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Organisational identification and workers' well-being: The mediating role of trust, meaning of work and self-objectification

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Abstract

Given the recognised benefits of organisational identification (OI) on workers' well-being, we investigated the underlying mechanisms of this association in this work. We conducted a cross-sectional study ($N = 192$) to examine the possible mediating role of three factors related to individuals' workplace experiences (organisational trust, the meaning of work and self-objectification) in the relationship between OI and well-being. Specifically, the research aims to examine the relationship between identification in the workplace and favourable well-being outcomes. The study results demonstrated the significant indirect effects of the hypothesised model. In particular, OI was positively related to well-being via increased trust and meaning of work and through a reduced self-objectification experience. The findings highlight the significance of OI in relation to distal outcomes despite the potential presence of negative perceptual experiences within the relationship. This study seeks

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to offer innovative perspectives through which we can observe the relationship between less-examined variables within the workplace, thus providing guidance for practitioners and researchers in this field.

KEYWORDS
meaning of work, organisational identification, self-objectification, trust, well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the topic of workers' well-being has attracted the attention of numerous psychologists, who have explored, tracked down and disentangled the complexity of factors that determine favourable human and relational environments for people in different contexts (Alagaraja, 2020; Budd & Spencer, 2015). Specifically, the growing social and organisational psychology literature has highlighted 'well-being' as a multidimensional concept that includes an important component of relational and affective well-being, along with the critical role of the environment in which people live their experiences (Jetten et al., 2017; Steffens, Haslam, Schuh, Jetten, & van Dick, 2017). From this perspective, the social context represents not only the field where one can observe the outcome of an engagement, but also the environment where individuals are influenced by relational interactions, quality of bonding and contextual demands that promote (or degrade) their perceptions of well-being (Jetten et al., 2017; Karanika-Murray, Duncan, Pontes, & Griffiths, 2015).

In light of the application of the social identity approach to the organisational context (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Haslam et al., 2004), a bulk of research has already highlighted the relationship between organisational identification (OI) and a wide range of workers' outcomes (Blader, Patil, & Packer, 2017; Steffens et al., 2017). In particular, researchers have investigated whether OI could affect not only work-related outcomes (eg, commitment and performance; DeConinck, 2011; Ellemers & Rink, 2005), but also the deeper and more personal aspects of workers' lives, suggesting that identification with one's organisation may be related to personal well-being and happiness beyond the organisational context (De Giorgio et al., 2023). This evidence underscores the need to investigate the pivotal role of social factors on an individual's personal dimension, which also impact perceptions related to quality of life.

However, to the best of our knowledge, the literature has devoted less attention to the potential conjoint effects of OI on three workers' perceptions that appear theoretically interrelated: the *meaning of work* (Auzoult, 2020; Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012), *self-objectification* (Baldissarri, Andrighetto, Gabbiadini, & Volpato, 2017) and *trust* (Haslam & Ellemers, 2011). These perceptions could qualify—either positively or negatively—workers' experiences and impact their well-being. To address this gap, we designed this correlational research to investigate whether the association between OI and workers' well-being is driven by their interpretation of situations in terms of the meaning of work, self-objectification and trust.

2 | WELL-BEING AS A SOCIAL PRODUCT: THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

In response to changes in the conditions and characteristics of work, as well as a greater awareness of the significance of social responsibility, organisations and management consultants have taken a keen interest in workers' well-being (Knight & Haslam, 2010; Scott & Spievack, 2019). The term 'well-being' refers to a state that encompasses several aspects, some of which are physical (eg, the absence of illness) and psychological (eg, stress).

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To acquire an exhaustive comprehension of the many aspects that play a role in determining a person's state of health and happiness, it is necessary to give equal weight to all relevant dimensions (Suls, Luger, & Martin, 2010).

