they are looking for numbers in boxes, a lot of the work we do is intangible… so it's quite difficult. I mean it is easy to count numbers of beneficiaries, but a lot of our [impact] is more qualitative." (Community Cohesion Manager, OE) "My services don't necessarily fit into that [KPI report] particularly well because of the people coming and going and it not being able to measure exactly what it is that she was asking for, which kind of meant it put me out. I mean, it's easy to say how many evictions are done, do you know what I mean? It's not so easy to say if people have their case meetings, and if they've moved forward, or backwards, and if they have moved backwards, actually, it's not because they've been sanctioned by the Benefit Service, or their mom passed away." (Senior Manager 2, YF) "What staff actually do for a living, the difference they make, is not measured…All the good stuff is not written down, is not measured." (Housing Services Manager, YF)
Existential challenges	"You will read on a shelf somewhere or a stand somewhere or in the garden someone will say 'oh, I have heard of [Organic Earth], I went ten years ago to your gardens and since then I have done x'… and you think wow, that is somebody we have made a difference to… But you don't know how many of them there are out there and it's almost an accident that you found them." (Senior Manager 7, OE) "How many people are growing their gardens organically or growing their gardens with less use of fertilizers and pesticides, because we're here? If anyone can answer me that question, that would be great, but I don't think you will be able to, and that's really what we're about." (Senior Manager 4, OE)
Experiences leading to expansion of work worthiness	
Conveying impact	"Well, if we are talking about the good work we do, and as a charity we are here to have an impact on peoples' behaviour in relation to growing, [the outcome measures for Compost Leader program] provide very useful information." (Senior Manager 4, OE) "[We write] a report at the end of the project to say, this is what we achieved. So, I think that's really rewarding because then you can see, after all that hard work…it can take days to get the information together, weeks even, and then to see how that's really made a difference to a project and to the young people." (Senior Manager 3, YF) "That is a big part of my role, is communicating what we have achieved and how we are helping young people, getting their stories [through the Case Studies]. Because if we can tell it – well, if they can tell it and we can be the channel by which they tell it – it is much more powerful than if I say or anyone here says we are doing a great job. It is much more powerful coming from the young people." (Marketer, YF)
Existential affirmation	"It is nice to come out during lunch and have a wander around these gardens and see how they are progressing. I have had a hand in some of it as well, so I can go and look at things and say, 'I've planted that tree.'" (IT Support Worker, OE)

	"The ethos of [Youth Futures] definitely is on the cutting edge. In terms of engaging with young people. We're definitely - compared to some of the councils that I've worked with. For a small organization like nationally, medium-sized organization, we're doing exceptional work." (Youth Activities Coordinator 1, YF)

Table 5. Relational Pathway: Additional Representative Data

Experiences leading to contraction of work worthiness	
Silencing	"You've got projects that are very insular a lot of the time. It can be quite defensive. So, trying to get at stuff is quite hard, because it's like you're going to beat us over the head with that bit of information, as opposed to something that you're just going to use it because you need it." (Senior Manager 4, YF) "I think it's a massive tick-box process basically... You don't want to submit something that is going to make the commissioner worry and come back to you with loads of questions." (Senior Manager 6, YF) "We are always guarding what we say to him [the funder] because he has always got his agenda of the number crunching" (Support Worker 4, YF)
Relational challenges	"We don't get enough recognition for the good work that we do. Sometimes you just feel that it doesn't filter through to the Senior Management. Because they are too busy with the strategic running of the business." (Support Worker 5, YF) "We do all of that [the small steps required to help young people] and nobody's recognizing it… [Senior managers and funders are] all, 'Have [the young people] got a job?' Well, no, but they are up in the morning and they're washed and cleaned and everything's tidy… I don't know if people value enough our team and what we do." (Fundraising Manager, YF)
Experiences leading to expansion of work worthiness	
Giving voice	"[The funder] was able to know that what we were doing, and he was able to ask about that, you know, three months into the project rather than 12 months into the project when you go at the end… so it's really useful." (Senior Manager 1, OE) "I don't think we would get the commissions if we didn't have those [SROI evaluations] …As soon as I throw that into the conversation the trust is there, and I think really when I have a one-to-one with somebody, if I have got their trust from the start then they will listen." (Fundraiser 2, OE) "When they saw the results [through the program KPIs] they were very impressed with the work that has been done, hence why they are looking to extend it now. So, it is a good thing." (Support Worker 1, YF)
Relational affirmation	During a senior management Meeting, Senior Manager 2 is praised by the Chief Executive and other senior managers for how well she "navigated turbulent waters" and handled performance issues in her department. She smiles and thanks everyone, expressing contentment and appreciation for being recognized for her efforts. (Field notes, OE) "The Symphony Hall, we've got fantastic relationship with them in terms of, they very much understand our [beneficiary] group; they understand how we have to go to the end of the earth to get them [the beneficiaries] there every day. We know that they care, and we know that they think we do a good job here, because we respect them, and I think they respect us." (Fundraising Manager, YF)

