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Organizational Dehumanization

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Summary

Embodying the negative side of the employee-organization relationship, organizational dehumanization is defined as the experience of an employee who feels objectified by his or her organization, denied personal subjectivity, and made to feel like a tool or instrument for the organization's ends. Empirical evidence shows that organizational dehumanization is linked to deleterious consequences for both employees and organizations. Specifically, organizational dehumanization impairs employees' well-being as well as their positive attitudes toward their organization and their work, and it elicits behaviors that impede organizational functioning. Overall, self-determination theory, social exchange theory, and social identity theory provide relevant theoretical insights into the underlying mechanisms through which organizational dehumanization leads to these negative consequences. Scholars also advanced theory regarding its antecedents that fall into six main categories (i.e., societal factors, organizational characteristics, environmental factors, job characteristics, interpersonal factors, and individual factors). Finally, prior work highlights that organizational dehumanization perceptions are not elicited to the same extent in all employees, depending on demographic characteristics and on contextual features. Although organizational dehumanization has already received some empirical attention, future research is needed to enrich its nomological network by further examining its antecedents, consequences as well as its explaining and moderating mechanisms.

Keywords:

organizational dehumanization, employee-organization relationship, employees' well-being, job attitudes, behaviors

Introduction

Twenty-first century workers face a substantial risk to be brought closer to the status of instruments and further away from humanity. While undergoing ever-changing technological breakthroughs, organizations may undertake restructuring processes aimed at reducing the size of the workforce, although still coping with the same workload (Caesens et al., 2017). On top of these issues, a considerable number of workers across the globe have been working under hazardous and inhumane conditions ranging from unsafe practices to modern slavery (Christ et al., 2020). Many modern workplaces may thus be impersonal environments where personal subjectivity collides with capitalistic injunctions (Bell & Khoury, 2011), formal bureaucratic procedures (Caesens et al., 2017), or indecent work conditions (Christ et al., 2020) to name a few. Providing a fertile ground for employees' perceptions of being treated as tools owned and used by their organization for its own ends (Caesens et al., 2017), these challenges spotlight the need for psychological considerations of employees' perceptions of a dehumanized relationship with their employing organizations (Bell & Khoury, 2011). In line with this, researchers have started to examine the negative side of the employee-organization relationship through the concept of organizational dehumanization (e.g., Bell & Khoury, 2011; Caesens et al., 2017), defined as "the experience of an employee who feels objectified by his or her organization, denied personal subjectivity, and made to feel like a tool or instrument for the organization's ends" (Bell & Khoury, 2011, p. 170).

Given its deleterious consequences for both employees and organizations (e.g., Caesens et al., 2017), organizational dehumanization has attracted increasing scholarly attention. This work has provided significant empirical evidence of its nomological network. Specifically, various categories of antecedents, consequences as well as explaining and moderating mechanisms of organizational dehumanization have been identified (e.g., Bell &

Khoury, 2011, 2016; Caesens et al., 2017, 2019; Lagios et al., in press; Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021; Stinglhamber et al., 2021; Taskin et al., 2019). As part of these necessary efforts to advance theory regarding employees' perceptions of being dehumanized by their organization (e.g., Stinglhamber et al., 2021), this article pursues different aims. First, it intends to briefly summarize the historical background behind the concept of organizational dehumanization in order to clarify its conceptualization and its operationalization in the field of work and organizational psychology. Second, this article aims at clarifying how organizational dehumanization conceptually differs from related constructs in the psychological literature such as perceived organizational support, perceived organizational obstruction or working objectification. Third, this article reviews past research findings to provide an integrated view of the nomological network of organizational dehumanization including its antecedents, consequences as well as its explaining and moderating mechanisms. Finally, it further seeks to identify promising directions for future research.