To date, researchers are learning more and more about the importance of the social dimension in ensuring quality of life. For example, studies have shown that the feeling of being part of a large social network has a major effect on people's health (Jetten et al., 2017). Apart from the classic indicators of physical (eg, blood pressure) and psychological (eg, satisfaction) well-being, access to social support (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000; Steffens et al., 2017), in all its forms, represents an essential need for individuals in terms of well-being in various contexts (Inoue, Funk, Wann, Yoshida, & Nakazawa, 2015). As such, the sociopsychological approach has shifted the focus of analysis to the importance of relationship qualities in building a framework for people based on bonding (eg, making different networks), bridging (eg, promoting social support at different levels) and linking (eg, aiming for mutual trust) in different parts of life (Haslam, Jetten, Cruwys, Dingle, & Haslam, 2018; Kawachi, Subramanian, & Kim, 2008).

Interestingly, recent research in the organisational field has found that group membership can have an impact on psychological well-being and physical health (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009; Jetten et al., 2017). Starting from the seminal work by Ashforth and Mael (1989), researchers have applied the principles of the social identity approach (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) in examining organisational contexts. In this regard, researchers have referred to OI as the psychological link between employees and their organisations (or their work team, in larger organisations) and have used the social identity approach as an innovative and holistic way of looking at the workplace. This approach also suggests that the various factors defining individuals' sense of belonging in specific groups, such as their work teams, contribute to the development of their attitudes and behaviours. In turn, these establish guidelines for individuals to become effective group members (Ellemers, 2017; Ellemers, Pagliaro, & Barreto, 2013). Furthermore, they shape a set of emotional and cognitive implicit perceptions that qualify people's experiences, which can either be positive or negative (Carmeli & Shteigman, 2010; Haslam et al., 2018).

Considering the encouraging results of the application of the social identity approach in the study of organisational contexts, several authors have highlighted its effectiveness not only on outcomes relating to the close working sphere (eg, job satisfaction and turnover intention; Lee, Park, & Koo, 2015) but also on typically personal dimensions of workers, such as their happiness (De Giorgio et al., 2023). Evidence has shown that identification processes, together with peculiar organisational features (eg, culture and climate; Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016; Teresi et al., 2022), act as stimuli for the evolution of workers' self-perceptions and provide essential information for understanding the quality of workers' experiences within the workplace. For example, a work setting that promotes the match between individuals' needs and organisational values (eg, trust, shared identity, aims and engagement promotion) is a fundamental antecedent of self-concept development (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). In other words, the effects of one's awareness of 'who *I am*' or 'who *we are*' influence the answer to 'why I am here'.

Past research has corroborated the idea that the relationship between OI and well-being may be mediated by how employees perceive their own experiences within an organisation (Avanzi, Schuh, Fraccaroli, & van Dick, 2015; Inoue, Lock, Gillooly, Shipway, & Swanson, 2021; Teresi, Giovannelli, Fasolo, & Barattucci, 2024). In the present paper, we attempt to verify the possible mediating role of three aspects that characterise such workplace experiences: organisational trust, meaning of work and self-objectification.

3 | MEDIATORS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OI AND WELL-BEING

3.1 | Organisational trust

'Organisational trust' refers to individuals' positive expectations of the intentions or behaviours towards other organisation members based on their roles or interdependencies (Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, & Winograd, 2000). Trust within

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an organisation is an important factor in coordinating individual efforts, and previous research has consistently linked trust to positive outcomes in organisations, including organisational commitment, work engagement, organisational citizenship behaviour and psychological contract breach (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Lin, 2010; Poon, Rahid, & Othman, 2006; Robinson, 1996). Furthermore, trust seems to play a central role in regulating individual behaviours within group settings, such as the workplace (Ellemers et al., 2013; Ellemers, Pagliaro, & van Nunspeet, 2023), for the maintenance of ethical practices, cognitive bridging, emotional embodying and inclusive enacting (Gustafsson, Gillespie, Searle, Hope Hailey, & Dietz, 2021).