Figure 1. Data Structure

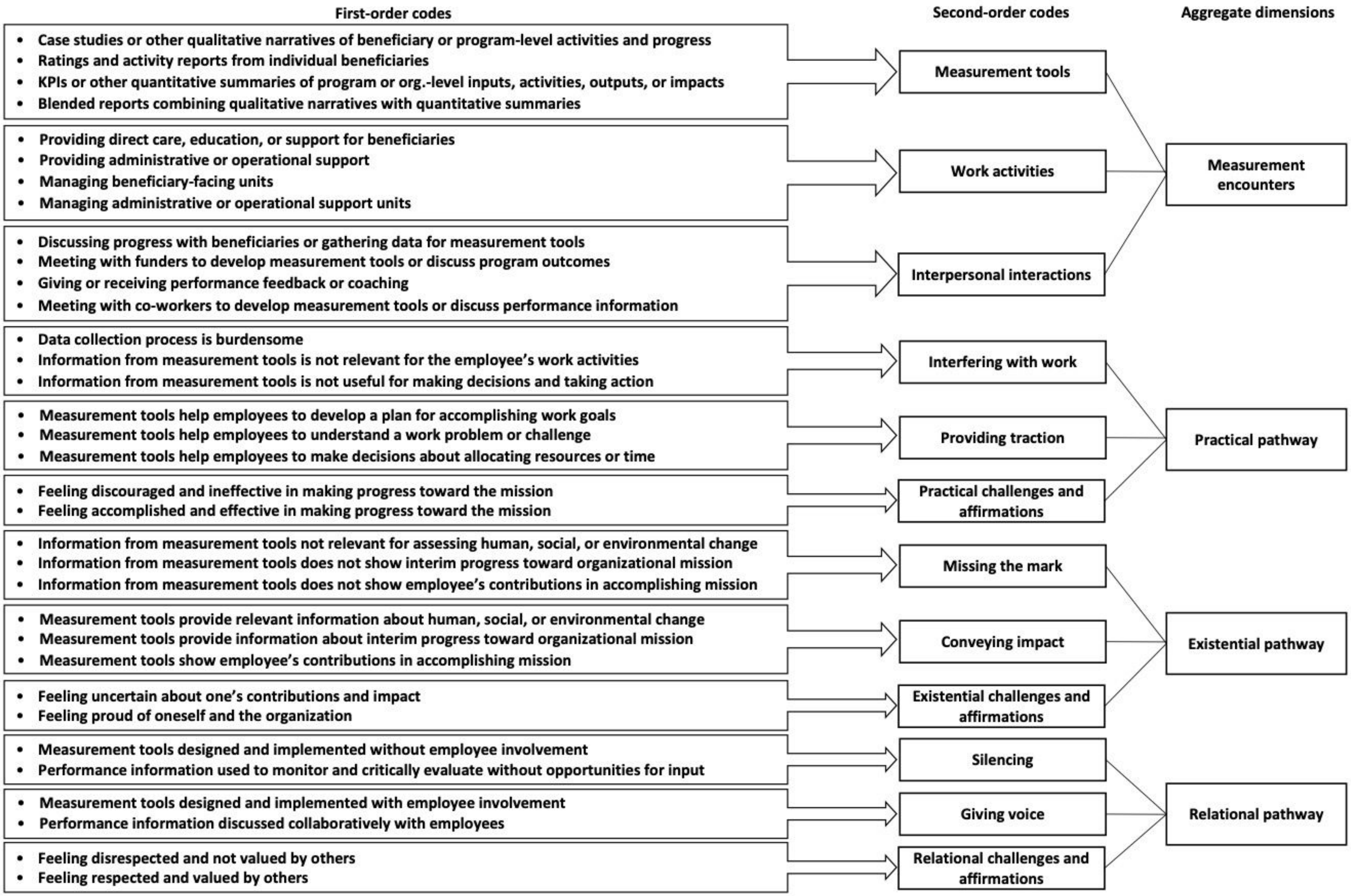
