Editorial
WORK AND HUMANNESS:
DEHUMANIZING PROCESSES IN THE WORKPLACE

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"[…] a clear path forward in building a future workplace that's fit for humans.
More than pay or free food or a fun team, workers are looking for meaningful work
at organizations where they feel recognized and respected"
(Workhuman Analytics & Research Institute, 2019, p. 27)

Our identities as human beings are fundamentally tied to the work we do and to the related derived social recognition (e.g., Berkman, 2014). At the same time, human history provides plenty of examples documenting that work may also lead to a loss of one's humanity, which results in both dehumanization against specific occupational groups and workers' self-view as less than human. However, empirical research on dehumanization in the workplace has flourished only in the last decade (for first evidence see, e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2014; Bell & Khoury, 2011). By integrating the knowledge deriving from dehumanizing and organizational literature, this research (for reviews, see Baldissarri et al., 2022; Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023; Christoff, 2014) has shown that specific dehumanizing processes feature today's work scenarios, such as organizational dehumanization — the meta-perception of being instrumentalized by the organization (e.g., Caesens et al., 2017) —, objectification of workers — the view of them as mere objects (e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2017) — and the related self-objectification — the workers' self-perception as mere objects (e.g., Baldissarri et al., 2014).

The present Special Issue aims to expand this burgeoning literature empirically and theoretically. We organized this issue into two main parts. The first four papers present empirical data that better disentangle these dehumanizing processes at work or analyze unexplored contexts and occupational groups targeted by dehumanizing processes. The remaining papers are theoretical and offer relevant insights into present or future work scenarios tightly linked to dehumanizing processes, together with possible strategies that could invert the process and promote humanizing processes in the work domain.

In the first contribution, Brison and colleagues focus on organizational dehumanization by empirically disentangling its mechanistic form — the meta-perception of workers of being considered as machines by the organization — from the animalistic one — the meta-perception of workers of being considered as "beasts" (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Christoff, 2014). Few empirical studies have considered this latter form of dehumanization (Agadullina et al., 2022; Valtorta et al., 2019a; Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018), and no studies have considered the distinctiveness between the animalistic and mechanistic form of dehumanization, at least through quantitative research. In three cross-sectional studies involving employees in different workplaces (total $N = 834$), the Authors show that the two forms of organizational dehumanization are not only empirically distinguished but also related to different adverse outcomes. Both animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization are negatively associated with job satisfaction. In contrast, only mechanistic organizational dehumanization impacts turnover intentions, and only animalistic organizational dehumanization is negatively related to in-role performance. These results highlight the importance of fully comprehending the different forms of organizational dehumanization to deeply understand the impact of these dehumanizing meta-perceptions on workers' general well-being.

The second paper shifts the focus to meta-objectification, a form of dehumanizing meta-perception that implies the perception of being considered as objects by supervisors. Correia analyzes the effect of meta-objectification by considering a precious sample of 573 police officers and finds that those reporting a greater perception of being objectified by their commanders felt they were treated less fairly by their organization (perceived organizational justice) and showed decreased levels of well-being. This study provides further evidence of the link between objectification and organizational justice, showing that these two dimensions could potentially create a vicious circle in which objectification fosters organizational justice, which in turn may feed dehumanizing meta-perceptions (as previously analyzed by Bell & Khoury, 2011, or Stinghlamberg et al., 2022), and finally undermine workers' health.

In the third paper, Chase and colleagues keep the focus on objectification by expanding our knowledge following two main directions. On the one hand, they aim to analyze two main facets characterizing objectification separately, that is, fungibility and instrumentality. On the other, they aim to link these two facets to two potential triggers of objectification — organizational change and organizational power (see Gruenfeld et al., 2008). Interestingly, they consider both self-objectification of office workers ($N = 118$) and other-objectification, that is, whether and to what extent laypeople ($N = 160$) objectify other (fictitious) employees occupied in potentially objectifying different conditions. The authors found that experiencing organizational change is strictly related to higher perceptions of being objectified as an instrument while occupying a less powerful position is strictly associated with higher perceptions of being treated as interchangeable with similar others, which, in turn, predicted tendencies to self-objectify through a decreased perceived professional efficacy. When considering other-objectification of workers, results showed a primary role of instrumentality, by also highlighting an essential interaction with the individual tendency to take the others' perspective, which can moderate the course of objectification. Thus, this research stresses the strong need to identify in this field of research the possible individual dimensions that could prevent — or promote — dehumanizing perceptions in the workplace environment.

The fourth contribution is inspired by the literature on "dirty jobs" (see Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, 2014) and focuses on cleaning ladies, an occupational group especially exposed to dehumanizing processes due to their critical work conditions. Through a scenario study, Boulard and colleagues examine the interactive effects of work repetitiveness and a new key dimension shaping their dehumanization — the job purpose, which is presented as oriented to bring cleanliness or remove dirt, depending on the condition. In line with previous research on the topic (see Andrighetto et

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al., 2017; Valtorta et al., 2019b), their study first shows that repetitiveness led laypeople to dementalize these workers. Furthermore, these dehumanizing perceptions are associated with a lower perception of job satisfaction. However, these effects vary depending on the job purpose, highlighting the importance of considering more amply the role of work environments and how it impacts the dehumanizing social judgment of laypeople toward stigmatized workers.

The fifth paper is a relevant scoping review of the existing literature examining the link between humanness at work and leadership behaviors. More specifically, Bohré-den Harder and colleagues highlight the role of abusive leadership in promoting dehumanization at work. Then, they underline the importance of "reversing the process," by first emphasizing the scarcity of works that focus on the study of experienced humanness in organizations and, consequently, the importance of clarifying which leadership behavior can inhibit dehumanization and promote the workers' experience of humanness. Concerning this, they describe accurately some recent cross-sectional studies (Arriagada et al., 2021; Moriano et al., 2021; Sainz et al., 2021; Stinglhamber et al., 2021) that examined the positive role that leaders can play in fostering humanness, specifically via high-quality exchanges with their employees, and authentic and security-providing leadership. Thus, this contribution stresses the need for research that pays more attention to how humanness can be improved in the workplace instead of just identifying processes that erode it.

In the sixth contribution, Tommasi analyzes the process of objectification from a macro-social level by providing insightful reflections on the tight link between objectification and the ideological perspective of neoliberalism (see Harvey, 2005). This paper adopts an interdisciplinary perspective and creates an optimal connection between studies from social psychology and critical perspectives in work and organizational psychology. In doing so, the author argues that dehumanizing processes and working objectification represent one of the main outcomes of the neoliberalization of work by also suggesting challenging implications for the investigation of dehumanizing processes and working objectification in the social psychology field.

The last contribution looks to the future of work and humanness. Sparascio and colleagues consider the impact of industrial revolution 4.0. and the advent of Big Data and Artificial Intelligence on workers' human perception, by specifically analyzing the phenomenon of datafication — extracting and collecting data (see Southerton, 2022) — as a potential new source of human objectification at the workplace. More broadly, this contribution delineates the important advantages for human societies of datafication and Big Data but also puts forward insightful research questions on the psychological and societal costs of these phenomena that future research should consider to protect humanness at work.

We believe that, taken together, the contributions included in this Special Issue document well the importance (and urgency) for scholars to further engage in research that monitors dehumanizing processes, both in today's and upcoming work scenarios. In this way, we also hope to inspire policymakers or organizations to move toward concrete actions aimed to guarantee a future of work that promotes a full recognition of workers as human beings.

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