Presence and Search for Meaning in Life and Work and Growth Mindset in One Higher Education Institution

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Abstract

This study examined the levels and interrelationships of meaning in life (presence and search), meaning in work, and growth mindset among employees in a Philippine higher education institution, and explored contextual explanations for low-scoring profiles through qualitative follow-up. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was used. Quantitative data were collected from 156 employees using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI), and an 8-item Growth Mindset Scale; qualitative data were drawn from follow-up interviews with purposively selected respondents who reported low meaning in life. Quantitatively, respondents reported generally low meaning in life on both presence (M = 21.51) and search (M = 21.38). Meaning in work was moderate-to-high overall (M = 41.79), with positive meaning emerging as the strongest component. Growth mindset was high (M = 33.29). Meaning in life correlated positively with meaning in work, but both were only weakly associated with growth mindset. Group comparisons showed that presence of meaning in life differed across age, civil status, educational attainment, years of service, and monthly income, while search for meaning differed across religious affiliation. Meaning in work differed by employment status, with lower scores among contractual/temporary employees than regular/permanent employees in the contrasts retained for reporting. Qualitatively, respondents located meaning primarily in relationships (family, partner, co-workers), small daily aspirations, and perceived responsibility; however, work-related setbacks and employment precarity were described as salient challenges. An intervention program ("Bakit Ako Nandito?") is proposed to strengthen meaning-making and work-related significance through reflective practice, mentoring, and values-alignment activities.

Keywords: *meaning in life; growth mindset; meaningful work; professional values; conscientiousness; higher education employees; Philippines; search for meaning*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the role of administrative employees in academic institutions has gained increasing recognition for their vital contributions to organizational efficiency, personnel support, and institutional success. While faculty members often receive the spotlight in educational research, non-teaching or administrative personnel tend to be overlooked. Working in the academic sector is sometimes met with understated regard, reflected in remarks that may carry undertones of surprise or diminished appreciation, stemming partly from the perception that compensation in educational institutions is relatively low.

Amid ongoing transformations in education—such as digitalization, increasing workloads, and heightened demands for service excellence—it becomes crucial to examine the psychological factors that sustain administrative employees' motivation and well-being. One such factor is meaning in life, a central concept in positive psychology referring to an individual's overall sense of purpose, coherence, and fulfillment. According to Frankl (as cited in Navarez, 2018), every person possesses a "will to meaning," an inherent drive to find purpose in life. In this study, meaning in life is conceptualized as having two dimensions: the presence of meaning, or the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as purposeful and significant, and the search for meaning, or the degree to which they actively seek deeper understanding and direction.

Equally important is the concept of meaning in work, which extends the search for purpose into the professional domain. For administrative employees who often manage diverse and demanding responsibilities, perceiving their work as meaningful contributes significantly to their sense of fulfillment and engagement. Research shows that employees frequently value meaningful work more than extrinsic rewards such as salary or promotion. Tommasi, Ceschi, and Sartori (2020) describe two perspectives of meaningful work: a steady mindset,

representing a long-term sense of purpose, and an episodic experience, reflecting temporary yet impactful moments of meaningfulness.

However, sustaining meaning and motivation amid workplace challenges also depends on one's mindset. Dweck's (2020) mindset theory differentiates between a fixed mindset, which views abilities as innate and unchangeable, and a growth mindset, which perceives them as improvable through learning and effort. Individuals with a growth mindset are more likely to adapt, persist, and continue pursuing meaningful goals despite obstacles. Within academic institutions, this mindset may serve as a psychological buffer, promoting resilience and continued engagement among administrative staff.

Although there is growing interest in positive psychology, limited studies have explored meaning in life, meaning in work, and growth mindset among Philippine administrative employees. Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding the internal drivers of well-being and for informing institutional programs that foster motivation, purpose, and psychological health. By examining these constructs, the present study aims to highlight the overlooked experiences of administrative personnel and contribute to the development of more inclusive and supportive practices within higher education institutions.

Specifically, this study examined the relationship between meaning in life—particularly the presence and search for meaning—meaning in work, and growth mindset among employees in an academic setting. It aimed to describe the demographic profile of the respondents; assess and explore meaning in life, meaning in work, and growth mindset; determine significant differences in these variables when grouped according to demographic profiles; explore the relationships between meaning in life, meaning in work, and growth mindset; and propose an evidence-based intervention program derived from the results of the study.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Meaning in Life: Presence and Search

Building on Frankl's notion of the will to meaning (Navarez, 2018), Nortje (2020) argues that a meaningful life is not merely discovered but actively cultivated by intentionally aligning daily actions with deeply held values and long-term goals; this intentionality frames meaning as a practice of

purposeful living rather than a passive state. Conceptual clarity about what constitutes meaning is provided by Martela and Steger's (2016) threefold model—coherence (making sense of life events), purpose (having clear goals and direction), and significance (believing one's life has inherent worth)—which together offer a practical lens for assessing how students construct meaning amid academic pressures. This process of meaning-making is especially salient in high-stress educational settings, where the search for meaning can buffer or exacerbate psychological strain; empirical work on Filipino medical students, for example, documents high levels of stress and burnout linked to lifestyle and demographic factors, underscoring the need to examine how meaning-related processes operate across diverse student populations (Agang Ang et al., 2025).

To operationalize the construct of meaning in life, Steger et al. (2006) developed the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), which conceptualizes it through two key dimensions: the presence of meaning (POM), reflecting the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as meaningful; and the search for meaning (SFM), which captures an active pursuit of life's purpose. These dimensions highlight that meaning is both a current sense of purpose and an ongoing process of discovery.

Empirical evidence supports this multidimensional view. A meta-analysis of 147 studies (Li, Dou, & Liang, 2020) found that POM is moderately and positively associated with subjective well-being (SWB), whereas SFM shows a weaker and sometimes negative association. Complementing this, Fu et al. (2022) found that the presence of meaning mediates the relationship between awe and prosocial behavior, especially among those with limited social support. Meanwhile, among Republic of Korea Army soldiers, SFM was positively linked to proactive leisure crafting and gratitude as indirect pathways to experiencing meaning (Lim, Yu, & Sohn, 2022). These findings suggest that while searching for meaning may not directly enhance well-being, it can contribute to a stronger sense of life's significance through proactive actions and positive attitudes.