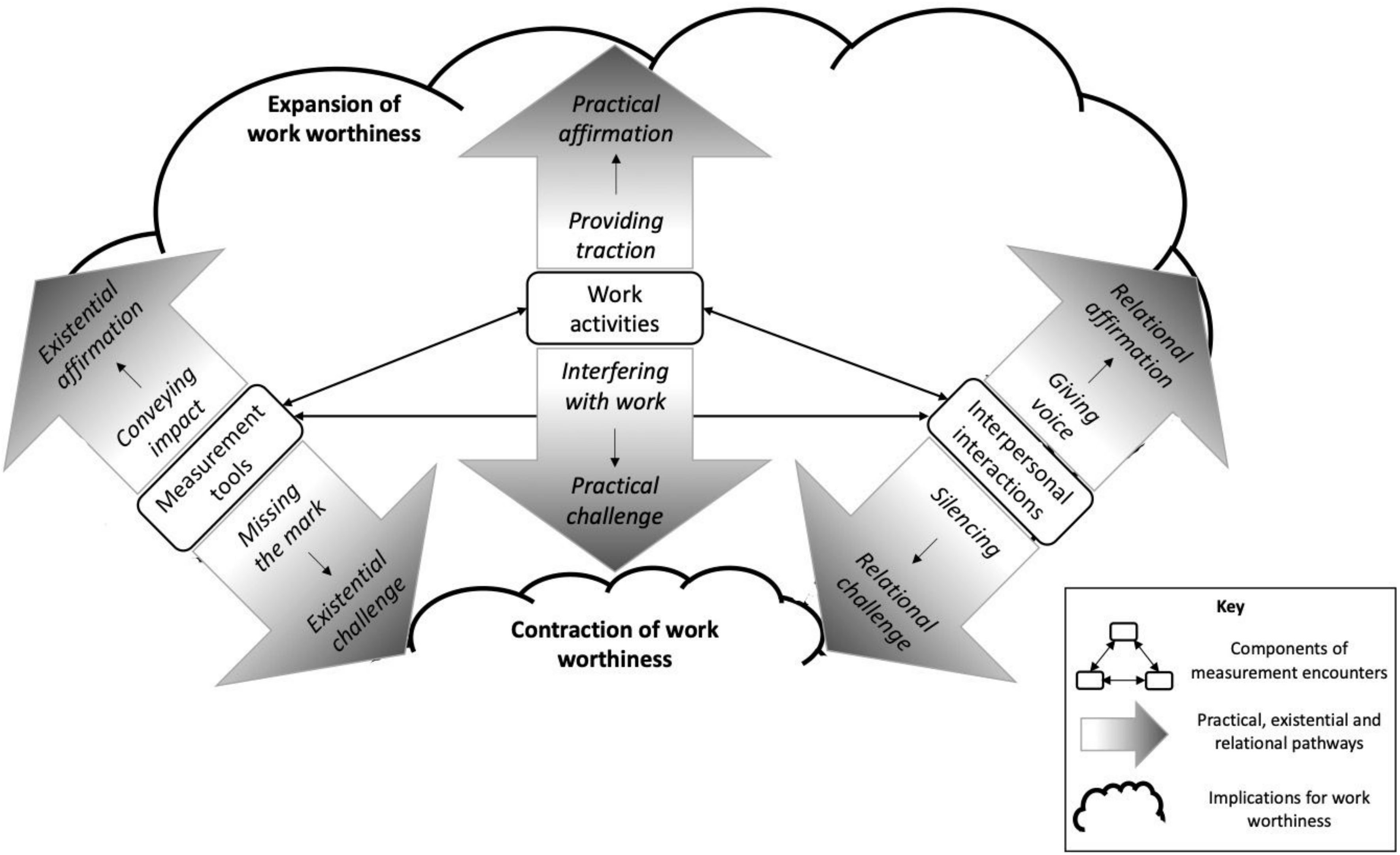