More relevant for our reasoning, evidence has been presented regarding the pivotal role of the OI process in supporting relationship building and strengthening bonds of trust, which are fundamental dimensions to generate an environment oriented towards promoting workers' well-being (Helliwell & Huang, 2010; van Dick & Haslam, 2012). Considering the central role of the relationships around the social identity approach, the generation of significant ties based on *trust*—on multiple levels (eg, towards colleagues, supervisors and the company)—and consequent reciprocity implies a clear impact on the workers' perceptions of well-being (Maiolo & Zuffo, 2018; Puusa & Tolvanen, 2006). As a result of having a shared sense of belonging with other members of a group (eg, workplace), individuals perceive an expansion of the resources to which they have access by being able to count on the support of the other group members (Haslam, Jetten, O'Brien, & Jacobs, 2004; Jetten et al., 2017). In turn, this leads to a sense of safeness and recovery, which will significantly impact perceptions of sharing a certain degree of social well-being among the workers themselves (Haslam et al., 2018; Jetten, Haslam, & Alexander, 2012).

Thus, based on what has been described above and in previous findings (Greenaway et al., 2015; Hameed, Arain, & Farooq, 2013; Helliwell & Huang, 2010; Oguegbe & Edosomwan, 2021; Teresi et al., 2024), it seems reasonable to believe that at least part of the relationship between OI and workers' well-being may be driven by trust.

3.2 | Meaning of work and self-objectification

While the identification process leads to the formation of psychological bonds between people (eg, co-workers and supervisors), it also seems to shape individuals' self-perceptions within a given context (eg, the workplace; Teresi et al., 2022). The outcome of the social experience impacts the evolution of people's self-perceptions, which can result in a positive (eg, generating the meaning of work; Steger et al., 2012) or in a negative (eg, feeling more instrument-like; Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2021) perspective. Thus, the link between OI and well-being could be further explained by the resulting shaping of workers' self-conceptualisation derived from the experience of one's job and work environment (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

Numerous researchers have reported that defining 'the meaning of work' is a challenging task (Pignault & Houssemand, 2021; Rosso et al., 2010), and various academic disciplines have provided different definitions for this concept. In the field of organisational psychology, 'the meaning of work' pertains to individuals' understanding and perceptions of their real-life encounters and engagements within the workplace (Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999). In other words, the meaning of work is the perception that one's existence offers an effective contribution to one's environment, in this case, the working context (Auzoult, 2020; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The concept of 'the meaning of work' is intricate and diverse, with its interpretation differing among cultures, historical contexts and individual viewpoints. Regardless of such differences, it is clear that this concept is regarded as a crucial aspect of human existence—one that embodies fundamental values and contributes significantly to self-realisation, subjectivity and identity formation (Bendassolli & Tateo, 2018).

The literature has shown that when the working context promotes high levels of identification, rewards and a sense of stability, the worker will feel the *meaning of work* (Rast III, Hogg, & Giessner, 2016; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003), such as being aware that one's job contributes to the organisation and one's quality of life. Furthermore, the meaning of work implies the alignment of an individual's values and passion with their job characteristics, thus leading to increased self-esteem, a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of fulfilment (Baumeister &

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Vohs, 2002; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Research has shown that meaningful work is linked to higher levels of life satisfaction and well-being (Baumeister, 1991) because it helps people build a positive self-image and a healthy sense of self-worth (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Kahn, 2007). Furthermore, the meaning of work can lead to greater job satisfaction and engagement and even better health (Dechawatanapaisal, 2021; Wallace, 2019). Evidence also seems to indicate that the perception of the meaning of work has a significant impact on worker's experiences of affective well-being and health (Bryce, 2018; Lips-Wiersma, Haar, & Cooper-Thomas, 2022). These findings allow us to hypothesise that the meaning of work, which should increase in relation to OI, would play a possible mediating role in increasing workers' well-being.