In the Philippine context, Navarez (2018) examined the impact of meaning in life on subjective well-being among Filipino college students, finding that both POM and SFM were significantly related to well-being. The presence of meaning showed a strong positive correlation with life satisfaction (r=0.40) and positive affect (r=0.36), while its correlation with negative affect was slightly

negative (r=−0.14). These results underscore the importance of meaning in life as a predictor of psychological well-being, with implications for counseling, education, and workplace strategies.

2.2 Meaning in Work: Dimensions and Significance

According to the American Psychological Association, work is defined as any physical, mental, or emotional activity directed toward accomplishing a task or transforming inputs into goods or services. In contrast, meaning refers to the implication of a hidden or special significance (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The link between work and meaning gains more importance when examined through the perspective of human motivation, as Frankl emphasized the profound, innate urge to seek purpose—even in hardship. Current studies support this, indicating that workers often prioritize meaningful work over salary, benefits, advancement prospects, or work environment.

Drawing from existing research, Tommasi et al. (2020) add a temporal aspect to the exploration of meaningful work, showing that it is not a fixed concept but rather a dynamic process comprising two different aspects: a consistent mindset and an occasional experience. The former signifies a lasting, fundamental perception of worth that people have regarding their jobs, whereas the latter reflects the fleeting yet impactful instances of meaning that can arise daily.

To measure meaningful work, Steger, Dik, and Duffy (2012) developed the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI), encompassing three dimensions: positive meaning (work holds personal significance); meaning-making through work (how it encourages self-awareness and personal development); and greater good motivation (the conviction that one's work serves others or contributes to society). Together, these dimensions illustrate that meaningful work goes beyond personal satisfaction to encompass broader social contributions.

A study conducted by Zeng, Chen, et al. (2019) on Chinese teachers examined the relationships among growth mindset, work engagement, perseverance of effort, and well-being. Findings indicated that teachers scored high in growth mindset, well-being, and perseverance of effort, while their work engagement was relatively low due to stress and heavy workloads. The study suggested that fostering a growth mindset can enhance engagement indirectly by improving well-being and sustained effort. Similarly, Liu, Usman, Zhang, et al. (2019) explored how meaning in life helps buffer the negative impact of occupational affective stress on suicidal ideation among employees, finding that employees in supportive environments report higher levels of meaning, which contributes to reduced suicidal thinking.

In the Philippine context, cultural values shape how individuals experience meaning in work. Utang na loob, which means "reciprocal debt or debt of gratitude," is a core Filipino value reflecting deep gratitude and reciprocal obligation that extends beyond material favors, fostering long-term mutual support within families and communities (Taas Noo Pilipino, 2021). Donato, Panotan, Castro, and Gavino (2023) explored how Filipino working millennials perceive and experience utang na loob, finding that they reinterpret it beyond gratitude to highlight personal growth and meaningful relationships with mentors, colleagues, and even strangers. Beyond utang na loob, other Filipino values such as kagandahang-loob (shared humanity), pakikipagkapwa (regard for others), and bayanihan (communal unity) further ground the experience of meaningful work by emphasizing interconnectedness and collective responsibility (Batang et al., 2025). These cultural values provide a framework through which Filipino employees derive purpose and fulfillment from their professional roles, reinforcing that meaningful work is not merely an individual pursuit but a relational and communal experience (Quiblat & Quirap, 2024).

2.3 Growth Mindset: Beliefs About Ability and Development

A growth mindset refers to the belief that abilities and intelligence are not static but can be nurtured through persistent effort, continuous learning, and perseverance. Individuals who hold this mindset tend to view difficulties as chances to grow and interpret failures as essential parts of the learning journey (Dweck, 2006, as cited in Picard, 2024). This perspective encourages traits such as resilience, intrinsic motivation, and openness to new challenges, which are vital for thriving in education, work, and personal growth.

Dweck's (2020) mindset theory identifies two implicit beliefs about intelligence and human traits: a fixed mindset and growth mindset. People with a fixed mindset perceive their abilities as innate and unchangeable, whereas those with a growth mindset view themselves as malleable and improvable through dedication, practice, and learning. To support this, a study conducted by Fisher, Fox, and Yoon (2023) involving undergraduate students who underwent the Trier Social Stress Test (TSST) showed that higher levels of growth mindset were associated with lower cortisol levels 25 minutes after the onset of the stressor—considered the peak point of stress reactivity.

Recent research in organizational psychology further underscores how employees' mindsets shape

their innovative behaviors. Liu and Tong (2022) found that employees with a growth mindset are more likely to engage in innovative work behavior, particularly when they utilize their skills and talents more often and feel more engaged at work. Moreover, the presence of strengths-based leadership amplified both the direct and indirect impacts of growth mindset on innovation. Yu, He, Ying, et al. (2024) similarly demonstrated that employees' growth mindset has a significant effect on job crafting, particularly in situations that involve perceived threats or reinforce negative stereotypes, as well as in environments that offer encouragement and support. Job autonomy was highlighted as a key factor: as autonomy increases, growth mindset traits are more likely to be activated, leading to proactive behaviors like job crafting.

Building on evidence that a growth mindset positively influences well-being and work engagement—partly by fostering perseverance and sustained effort (Zeng et al., 2019)—when individuals believe they can improve and are empowered to apply their strengths meaningfully, they are more likely to experience purpose, fulfillment, and a proactive stance toward challenges; these individual benefits scale to organizational contexts, where mindset shapes responses to systemic stressors. In health professions education, where faculty burnout, moral distress, and the need to adapt to Generation Z learning preferences create persistent pressures, a growth mindset therefore functions not only as a personal resilience resource but as a strategic element of a systems-oriented approach to maintaining program quality, supporting faculty well-being, and promoting institutional sustainability (Bermido, Quinto, & Atento, 2025).