Historical Background, Conceptualization, and Operationalization

Before entering the field of organizational psychology, the concept of dehumanization raised the interest of social psychologists (for reviews, see Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). According to Haslam (2006), dehumanization is commonly referred to as the result of the process by which an individual is made to feel deprived of human attributes, which leads them to feel more like an animal or machine. In other words, their human characteristics are being denied (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Most empirical research on dehumanization draws on Haslam's (2006) theoretical model that distinguishes animalistic dehumanization from mechanistic dehumanization. It is argued that when dehumanized, an individual is being denied humanness, which can be understood in two senses (Haslam, 2006). On the one hand, humanness may be understood in a comparative way that involves comparing humans with other animals, resulting in the identification of Human Uniqueness

(i.e., the characteristics that differentiate humans from other animals) (Haslam, 2006). On the other hand, humanness may also be thought of in a non-comparative way when seeking to identify Human Nature (i.e., the characteristics that are typical or fundamental to humans) (Haslam, 2006). When individuals are denied Human Uniqueness attributes, they are likely to be reduced to the status of animals "and seen as childlike, immature, coarse, irrational, or backward" (Bastian & Haslam, 2010, p. 107), which refers to animalistic dehumanization (Haslam, 2006). When they are denied Human Nature attributes, individuals are likely to be reduced to the status of objects or machines "and seen as cold, rigid, inert, and lacking emotion and agency" (Bastian & Haslam, 2010, p. 107), which refers to mechanistic dehumanization (Haslam, 2006). Alongside Haslam's dual model (2006), scholars suggest that the key components of the denial of humanity are property (i.e., the commodification of an individual), violability (i.e., failure to consider a person's physical well-being), fungibility (i.e., treatment of a person as interchangeable), instrumentality (i.e., use of a person to one's own ends), and lack of autonomy, subjectivity, and experience (Nussbaum, 2005).

Primary scientific investigations of dehumanization focused on ethnicity and genocides (e.g., Kelman, 1973). Later on, other social issues such as disability (e.g., O'Brien, 1999), gender (e.g., Vaes et al., 2011), mental illnesses (e.g., Martinez et al., 2011), and medical relationships (e.g., Vaes & Muratore, 2013) have been considered through the lens of dehumanization. Therefore, dehumanization has been described as a subtle everyday phenomenon that could also pervade individuals' professional life (Christoff, 2014).

The overwhelming majority of earlier work on dehumanization considered the phenomenon from the perpetrators' perspective by investigating to what extent and in which circumstances laypeople tend to dehumanize targets (Demoulin et al., 2021). As a result, the targets' perspective has been largely overlooked in the dehumanization literature (Demoulin et al., 2021). It is only in the late 2010s that scholars have started to focus on the victims'

perceptions of being dehumanized among sexually objectified women (e.g., Chevallereau et al., 2021), patients with severe alcohol-use disorders (e.g., Fontesse et al., 2020), and in employees within organizations (e.g., Caesens et al., 2017).

Specifically, researchers started to examine employees' perceptions of being denied the main tenets of humanness by their organization. Even though it has been suggested that the two forms of dehumanization – animalistic and mechanistic - may occur in organizational contexts (e.g., Bell & Khoury, 2011; Christoff, 2014), it is commonly argued that the mechanistic form of dehumanization is more pervasive in work settings (e.g., Bell & Khoury, 2011; Christoff, 2014). Therefore, research on organizational dehumanization has mainly focused on the mechanistic form of dehumanization. In line with the research body that seeks to consider the victims' perspective, organizational dehumanization focuses on employees' perceptions of being treated like interchangeable tools by their organization. As such, the concept of organizational dehumanization encompasses the violation of the core characteristics of humanity by the organization, including fungibility, subjectivity and instrumentality.

Drawing on this conceptualization, scholars developed scales to measure organizational dehumanization. The first scale was created by Bell and Khoury (2011) to assess the extent to which employees feel dehumanized by their organization via eight questions targeting specific aspects of dehumanization perceptions in work settings. A sample item is "Does the [target organization] respond to your concerns, or does it focus on efficiency with [organization members] treated like robots or numbers?", from – 3 (Focus on efficiency, treating [organization members] like robots or numbers) to +3 (Responds to personal concerns). However, one item of this scale (i.e., "Are you free to make decisions in important matters or does the [target organization] control everything with lots of formal rules and bureaucracy?") appears to better capture job autonomy, which has been shown to be a

distinct construct that predicts employees' organizational dehumanization perceptions (Caesens et al., 2019; Demoulin et al., 2020). Similarly, some items of Bell and Khoury's scale (2011) show conceptual overlap with the construct of perceived organizational support, which is distinct from organization dehumanization (Caesens et al., 2017) (e.g., "Does the [target organization] care about and value you based on who you are as a person, or based on your performance?).