Apart from the set of social environment characteristics and the demands of the job playing a crucial role in shaping workers' perceptions of the meaning of their work, these experiences also shape their perceptions of themselves, robbing individuals of the typical characteristics featuring human beings. This perception is also known as *self-objectification* (Baldissarri et al., 2017; Baldissarri, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2022). When people are thought of (and treated) in the same manner as other items, we use the term 'objectification' to describe the phenomenon (Nussbaum, 1995). In particular, an objectified person is dehumanised and considered devoid of subjectivity, and, as a result, they are regarded as only an instrument that may be utilised for the purpose of accomplishing certain objectives (Holland & Haslam, 2013; Vaes, Loughnan, & Puvia, 2014). Social psychological research has identified the asymmetric work relationship (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008) and the peculiar objectifying features (repetitiveness, fragmentation and other direction) that characterise specific activities performed by workers as the two main antecedents that trigger an objectified view of workers in the context of the work domain (Andrighetto, Baldissarri, & Volpato, 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2022) and also trigger workers' self-objectification, that is, their self-perceptions of being more instrument-like than human-like. This experience is also shaped by the structural characteristics of an organisation (Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016), as noted by recent research regarding job features and ethical climate (Teresi et al., 2022; Valtorta & Monaci, 2023). Furthermore, in cases in which job demands and workers' personal needs do not match, workers' experiences negatively influence their self-perceptions as humans versus objects (Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016). Indeed, failing to find a response to different needs related to work (eg, self-esteem, recognition and belongingness) is strictly related to our perceptions of humanness (Baldissarri, Andrighetto, & Volpato, 2014; Demoulin et al., 2021). Thus, we expect that when workers perceive a bond with others through the perception of OI, they experience a fulfilment of their human needs, which should prevent their self-objectification.

Some studies have suggested that OI is negatively associated with dehumanising workplace processes, working as a potential protective factor that can mitigate negative self-perceptions due to critical workplace conditions (Sainz, Delgado, & Moriano, 2021; Teresi et al., 2022). Furthermore, workers who self-objectify suffer negative effects, whether as a result of objectifying treatment or peculiar job requirements. In turn, employees'

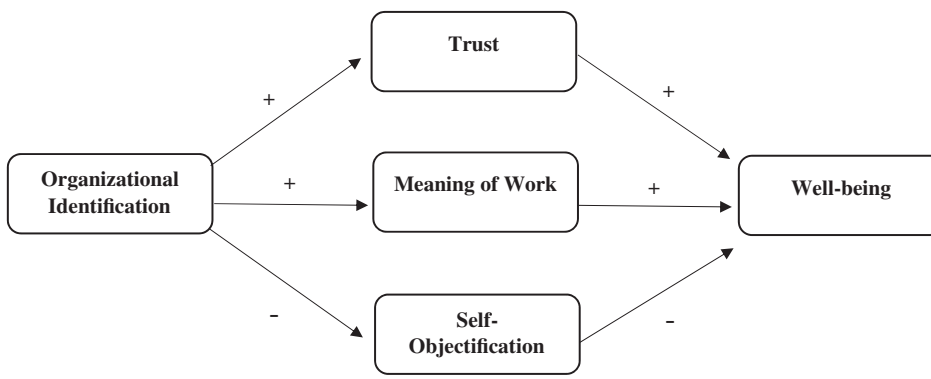

FIGURE 1 The hypothesised model.

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self-objectification negatively impacts their beliefs about their own perceptions of autonomy (Baldissarri et al., 2017; Rakos, Laurene, Skala, & Slane, 2008) and reduces their sense of well-being (Baldissarri et al., 2022; Steger et al., 2012). In summary, these reflections demonstrate a common field of antecedents that can build either positive or negative workers' self-perceptions, which in turn affect their well-being.

In light of this rationale, in the present paper, we hypothesised a comprehensive mediational model, depicted in Figure 1, in which a positive relationship between OI and workers' well-being is shown—one that is driven by organisational trust, self-objectification and the meaning of work as three parallel mediators. Figure 1 also depicts the hypothesised paths within the model, all of which stem from the rationale above.