2.4 Synthesis and Gaps

The literature reviewed establishes that meaning in life, meaning in work, and growth mindset are each associated with positive psychological and organizational outcomes. Meaning in life provides individuals with coherence, purpose, and significance (Martela & Steger, 2016), while meaning in work extends this sense of purpose into the professional domain, contributing to engagement and fulfillment (Steger et al., 2012; Tommasi et al., 2020). Growth mindset, in turn, enables individuals to persist through challenges and view setbacks as opportunities for learning and development (Dweck, 2020; Liu & Tong, 2022).

In the Philippine context, cultural values such as pakikipagkapwa, kagandahang-loob, and bayanihan provide a unique lens through which meaning and purpose are experienced and constructed (Batang et al., 2025; Quiblat & Quirap, 2024). Studies on Filipino samples have examined meaning in life among college students (Navarez, 2018) and the reinterpretation of utang na loob among working millennials (Donato et al., 2023). However, despite growing interest in positive psychology, limited studies have explored how meaning in life, meaning in work, and growth mindset intersect among administrative employees in Philippine higher education institutions. This population is often overlooked in educational research, yet their roles are critical to institutional functioning. The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationships among these three constructs and exploring how they are experienced by employees in an academic setting, with particular attention to the cultural context that shapes their sense of purpose and fulfillment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method approach, specifically a sequential explanatory design (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017), to explore the presence and search for meaning in life and work, and growth mindset among employees in an academic setting. This methodology involves two distinct phases: quantitative data collection followed by qualitative data collection. The quantitative phase involved the administration of standardized instruments to measure the three variables—meaning in life, meaning in work, and growth mindset—along with demographic profiling. The qualitative phase was carried out through interviews with selected participants to further explain and enrich the quantitative findings by exploring participants' lived experiences related to meaning and growth mindset in the workplace.

3.2 Participants

This study employed purposive sampling, in which participants were intentionally selected based on characteristics relevant to the research. Included were employees of a higher education institution (HEI) aged 22 years and above who were currently employed, regardless of employment arrangement (Permanent/Regular, Contractual/Temporary, Part-time, Consultancy, or Other). Participants belonged to either administrative staff or faculty classifications. This age range was chosen to capture perspectives from early-career employees, including fresh graduates, while encompassing generational

experiences from Generation Z to Generation X. All participants provided informed consent and completed the survey independently. Exclusion criteria included individuals who did not meet the criteria, those who declined participation, and employees who were not affiliated with the selected university. A total of 156 employees participated in the study.

3.3 Measures

This study employed three standardized instruments and an interview guide.

a. Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ). Developed by Steger and Frazier (2006), the MLQ consists of 10 items divided into two subscales: Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning, with five items each. Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale from Absolutely Untrue (1) to Absolutely True (7). Item 9 is reverse scored. Subscale scores range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater perceived meaning or engagement in seeking meaning. The MLQ has demonstrated strong measurement invariance across cultures and excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.90 for both subscales (Freeman, Chadwick, & Winstone, 2023).

b. Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI). Developed by Steger, Dik, and Duffy (2012), the WAMI assesses employees' perceptions of meaningful work. It is composed of 10 items divided into three dimensions: Positive Meaning (4 items), Meaning-Making Through Work (3 items), and Greater Good Motivation (3 items). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Absolutely Untrue) to 7 (Absolutely True), with one reverse-scored item. Scores are summed to compute subscale scores and a total score, where higher values reflect greater meaningfulness at work. The WAMI has demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.92 (Amillano et al., 2024).

c. Growth Mindset Scale. Authored by Sigmundsson and Haga (2024), this scale is composed of eight items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not like me at all) to 5 (Very much like me). Scores are summed to compute participants' responses, with higher values indicating a strong growth mindset and lower scores reflecting a fixed mindset. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.83.

d. Interview Guide. The researcher prepared 13 open-ended questions: four on meaning in life, four on meaning in work, and five on growth mindset. Questions were constructed to understand how participants perceive and experience meaning in their lives and work, and to assess beliefs about personal growth, learning, and development at work. The questions were based on the scales of each variable. The interview guide was validated by expert panelists and revised accordingly. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Following topic approval and ethical clearance, the researcher obtained permission from the university's Vice President for Academics and Research and the Human Resource Management and Development Office. A formal request letter was submitted to access the total employee population for sample size calculation. Via Messenger, the researcher contacted employees privately and requested assistance in sharing the Google Form survey link with colleagues. With the support of department heads and supervisors, 156 participants completed the online questionnaire. Participants who scored low on meaning in life were purposively selected for follow-up interviews. Interviews were conducted, recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation, to describe the demographic profile of respondents and their levels of meaning in life, meaning in work, and growth mindset. Inferential analyses included t-tests and one-way ANOVA to examine differences in the variables when grouped according to demographic profiles. Pearson's r was used to examine relationships between variables. All quantitative analyses were conducted using SPSS.

For the qualitative data, thematic analysis (TA) following Huberman and Miles (1994, as cited in Nowell, 2017) was utilized to analyze concepts that emerged from participant responses and to provide a meaningful presentation of the data.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This research followed the 2017 Code of Ethics set by the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP), specifically Standard III J regarding research ethics. Participation was

voluntary with no pressure applied, and informed consent was secured from all participants. The privacy and anonymity of personal information and responses were rigorously upheld. The researcher obtained approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Lyceum of the Philippines University before collecting data, ensuring adherence to institutional and national ethical standards. Data accuracy and integrity were maintained, and all references were accurately cited to ensure academic integrity. All procedures followed the ethical guidelines set by both the APA and PAP.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Profile of Respondents

A total of 156 employees participated in the quantitative phase. The sample was predominantly female (n = 94, 60.3%), with males comprising 39.1% (n = 61); one respondent (0.6%) did not indicate sex. The largest age brackets were 20–29 years (n = 57, 36.5%) and 30–39 years (n = 49, 31.4%), followed by 50–59 (n = 23, 14.7%), 40–49 (n = 21, 13.5%), and 60 years and above (n = 6, 3.8%). Civil status was primarily single (n = 86, 55.1%) or married (n = 68, 43.6%), with very small proportions reporting separation (n = 1, 0.6%) or widowhood (n = 1, 0.6%).