Figure 2. How Measurement Encounters Affirm and Challenge Work Worthiness



Appendix. Interview Protocol

To gain an overview of the performance measurement system in place in each organization and to understand senior managers' roles in the measurement process, initial interviews were conducted with the principle informants at YF and OE, followed by other members of the senior management team. These were wide-ranging, semi-structured interviews in which the following questions were used as a guide:

<u>Performance management systems</u>

1. How is performance management conducted within this organization?
2. What specific performance management systems have you adopted?
3. What specific performance measures are in place?
4. What kinds of targets do you set?
5. What other tools and practices do you use to measure and manage performance?

<u>Rationale for performance management systems</u>

6. What is the purpose of performance management within this organization?
7. [For each performance management system and measure] Why do you use this specific performance management system / performance measure?

<u>Process for measuring performance</u>

8. How does performance information flow through the organization?
9. Who collects performance information?
10. Who analyses performance information?
11. To whom are the data reported? (Probe to ask about specific internal and external constituencies, departments/units that might relevant to the organization)
12. Do you gather feedback from these individuals/groups?
13. If so, what process do you use for feedback?
14. How, if at all, is feedback incorporated or used in the performance management process?

<u>Performance measurement in your role</u>

15. Thinking now about your role specifically, how are you involved in the performance management process?
16. With which systems or specific instruments are you involved?
17. [For each one] Could you please describe the nature of your involvement?
    a. Probe for involvement in designing systems or instruments, collecting data, analysing data, and reviewing performance information
18. How, if at all, do you use performance information?
19. [If yes, for each relevant instrument ask] Could you please describe a specific example of how you have used performance information?
20. [If no] Why do you not use the information?
21. What value, if any, does performance information have for your role?

<u>Other stakeholders involved in performance management</u>

22. Which departments/units and individuals are most directly involved in the performance management process?
23. Which external stakeholders are involved in the performance management process?

24. Are there any other people with whom you recommend we speak?

Following the senior manager interviews, the protocol was adapted for interviews with individuals across different hierarchical levels and in different functional and programmatic areas. As we learned of additional measurement tools used in particular roles or departments, we further adapted the protocol to include more detailed questions on those tools. The following questions were used as a guide, with questions 6-14 repeated to ask specficially about each instrument identified as relevant in prior interviews:

Your role and responsibilities

1. What is your role within the organization?
2. What are your core responsibilities and goals?
3. For how long have you worked at the organization?
4. What were your prior roles (in this organization or others)?
5. Why did you choose to join this organization?

Experiences with and uses of performance measurement

6. How are you involved in the performance management process?
7. With what specific instruments are you involved?
    - Probe to ask about on specific instruments identified in earlier interviews
8. [For each instrument] With what part of the measurement process are you involved?
    - Probe to ask about involvement in designing measurement instruments, collecting data, analysing data, and reviewing performance information
9. What kind of performance information do you receive?
10. How, if at all, do you use this information?
    - [If yes] Could you please describe a specific example?
    - [If no] Why do you not use the information?
11. Tell me about some times when you have used performance measurement in your role. What did you do? What was the outcome?
    - Prompt: Examples might include a time when you had to collect, analyse or report on any performance measures within your role.

Perceptions of the value of performance measurement

12. From your perspective, what is the purpose of measuring performance within this organization?
    - Probe for specific instances and examples that convey to the individual the purpose of measurement
13. Is performance measurement valuable for your role? Why or why not?
14. Tell me about some times when you found measurement to be especially valuable or not valuable.
    - For example, have there been times when using performance measurement [positively and/or negatively] influenced how you perform your responsibilities?
    - What were you working on?
    - What happened?

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