4 | THE PRESENT RESEARCH

In the present research, we investigated the antecedents and related processes (individual self-perceptions) that contribute to employees' positive or negative workplace experiences. In doing so, we consider employees' well-being as the primary outcome of our investigation. In accordance with the rationale described above, we hypothesise that OI is a crucial precondition for a positive employee experience. Regarding underlying processes, we analysed two potentially positive mechanisms (ie, trust and the meaning of work) and a potentially negative one (ie, self-objectification). The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the association between OI and workers' well-being could be driven by workers' perceptions of trust, the meaning of work and self-objectification (Figure 1).

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants and procedure

With the aim of improving the generalisability of the results and best representing the heterogeneity of the workers' population, we used the snowballing sampling method. Workers of different companies in Italy were recruited by sharing a short poll on two social networking sites (ie, Facebook and WhatsApp), specifically a link to Qualtrics that led to a closed-ended questionnaire. The form was active for the first 2 weeks of March 2022. Workers read and agreed to a consent form, the participation instructions and a data processing declaration in accordance with current Italian laws (GDPR) and the Helsinki Declaration. Participation was anonymous and voluntary.

A total of 192 employees correctly completed the survey (mean age = 41.92, SD = 12.59; 95 women, 91 men, six missing values). Regarding education, 45.8% had a high school degree, 34.4% had a university degree, 9.9% had a higher degree and the remaining had only completed primary school or held a professional certificate/qualification. The majority of the sample comprised permanent workers (58.9%), while 24.5% were fixed-term contract workers. The remaining employees were either freelancers or consultants.

4.1.2 | Measures

Due to the correlational design of this study and the fact that all constructs were assessed through a single questionnaire, with each item measured on a 7-point Likert scale, we used the following suggested methods to address response bias and common method variance: the different scales were randomly inserted into the questionnaire and graphically separated from each other, and various scale formats and end-points were utilised for each of the measured variables (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

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Organisational identification

The study participants filled out the Italian adaptation (Manuti & Bosco, 2012) of the original 7-item scale by Mael and Ashforth (1992), which was revised for organisational contexts (eg, 'When someone criticises my organisation, it feels like a personal insult', $\alpha = .85$).

Organisational trust

The participants completed the Workplace Trust Survey (I-WTS; Maiolo & Zuffo, 2018), a 27-item scale that measured three dimensions of organisational trust (trust towards the organisation eg, 'I have the impression that the company will do well in the future'), trust towards colleagues (eg, 'In the company, I can trust the work my colleagues do') and trust towards the supervisor (eg, 'I feel like my supervisor listens to what I have to say'). Given the optimal reliability of the global index ($\alpha = .98$) and the high correlations among the three subfactors, we calculated a unique index through the average of all 27 items.

Self-objectification

The participants were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived themselves to be similar to four instrument-related items (ie, instrument, tool, thing and machine) and four human-related items (ie, human being, person, individual and subject; Baldissarri et al., 2017). After reversing the items, when necessary, the scale measured the workers' self-perception as being instrument-like (vs. human-like; $\alpha = .81$).

Meaning of work

We asked the participants to complete the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012), a 10-item scale that measured positive meaning (e.g., 'I have found a meaningful career'), meaning-making through work (eg, 'I view my work as contributing to my personal growth') and greater good motivation (eg, 'My work really makes no difference to the world') scores related to workers' experiences. The overall score of these three dimensions was obtained as the Meaningful Work score ($\alpha = .92$).

Well-being

To measure the participants' well-being, we used the Who-5 Well-Being Index (Bech, 2004), a self-reported scale to assess subjective well-being in an organisational context (Russo & Terraneo, 2020; for a review, see Topp, Østergaard, Søndergaard, & Bech, 2015). The participants were asked to rate on a 7-point scale (1 = never, 7 = everyday) the extent to which the five statements applied to them considering the last 2 weeks (eg, 'I have felt cheerful and in good spirits', $\alpha = .90$).

4.2 | Data analysis and results

As a preliminary analysis, we checked whether the participants' gender was related to the other study variables. As this analysis revealed that gender was unrelated to any other variable, we did not consider it in the subsequent analysis. Table 1 summarises the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for the research variables.