Most respondents were college graduates (n = 85, 54.5%), followed by master's degree holders (n = 38, 24.4%), doctorate degree holders (n = 32, 20.5%), and one high school graduate (n = 1, 0.6%). In terms of job classification, 55.1% (n = 86) were administrative personnel, 30.8% (n = 48) were faculty, 8.3% (n = 13) were department heads, and 5.8% (n = 9) were administrative personnel with faculty load. For employment status, 63.5% (n = 99) were permanent/regular, 34.6% (n = 54) were contractual/temporary, and 1.9% (n = 3) reported another status.

Roman Catholic affiliation was most common (n = 94, 60.3%); smaller groups identified as Protestant (n = 6, 3.8%), Baptist (n = 2, 1.3%), Born Again Christian (n = 3, 1.9%), Christian (n = 1, 0.6%), and other religions (n = 7, 4.5%). A sizeable proportion (n = 43, 27.6%) either did not indicate a religion or reported an affiliation not captured by the listed categories. Monthly income clustered in the ₱15,000–₱30,000 bracket (n = 73, 46.8%), followed by ₱30,000–₱50,000 (n = 22, 14.1%), below ₱15,000 (n = 20, 12.8%), and more than ₱50,000 (n = 16, 10.3%); 25 respondents (16.0%) did not

disclose income or reported another bracket. Length of service was highest in the 1–5-year group (n = 67, 42.9%), followed by more than 10 years (n = 39, 25.0%), less than 1 year (n = 27, 17.3%), and 6–10 years (n = 23, 14.7%).

4.2 Meaning in Life

Respondents reported relatively low levels of meaning in life on both subscales. The mean Presence of Meaning score was 21.51 (SD = 6.36), and the mean Search for Meaning score was 21.38 (SD = 6.46). Taken together, these values indicate that participants—on average—reported only modest perceived life meaning and only modest active exploration for meaning.

The qualitative responses contextualize these patterns by showing that meaning is often constructed in relational and everyday terms. Respondents repeatedly framed meaning around family and close ties: "Siguro 'yong family… kasi siyempre parang kay family mo umiikot 'yong buhay mo" (R1) ["Probably family… because life seems to revolve around your family."]. Another respondent described fulfillment as closely linked to family wellbeing: "Ang life ko naman as a person ay very fulfilling na… masaya dahil ng pamilya" (R2) ["My life as a person is very fulfilling… happy because of my family."]. Meaning also emerged through shared affect within the social environment: "Bukod sa partner ko… yung mga ka-work ko din… kung nakikita ko rin masaya rin sila… at saka sa family" (R1) ["Aside from my partner… also my co-workers… when I see them happy… and my family."].

In addition, respondents associated meaning with "small things" and attainable aspirations, such as having something to look forward to (e.g., a show or movie) and pursuing new personal goals. At the same time, the interviews also pointed to work-related hurdles that can erode perceived meaning, particularly when tasks are missed or when setbacks trigger self-criticism. Overall, the qualitative narratives suggest that meaning is experienced in concrete relational obligations and daily anticipations, even when global self-ratings on standardized measures are comparatively low.

4.3 Meaning in Work

Respondents reported moderate-to-high meaning in work (M = 41.79, SD = 6.00), with the sample median at 42.00. Among subscales, Positive Meaning was highest (M = 16.81, SD = 2.54), followed by Meaning-Making through Work (M = 12.78, SD = 2.03) and Greater Good Motivation (M

= 12.21, SD = 2.08). The pattern suggests that respondents most strongly endorsed the intrinsic significance of their work (positive meaning), while endorsement was comparatively lower for items reflecting broader meaning-making and explicit prosocial contribution.

The qualitative excerpts are consistent with this configuration. Respondents tended to describe meaningful work in terms of competency, service, and alignment with personal responsibility: "My job makes me see the bigger picture… I can be somebody. Helping also gives me sense of happiness. And it gives me purpose in life" (R2). Others emphasized routinized conscientiousness and accountability (e.g., feeling "relieved" when tasks are completed and anxious when obligations remain unfinished). These narratives indicate that experienced work meaning is anchored in role performance and immediate social contribution, while broader meaning-making may be more variable and contingent on job conditions.

4.4 Growth Mindset

Growth mindset scores were high (M = 33.29, SD = 3.42), indicating that respondents generally endorsed the belief that abilities can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence. Qualitative accounts reinforce this orientation: "I believe that even if someone doesn't have talent, if he is hardworking, he can still achieve something" (R1). Another respondent underscored the role of perseverance: "The more that you practice, the more you excel" (R2). Overall, the findings suggest a learning-oriented belief system that may support resilience, although the correlational results indicate that growth mindset is not a strong standalone proxy for either life meaning or work meaning.

4.5 Differences in Variables According to Profile

Presence of Meaning in Life. Non-parametric group comparisons indicated that presence of meaning in life differed significantly across age groups (H = 11.491, p = .022), civil status (H = 6.577, p = .037), educational attainment (H = 8.634, p = .035), length of service (H = 15.262, p = .002), and monthly income (H = 8.168, p = .043). In the set of retained post-hoc contrasts, higher presence scores were observed among respondents aged 50–59 compared with those aged 20–29 (p_adj = .046), married compared with single respondents (p_adj = .013), employees with more than 10 years of service compared with those with 6–10 years (p_adj = .001), and respondents earning more than ₱50,000 compared with those earning below ₱15,000 (p_adj = .031). These findings indicate that perceived life meaning tends to be higher among older, more settled, and more economically secure subgroups within the institution.

Search for Meaning in Life. Search for meaning differed significantly across religion (H = 10.102, p = .039). This suggests that patterns of active meaning-seeking may be shaped by differences in faith tradition, religiosity, or the degree to which meaning is supplied by communal and doctrinal frameworks.

Meaning in Work. Meaning in work differed by employment status, with significant group differences observed for positive meaning (H = 7.311, p = .026), meaning-making through work (H = 6.206, p = .045), and overall meaning in work (H = 9.491, p = .009). In the retained post-hoc contrasts, contractual/temporary employees reported lower positive meaning (p = .004), meaning-making (p = .011), and overall meaning in work (p = .011) than regular/permanent employees. These differences suggest that employment precarity may attenuate both intrinsic valuation of work and the extent to which work is experienced as a source of broader purpose.

Growth Mindset. No statistically significant differences in growth mindset were observed across the demographic and work-related groupings assessed, suggesting that the learning-oriented belief captured by the scale is relatively stable across subgroups in this sample.

4.6 Relationships Between Variables

Significant positive correlations were found between presence of meaning and meaning in work (r = 0.571, p < 0.001), and between presence of meaning and growth mindset (r = 0.451, p < 0.001). Search for meaning showed a significant but weaker positive correlation with growth mindset (r = 0.188, p = 0.019), but no significant correlation with meaning in work (r = 0.116, p = 0.149). Meaning in work and growth mindset were significantly positively correlated (r = 0.529, p < 0.001). These findings indicate that employees who perceive greater meaning in their lives tend to find greater meaning in their work and hold stronger growth mindset beliefs.

4.7 Discussion

4.7.1 Meaning in Life: Low Presence and Search Despite Relational Sources

The finding that respondents scored below 24 on both presence and search for meaning indicates that employees generally do not perceive their lives as having valued meaning and purpose, and are not actively seeking it. According to Steger et al.'s (2006) interpretive framework, this pattern suggests that respondents may not find the idea of thinking about life's meaning very interesting or important, and may experience lower life satisfaction, less optimism, and fewer positive emotions.

However, the qualitative findings present a more nuanced picture. Participants articulated rich sources of meaning rooted in family relationships, shared happiness with co-workers, and a sense of forward momentum from pursuing goals. This apparent contradiction between quantitative and qualitative findings may be explained by how meaning is conceptualized and expressed in Filipino culture. In collectivist contexts, meaning may be experienced as embedded in everyday relationships and responsibilities rather than as an abstract cognitive construct requiring active articulation or search (Martela & Steger, 2016). Participants may not have perceived themselves as "searching" for meaning because meaning is already present in their relational worlds—through family, pakikipagkapwa (regard for others), and shared happiness with co-workers. This interpretation aligns with Batang et al. (2025), who emphasize that Filipino cultural values such as pakikipagkapwa and bayanihan ground experiences of purpose and fulfillment in interconnectedness rather than individual striving.

The significant differences in presence of meaning according to age, civil status, educational attainment, length of service, and monthly income further suggest that meaning in life accumulates with life experience and stability. Older employees (aged 50–59), married individuals, PhD holders, those with longer tenure, and higher earners all reported greater presence of meaning. These findings are consistent with research showing that maturity, committed relationships, advanced education, and financial stability contribute to a deeper sense of purpose and life satisfaction (Yöyen, Çalık, & Güneri Barış, 2025). The finding that differences in the search for meaning emerged only by religion—with Protestants reporting higher levels than Catholics—underscores religion's distinctive role in shaping existential exploration. At the same time, meaning may be culturally embedded in relational obligations and collective wellbeing, particularly in contexts where family-centered identity is salient (Martela & Steger, 2016; Navarez, 2018).

4.7.2 Meaning in Work: Personal Significance Outweighs Broader Impact

For meaning in work, Positive Meaning ranked highest among subscales, indicating that employees derive the strongest sense of meaning from the personal significance of their work. This suggests that motivation is rooted in the belief that their roles matter to them individually, a pattern that is consistent with integrative models of meaningful work in which personal significance, values

alignment, and perceived contribution jointly shape positive work-related functioning (Charles-Leija et al., 2023; Rosso et al., 2010).

Meaning-Making followed, indicating that employees moderately view their work as a pathway to personal growth and self-discovery, a well-established factor in fostering employee commitment and engagement (Mishra et al., 2023).

Notably, Greater Good Motivation scored above its median, yet overall meaning in work fell below the median. This pattern suggests that while employees recognize their work's broader societal purpose, the personal significance and meaning-making aspects are less strongly experienced. Qualitative findings illuminate this tension: participants derived meaning through critical thinking, integrity, and teamwork—professional values that reflect immediate, relational experiences of competence and contribution rather than abstract awareness of serving a greater good.

The finding that employment status was significantly associated with meaning in work aligns with research showing that employment precarity can reduce psychological safety, constrain autonomy, and weaken perceived reciprocity—conditions that undermine sustained work meaning. This aligns with research indicating that temporary or non-permanent employment is associated with lower job satisfaction and work stability in the Philippines (Lagrana & Bayoneta, 2021) and internationally (De Cuyper et al., 2020). Contractual employees may experience less opportunity to develop the deep, sustained engagement that supports meaning-making through work.

4.7.3 Growth Mindset: A Consistent Psychological Strength

Respondents demonstrated high levels of growth mindset (M = 4.59), indicating strong belief that abilities can be developed through effort and learning. This finding is consistent with research showing that Filipino employees often exhibit resilience and adaptability (Cullimore, 2021; Quiblat & Quirap, 2024). The absence of significant differences across any demographic profile suggests that growth mindset is a relatively stable psychological trait in this sample, unaffected by age, education, job status, or income.

Qualitative analysis revealed that growth mindset is behaviorally expressed through conscientiousness—specifically, achievement-striving, competence development, self-discipline, and forward thinking. These findings align with

research showing that growth mindset supports continuous learning, motivation, and adaptive coping in professional settings (Burnett, 2023; Yeager et al., 2022). The strong positive correlation between growth mindset and both presence of meaning ($r = 0.451$) and meaning in work ($r = 0.529$) suggests that employees who believe in their capacity to grow are better equipped to find and sustain meaning across life and work domains.

4.7.4 Relationships Between Constructs

The significant positive correlations among presence of meaning, meaning in work, and growth mindset indicate that these psychological resources are mutually reinforcing. Employees who feel greater purpose in their lives are more likely to find meaning in their work and hold growth-oriented beliefs about their abilities. This finding aligns with Filipino cultural perspectives wherein meaningful work is closely tied to personal virtues, purpose, and moral contribution (Tarray & Calimag, 2022), and with empirical findings that growth mindset is associated with higher work engagement, dedication, and vigor.

The significant correlation between search for meaning and growth mindset ($r = 0.188$), but not between search for meaning and meaning in work, suggests that actively seeking meaning is more closely tied to personal development beliefs than to work experiences. According to Dweck's (2020) theory, individuals with growth mindset are naturally more inclined to engage in exploration and reflection, including the search for meaning. However, the workplace may not always provide opportunities or support for this existential search, particularly for employees in less stable employment arrangements or roles with limited autonomy (Yu et al., 2024).