4.2.1 | Correlation analysis

The correlation analysis provided initial evidence about our hypotheses regarding the association between the main variables (Table 1). In line with the literature, our results showed a positive association of OI with different facets of workers' quality of life in the workplace. In particular, and as expected, OI was positively related to organisational trust, the meaning of work and well-being. On the contrary, OI was negatively related to perceived

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TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations on the whole sample among the variables of the study.

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Organisational identification	4.37 (1.39)	1	-	-	-	-
2. Organisational trust	4.45 (1.37)	.55***	1	-	-	-
3. Self-objectification	2.97 (1.23)	−.38***	−.43***	1	-	-
4. Meaning of work	4.5 (1.37)	.55***	.47***	−.46***	1	-
5. Well-being	4.19 (1.27)	.39***	.45***	−.44***	.50***	1

***$P < .001$.

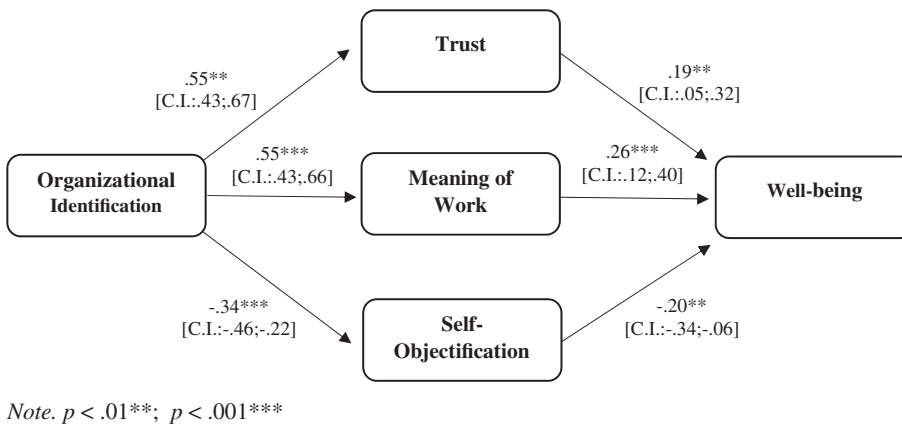

FIGURE 2 Results of the hypothesised mediation model.

self-objectification. Moreover, in line with our rationale, the results showed that both trust and the meaning of work were negatively related to workers' self-objectification. Furthermore, organisational trust and the meaning of work were positively related to well-being, whereas a negative association emerged between workers' perceived self-objectification and well-being.

4.2.2 | Mediation analysis

We conducted a mediation analysis using the PROCESS function V3.4 in IBM SPSS V.25 (Hayes, 2018; Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrapping samples to generate 95% confidence intervals by the percentile method) to test our mediation hypothesis (ie, whether the positive relationship between OI and workers' well-being was mediated by trust, meaningful work and self-objectification). Then, we modelled OI as a predictor; organisational trust, the meaning of work and self-objectification as parallel mediators; and well-being as the criterion (Figure 1). The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .59$, $F(4, 183) = 23.94$, $P < .001$. As shown in Figure 2, OI was positively related to organisational trust and the meaning of work, while it was negatively related to self-objectification. Furthermore, both trust and the perception that work was meaningful were positively associated with well-being; on the contrary, the experience of self-objectification in the workplace was negatively associated with workers' lower sense of well-being. In line with our hypothesis, the mediation model showed that OI was positively associated with workers' well-being via trust (*Indirect effect* = 0.10, SE = 0.04, 95% CI: 0.024, 0.192), the meaning of work (*Indirect effect* = 0.14, SE = 0.05, 95% CI: 0.055, 0.233) and self-objectification (*Indirect effect* = 0.07, SE = 0.03, 95% CI: 0.018, 0.129). Furthermore, all

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three hypothesised indirect effects were significant, while the direct effect between OI and workers' well-being was not significant when considering the mediators (*Direct effect* = .06, SE = 0.72, 95% CI: −0.083, 0.199).

5 | DISCUSSION

In the present research, we analysed the association between OI and workers' well-being, considering the mediating role of organisational trust, the meaning of work and self-objectification. In recent years, several authors have investigated workers' well-being by looking at the interplay between psychological and social factors. Our research attempted to move this analysis one step ahead by considering how the bond between workers and their organisations might be related to their self-perceptions and how such perceptions, in turn, may influence their well-being.

The analysis was conducted in light of the social identity approach to organisational behaviour (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Haslam, Postmes, & Ellemers, 2003). On the one hand, our results confirmed the bulk of findings showing that OI is strictly related to trust towards the organisation (Atalay, Aydemir, & Acuner, 2022) and employees' meaning of work (Lysova, Allan, Dik, Duffy, & Steger, 2019; Rosso et al., 2010), self-objectification (Teresi et al., 2022) and well-being (Greenaway et al., 2015). Moreover, we found that the direct relationship between OI and well-being was driven by employees' experiences and perceptions in the workplace. In other words, we present evidence that OI is positively related to organisational trust and the meaning of work and negatively related to employees' self-objectification. We then relate these reactions to well-being. Our findings further indicate that the positive effect of OI on employees' workplace experiences can even mitigate the negative experience of self-objectification.

5.1 | Theoretical implications

To the best of our knowledge, the current results offer the first evidence of the interrelation between organisational trust, the meaning of work and self-objectification and how their interplay can magnify the relationship between identification and perceived well-being. Moreover, the present contribution offers both comprehensive and in-depth insights into how social determinants, in a given context, play a significant role in shaping individuals' self-perceptions and not just their job-related outcomes (Barattucci, Alfano, & Amodio, 2017).

There are many indications in the literature proving that a higher level of OI is related to various organisational outcomes (eg, satisfaction, commitment and turnover). However, researchers have recently begun to investigate whether OI may impact personal aspects of an individual's life. For example, the social identity approach argues that individuals' self-concept facilitates the comprehension of their personal and social identities. While personal identity is based on individual characteristics, such as our personal preferences, values and beliefs, social identity is based on the group or groups we identify with (eg, social role, gender, ethnicity or occupation). This latter assumption suggests that contextual cues may determine whether, at a specific moment, a specific behaviour is driven by personal traits or group norms and rules. Apart from the personal benefits that come from high levels of OI, it seems to have additional personal benefits related to the social support generated at work (Avanzi et al., 2015).

The OI process drives the creation of relational connections and, in parallel, moulds individuals' self-perceptions within workplace contexts. The outcomes of social experiences, together with the other factors that constitute organisational life, will then shape the evolution of individuals' self-perceptions.

The results regarding the relationship between OI, trust and well-being confirm previous research (De Giorgio et al., 2023; Teresi et al., 2022; Teresi, Pietroni, Barattucci, Giannella, & Pagliaro, 2019), while the reading of the ones regarding the other two constructs under examination appears more complex. Indeed, despite our findings being entirely in line with previous findings that conceive social and relational processes (eg, OI) as possible determinants of self-perceptions, such as self-objectification, some other contributions (Manzi et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2017)

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interpret OI as a possible outcome of individual beliefs or perceptions, such as the meaning of work. In this sense, it is plausible to imagine that a bidirectional relationship underlies these constructs. This means that if a greater sense of belonging and identification with one's own organisation contributes to increasing workers' sense of meaning of work and inhibiting their self-objectification, it is also possible that a well-developed meaning of work or job features that do not objectify workers would foster satisfactory OI.