4.7.5 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences about the relationships observed. Second, the sample was drawn from a single higher education institution, limiting generalizability to other settings. Third, the sample size ($N = 156$) fell below the target of 258, potentially affecting statistical power. Fourth, self-report measures may be subject to social desirability bias. Fifth, the qualitative findings, while rich, were based on interviews with a small subset of participants and may not represent the full range of employee experiences. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, diverse samples, and mixed methods to further explore these constructs and their interrelationships.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the foregoing findings, the following conclusions are drawn.

First, the demographic profile of respondents reveals that the majority were female, aged 20–29 years, single, college graduates, and employed as administrative personnel in permanent or regular positions with 1–5 years of service. Most were Roman Catholic earning between ₱15,000 and ₱30,000 monthly. This profile represents a relatively young, educated, and predominantly female workforce in the early to mid-stages of their careers.

Second, employees demonstrated a varied psychological profile across the variables assessed. Overall meaning in life was low, with below-threshold scores on both presence and search for meaning subscales. For meaning in work, employees reported a below-median overall score; however, while Greater Good Motivation scored above the median—indicating recognition of work's broader societal purpose—Positive Meaning and Meaning-Making were below the median. In contrast, employees showed high levels of growth mindset, reflecting a strong belief in their capacity to develop skills, acquire knowledge, and contribute meaningfully through effort and learning.

Third, qualitative analysis revealed three emergent themes. For meaning in life, the theme "Meaningful Life Construction" emerged, with sources of meaning organized into external (family, relationships, shared happiness) and internal (anticipation, momentum, questioning during struggles) dimensions. For meaning in work, the theme "Professional Values" emerged, encompassing critical thinking, integrity, and teamwork as the primary sources through which employees experience work as meaningful. For growth mindset, the theme "Conscientiousness" emerged, expressed through achievement-striving, competence development, self-discipline, and forward thinking.

Fourth, most demographic factors—including age, civil status, educational attainment, length of service, and monthly income—were found to significantly influence the presence of meaning in life, suggesting that meaning accumulates with life experience and stability. In contrast, religion was the only variable significantly associated with the search for meaning, with Protestants reporting higher search than Catholics. For meaning in work, job classification was the sole significant variable, with contractual or temporary employees differing from permanent employees, highlighting the importance of employment stability in fostering work meaning.

Notably, growth mindset showed no significant differences across any demographic variables, indicating that this psychological trait is relatively consistent across the respondent profile.

Fifth, presence of meaning, meaning in work, and growth mindset were all significantly and positively correlated with one another, indicating that these psychological resources are mutually reinforcing. Growth mindset was also significantly correlated with search for meaning, suggesting that individuals who believe in their capacity to grow are more inclined to engage in existential exploration. However, no significant relationship was found between search for meaning and meaning in work, indicating that actively seeking meaning may be more closely tied to personal development beliefs than to work experiences in this sample.

Sixth, based on the findings, the evidence-based program "Bakit Ako Nandito? A Filipino Workplace Program for Meaning, Purpose, and Well-Being" was developed to address the low levels of meaning in life and work while leveraging the existing high levels of growth mindset among employees.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed.

For institutional practice, the Human Resource Management and Development (HRMD) Office should develop and implement holistic employee development programs that help employees, particularly younger and newer staff, construct meaning in life and work while channeling their strong growth mindset into conscientious work behaviors. Such programs should be tailored to employees' demographic profiles and cultural values, recognizing that meaning is often experienced relationally through family and pakikipagkapwa rather than through abstract individual striving.

The Mental Health Committee should collaborate with the Marketing Department and psychology student organizations, such as the Psychology Association of LPU-Batangas (PALs) and the LPU-B Peer Facilitators Group (PFG), to implement targeted awareness campaigns for employees, increasing visibility and access to mental health support. These campaigns should emphasize that psychological well-being is as important as physical health, and that seeking support is a sign of strength, not weakness.

The proposed intervention program, "Bakit Ako Nandito? A Filipino Workplace Program for Meaning, Purpose, and Well-Being," should be reviewed, evaluated, and refined by the Mental Health Committee and HRMD before implementation. The program's culturally grounded activities—such as Kwentuhan Circles, Values Mapping, and Work Role Reframing Sessions—should be piloted with a small group of employees, with feedback collected to assess relevance, acceptability, and effectiveness.

For future research, investigators may use this study as a foundation for similar inquiries in other higher education institutions and organizational settings. Longitudinal designs are needed to examine how meaning in life and work develop over time and how growth mindset contributes to sustained meaning-making. Researchers may also explore additional variables not included in this study, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and psychological well-being, to build a more comprehensive model of employee flourishing. Comparative studies across different types of organizations (e.g., private vs. public, academic vs. corporate) and across different cultural contexts within and beyond the Philippines would further enrich understanding of how meaning and growth are constructed in diverse work settings.

5.3 Implications

The findings of this study carry several implications for theory, practice, and policy.

Theoretically, the results contribute to the growing body of literature on meaning and mindset in organizational settings by demonstrating how these constructs intersect in a non-Western, collectivist context. The finding that meaning in life is low by standard metrics yet richly articulated in relational terms through qualitative inquiry suggests that existing conceptualizations and measures of meaning may need to be culturally adapted to fully capture how meaning is experienced in Filipino and similar cultural contexts. The emergence of professional values and conscientiousness as central themes in how employees experience meaning and growth offers a nuanced understanding of the behavioral expressions of these psychological constructs.

Practically, the study highlights the importance of attending to the psychological well-being of administrative employees, who are often overlooked in educational research and institutional programming. The finding that contractual and temporary employees report lower meaning in work

than permanent employees underscores the need for institutions to consider how employment policies and practices affect employees' sense of purpose and fulfillment. Providing pathways to regularization, offering meaningful professional development opportunities, and creating supportive work environments that recognize contributions may help mitigate these disparities.

The strong growth mindset observed across all demographic groups indicates that employees are psychologically prepared to embrace challenges, learn new skills, and persist through difficulties. Institutions can leverage this strength by creating cultures that encourage learning from mistakes, provide constructive feedback, and support innovation and job crafting. The significant correlations between growth mindset and both presence of meaning and meaning in work suggest that interventions aimed at strengthening growth mindset may also enhance employees' sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Culturally, the study affirms the relevance of Filipino values such as pakikipagkapwa, kagandahang-loob, and bayanihan in shaping how employees experience meaning and purpose. Programs and policies that recognize and build upon these cultural strengths are likely to be more resonant and effective than those imported from Western contexts without adaptation. The proposed intervention program, grounded in Filipino cultural practices such as kwentuhan (storytelling) and shared reflection, offers a model for culturally responsive employee development.

Finally, the study contributes to destigmatizing mental health in the workplace by emphasizing that meaning, purpose, and well-being are legitimate and important concerns for all employees, not only those experiencing distress. By bringing attention to the psychological experiences of administrative staff, the study encourages more inclusive and holistic approaches to employee development and institutional effectiveness.

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7. Tables

Table 1

The Emergence of the Theme Conscientiousness for the Variable Growth Mindset Among HEI

Employees

Res No.	Transcript	Emerging Concept	Sub-category	Category	Theme
R1	*Oo,... umm…'yong pag-eedit sa video kasi more on photo ako, 'yon. Tas pina-attend ako ni Sir Paolo ng training, connected naman yun. At saka 'yong sa HR, Coursera… 'di ba lagi naman tayo nagccha-chatgpt; nagtatake ako ng mga prompt training at kung paano mag prompt..'yon.*	Learning new skills through training and technology	Diligence	Achievement-striving	Conscientiousness
R1	*Ano.. Siyempre, na-affect 'yong work mo on that day. Parang hindi ko rin siyang masyadong bibigyan ng time na isipin especially if alam mong, alam ko na sunod gagawin after that..'Yon parang you learn from it pero hindi mo dinidibdib*	learning and moving on without dwelling on mistakes	Resilience		

R2	*Ako naman, 'yon nga sabi ko nga sa'yo pag may mga task na hirap gawin… tapos nagagawan ng paraan… parang nakakuplift sa'yo as employee..Parang wala akong natatandaan na… na naging task na parang 'di namin magawa ng paraan, pinipilit namin gawin ng paraan, parang ganon. Parang kahit namin i-overtime, nakaranas kami sa LIMA, sinabi sa amin ng Friday, may duty kami ng sabado, lunes kailangan namin i-setup 'yon. Linggo talagang pumasok kami, magovertime man din 'yon hanggang halos dilim kami doon…mga ganon pagkataoon. Dumating ang bagong computer, kailangan namin i-setup, bukas gagamitin– hanggang alas-nuwebe nagtratrabaho kami, dumating talaga kami sa time na ganon pero kaya nga 'yon nga sabi ko sa'yo – iba ang pakiramdam, pag nagagawa mo na napapapagtagumpay an mo 'yong bagay na "kaya ba natin 'to?" "di kaya 'yan!", mga ganon.*	Motivation from overcoming difficult work	Forward Thinking	Cautiousness	

R1	*As a media coordinator kasi tas facebook and social media parang mas nacha-challenge pag may "new trend" tapos parang mababago ang algorithm.You have to keep up, 'yon. Keeping up tapos din naman..ummm.. Ano nga 'yon, kasama ba yung motivation? Supportive din kasi yung boss namin, si Sir Paolo ay papasang Gen-Z kahit siya ay sobrang millenial and advocate siya Mental Health.*	keeping up with the trends and supportive supervisors	Openness	Competence	
R2	*Siguro… 'yong .. itong trabahong ito is kumbaga ay "bread and butter"... ito 'yong bumubuhay sa pamilya ko. So kailangan, gawin ko 'yong the best, hindi lang para sa sarili ko kundi para sa pamilya ko.*	Family-Driven Purpose and Responsibility in Work	Role-Consciousness	Self-discipline	
R1	*Yung growth mindset? Na hindi pwede yung "pwede na", or "ganun na lang". 'Yong kahit 'di ba, meron naman tayong employee development programs..'yong kahit hindi part sa sarili mo mo lang nakikita ko na need ng improvements sa isang bagay. Ta's*	continuous learning as a source of meaning	Goal setting approach		

	nagrereflect pa sa'yo. 'Yon ang growth mindset for me, feeling ko naman ay eh… madami naman akong nakikitang ganun sa kawork ko. *oo , kasi nagtatake din ako ng online classes kahit 'di siya content… basta relevant sa work ko or relevant sa hobbies, I'm willing to learn..kumbaga… I treat myself as a sponge.*			
R2	*Ah ah ..'yon. 'Yong ngayon, mas madali na for me mag-research… dati parang … sa google ka lang magse-search. As in sa Google, search search ganoon. Ngayon, pag may kailangan ka, ita-type mo lang kay AI, Chatgpt, Gemini, Copilot, ganon tas 'yong mga task dati ng mga parang pasesetup ng mga server, dati parang may manual ka pang titignan isa-isa. Ngayon, tutorial mo na mapapanuod kung paano, kaya napakadali na ngayon kumpara kesa sa dati. Iyon, ang pagkakaiba na dating hirap-talagang tas makikita mo na ah ganito. May pagkakataon na talagang kailangan mo ng*	collaborative problem-solving with technology	Goal setting approach		

	isang tao katulad noong pinase-setup na recently na gustong iparang i-try namin kung maganda talaga siya ay baba-budgetan [clearing his throat] may tutorial na siya pinadala sa akin, tas di ko talaga siya masetup... tas naghanap ako ng way, parang isang linggo ko siya ginagawa; hindi ko pa rin magawa. Sabi ko tama anman, so ang ginawa ko- palibahasa may way naman ako para kontakin ang supplie, humingi ako ng assistance and then binigay niya sa akin tutorial eh okay na yan eh, pwede bang i-assist niyo na ako, siya sige sir magmeeting tayo. So nagkaroon kami ng .. so meeting 3 kami - supplier, distributor, at ako. Tama naman ginagawa ko, ang naging problem 'yong pinakalink na installer na nakuha ko, dahil nga nagtagal ang process ko at bago ko naset up - bago ko naayos, naexpire na. So 'yon, pwede kang... pwede akong humingi ng tulong sa ibang tao na kumbaga				