5.2 | Practical implications

The abovementioned reflections could inform human resource management strategies aimed at improving workers' well-being over and beyond classical workplace rewards. In fact, our findings and related reflections clearly stress the importance of considering workers' needs, which are implied in their self-perceptions as unique and fully human entities, not only in the context of work but also in their lives. The workplace, as a social context, provides a multitude of stimuli that predict workers' quality of life (Haslam et al., 2018; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Given that the structure of the social environment is a key factor in workers' well-being (Jetten, Haslam, Haslam, Dingle, & Jones, 2014), managers should start to pay attention to structural dimensions, such as job characteristics, relational climate and manager support, that enable workers to perceive being supported by the group (Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016; Jetten et al., 2012; Steffens et al., 2017).

From an operational point of view, team sense-making programmes, protocols for managerial support, interventions on resources and role-clarification periodic activities appear particularly indicated to set up a valid work climate based on support, solidarity and cooperation, and to positively impact the OI process (Barattucci et al., 2021). Specifically, for trust, interventions related to the sharing of information, values and participation in responsibilities could be very effective, while for the meaning of work, ideal interventions include those focused on responsibilities, personal and organisational goals, strategies for engagement and the provision of greater voice and involvement (Fletcher & Schofield, 2021). Meanwhile, for self-objectification, interventions that focus on stimulation and engagement and on co-created reviews of work design appear more suitable (Knight & Parker, 2021; Valtorta & Monaci, 2023).

5.3 | Limitations and further research

Despite our general rationale being confirmed by the findings reported above, some limitations of the present research should be acknowledged to help in the design of future studies on this topic. First, the cross-sectional nature of our data should be considered when we advance our speculation about the possible causal direction of the reported pattern. Nevertheless, we are reassured by the bulk of the literature showing the goodness of the relations between factors considered in the hypothesised model. Moreover, given that the supposed mediators were measured simultaneously, we tested for parallel mediation. Indeed, more adequate longitudinal designs may help explain whether these factors actually operate in parallel or whether it is possible to hypothesise and verify a sequential chain, such as by considering trust as a first-order mediator that impacts employees' perceptions of the workplace in terms of meaning of work and self-objectification.

Furthermore, future research may find it useful to test the proposed model using a larger and more representative sample of the population. In this way, such studies might be directed towards testing predictions through an experimental paradigm, considering the noted difficulties in manipulating psychological perceptions in a real-world workplace context.

Apart from these methodological issues, it would be interesting to test the present model in relation to other outcomes (eg, happiness and life satisfaction) related to workers' perceptions. Another opportunity, which is in line with recent literature, could be to implement the job demand—resources (JD–R model; Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; Ramaci, Pagliaro, Teresi, & Barattucci, 2021) in the reading of the variables' relationships and their

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impact on quality of life in the workplace. The JD–R model examines how job demands and resources influence employees' well-being and productivity. In this model, job demands represent the stressful aspects or efforts required by a job, while job resources are the aspects that can help employees manage these demands and achieve their goals. If resources outweigh demands, employees are more likely to experience greater well-being and increased productivity (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Considering future directions and in accordance with our results, the presence of high levels of OI, trust or meaning of work could represent a worker's useful resources to cope with elevated job demands. Finally, the nature of our research, which considered a heterogeneous sample of workers, did not allow us to fully comprehend the possible modulations of the investigated processes based on the specificities of a given organisational context or the type of work performed. Thus, future studies are encouraged to examine our findings in relation to the specific workplace contexts and types of work performed by the respondents.

6 | CONCLUSION

Despite the previously mentioned limitations, the present study aimed to fill the gap regarding the constructs that contribute to improving workers' quality of life and attempted to demonstrate how these may present innovative perspectives that can serve as guidelines on how to take care of workers' well-being.

We believe that the study represents a novel starting point for more in-depth investigations of the interplay between social factors (eg, trust towards organisations) and workers' self-perceptions in determining their well-being. This notion could also be crucial for researchers and practitioners in the fields of organisational behaviour and human resource management.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Manuel Teresi and Stefano Pagliaro conceptualised the present research. Manuel Teresi collected and analysed the data. Manuel Teresi, Massimiliano Barattucci and Stefano Pagliaro drafted the first version of the manuscript. All the authors provided comments and contributed to finalise the paper.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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