	sa tingin ko mas nakakaalam kung paano especially nga nung bago 'yong task na pinapagawa sa akin na- "ah ngayon ko lang 'to naexperience, so minsan hindi kaya ng tutorial lang"				
R2	*Kasi ako more on ... parang... ito noong bata pa ako , hindi kahit binata na ako. Mahilig akong manuod ng cartoons especially sina Naruto, 'yong parang karakter nila ay is ... kahit imposible, kahit alam mong dehado ka na, laging nagpupursigi – never gave up nga. So ako nadevelop sa akin 'yong mindset na laging positive parang " 'di kaya ko to!" lalo na*	Perseverance	Goal setting approach		

	ngayon napakalawak ng technology kumbaga'y masipag ka lang... lahat makikita mo eh sa internet.. may mga 'di katulad nung dati.. noong kami sabi ko sa mga 'yan "mag-internet lang kayo, magsipag lang kayo, maraming-kami nga nagumpisa nga sa parang nag-umpisa na, paano ba 'to? Trial and error? " noong una ako dumating dito ay 2001, trial and error talaga kami kasi...'di pa ganun.. ka.. mga Youtube, wala kang pang basta makikitang ways na ganito, ito ang gagawin mo.. ngayon sa tutorial, lahat makikita mo sa internet. So.. kailan nadevelop 'yong mindsetting na laging positive na "di kaya 'yan", nadala ko 'yon kahit sila ay kaya sila lagi kong sinsabihan; at least kayo marami na kayo, nakikita at napapanuod sa Youtube. Kami nga, nagsimula sa talagang ah! Talagang kailangan mong tiyagin at mag-trial and error.				

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Table 2.

Differences of Responses on Meaning in Life when grouped according to Profile

Profile Variables	*H/U*	p-Value	Interpretation
SEX			
Presence In Meaning	2805.000	.818	Not Significant
Search For Meaning	2714.500	.575	Not Significant
AGE			
Presence In Meaning	9.804	0.044	Significant
Search For Meaning	3.721	0.445	Not Significant
CIVIL STATUS			
Presence In Meaning	11.857	0.008	Significant
Search For Meaning	2.369	0.499	Not Significant
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT			
Presence In Meaning	8.595	0.035	Significant
Search For Meaning	2.22	0.528	Not Significant
JOB CLASSIFICATION			
Presence In Meaning	7.275	0.064	Not Significant
Search For Meaning	2.872	0.412	Not Significant
EMPLOYMENT STATUS			
Presence In Meaning	0.287	0.866	Not Significant
Search For Meaning	1.82	0.402	Not Significant
LENGTH OF SERVICE			
Presence In Meaning	16.104	0.001	Significant
Search For Meaning	1.77	0.621	Not Significant
RELIGION			
Presence In Meaning	6.322	0.276	Not Significant
Search For Meaning	14.799	0.011	Significant
MONTHLY INCOME			
Presence In Meaning	10.479	0.015	Significant
Search For Meaning	2.757	0.431	Not Significant

Table 3.
Differences of Responses on Meaning in Work when grouped according to Profile

Profile Variables	H/U	p-Value	Interpretation
SEX			
Positive Meaning	2761.5	0.694	Not Significant
Meaning-Making	2688.5	0.503	Not Significant
Greater Good Motivation	2793	0.783	Not Significant
Overall Meaning Score	2809.5	0.833	Not Significant
AGE			
Positive Meaning	4.314	0.365	Not Significant
Meaning-Making	4.986	0.289	Not Significant
Greater Good Motivation	6.607	0.158	Not Significant
Overall Meaning Score	5.605	0.231	Not Significant
CIVIL STATUS			
Positive Meaning	1.937	0.586	Not Significant
Meaning-Making	2.89	0.409	Not Significant
Greater Good Motivation	5.849	0.119	Not Significant
Overall Meaning Score	4.03	0.258	Not Significant
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT			
Positive Meaning	7.64	0.054	Not Significant
Meaning-Making	3.087	0.378	Not Significant
Greater Good Motivation	6.515	0.089	Not Significant
Overall Meaning Score	5.942	0.114	Not Significant
JOB CLASSIFICATION			
Positive Meaning	9.232	0.026	Significant
Meaning-Making	1.407	0.704	Not Significant
Greater Good Motivation	13.962	0.003	Significant
Overall Meaning Score	9.405	0.024	Significant
EMPLOYMENT STATUS			
Positive Meaning	0.086	0.958	Not Significant
Meaning-Making	0	1	Not Significant
Greater Good Motivation	3.217	0.2	Not Significant
Overall Meaning Score	0.375	0.829	Not Significant
LENGTH OF SERVICE			
Positive Meaning	3.045	0.385	Not Significant
Meaning-Making	1.992	0.574	Not Significant
Greater Good Motivation	2.27	0.518	Not Significant
Overall Meaning Score	3.132	0.372	Not Significant
RELIGION			
Positive Meaning	6.346	0.274	Not Significant
Meaning-Making	8.673	0.123	Not Significant
Greater Good Motivation	6.207	0.287	Not Significant

Overall Meaning Score	7.467	0.188	Not Significant
MONTHLY INCOME			
Positive Meaning	6.237	0.101	Not Significant
Meaning-Making	1.431	0.698	Not Significant
Greater Good Motivation	12.733	0.005	Significant
Overall Meaning Score	7.111	0.068	Not Significant

Table 4.
Relationship between Meaning in Life, Meaning in Work and Mindset

Variables	Spearman-rho	p-Value	Interpretation
PRESENCE IN MEANING			
Meaning in Work	.571**	.000	Significant
Growth Mindset	.451**	.000	Significant
SEARCH FOR MEANING			
Meaning in Work	.116	.149	Not Significant
Growth Mindset	.188*	.019	Significant
MEANING IN WORK			
Growth Mindset	.529**	.000	Significant

Legend: Correlation is significant at 0.05 alpha level, S (Significant), NS (Not Significant)