Therefore, another 11-item scale that is most widely used, has been developed in order to assess organizational dehumanization perceptions on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Caesens et al., 2017) (see Table 1). The items have been developed based on the main components of denied humanness (e.g., instrumentality, fungibility, subjectivity) (Nussbaum, 1995) as well as on the core characteristics of mechanistic dehumanization (e.g., being reduced to the status of a machine or robot) (Haslam, 2006). This scale shows good psychometric properties (Caesens et al., 2017) and is thus at the core of most studies in the field of organizational dehumanization. Specifically, analyses reveal that the scale developed by Caesens and her collaborators (2017) measures the unidimensional construct of organizational dehumanization that is distinct from other related concepts (e.g., perceived organizational support). However, the first item (i.e., "My organization makes me feel that one worker is easily as good as any other") has slightly weaker loadings (Caesens et al., 2017), suggesting that it may be less representative of the organizational dehumanization construct.

Table 1

11-item Scale Measuring Organizational Dehumanization (Caesens et al., 2017, p. 532)

1. My organization makes me feel that one worker is easily as good as any other
2. My organization would not hesitate to replace me if it enables the company to make more profit
3. If my job could be done by a machine or a robot, my organization would not hesitate to replace me by this new technology
4. My organization considers me as a tool to use for its own ends
5. My organization considers me as a tool devoted to its own success
6. My organization makes me feel that my only importance is my performance at work
7. My organization is only interested in me when it needs me
8. The only thing that counts for my organization is what I can contribute to it
9. My organization treats me as if I were a robot
10. My organization considers me as a number
11. My organization treats me as if I were an object

Note. Scale anchors are 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*

Overlap and Differences with Related Constructs

Alongside the growing research body focusing on organizational dehumanization, other related constructs have been examined. Although some of these concepts target employees' perceptions of being exploited and treated with cruelty or, conversely, particularly cared for as human beings by their organization, there is evidence showing that they are distinct constructs. Additionally, discrepancies with working objectification and work alienation are also discussed. The following section aims at clarifying the conceptual similarities and differences with these related constructs.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived Organizational Support (POS), defined as employees' general perceptions regarding "the extent to which their organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 501), has been at the core of an extended research body on the employee-organization relationship. Similar to organizational dehumanization, POS considers the targets' perspective by focusing on employees' perceptions of the relationship they hold with their organization. Yet, it comes out from its definition that POS depicts the positive side of this relationship whereas organizational dehumanization captures its negative side. It is thus not surprising that these two concepts are strongly correlated (Caesens et al., 2017). However, there is empirical evidence showing that they are distinct constructs (Caesens et al., 2017). Accordingly, these findings suggest that POS and organizational dehumanization are not the ends of a single conceptual continuum. Corroborating this claim, scholars argue that employees' perceived failure of their organization to support its employees (i.e., low levels of POS) is conceptually distinct from employees' perceptions of being actively harmed by their organization (Gibney et al., 2009), for instance through an instrument-like treatment. Hence, POS is unable to assess the extent to which employees believe that their organization is being detrimental to them. This assertion leaves room for constructs that target the negative side of the employee-organization relationship such as organizational dehumanization.

Perceived Organizational Obstruction

Given the inability of the POS construct to assess the negative side of the employee-organization relationship (Gibney et al., 2009), scholars have examined the latter through other concepts including Perceived Organizational Obstruction (POO). POO is referred to as the "employees' belief that the organization obstructs, hinders, or interferes with the accomplishment of their goals and is a detriment to their well-being" (Gibney et al., 2009, p.

667). Both POO and organizational dehumanization capture employees' perceptions that their organization prioritizes the achievement of organizational objectives over workers' personal goals (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Gibney et al., 2009). Yet, POO and organizational dehumanization show conceptual discrepancies. Supporting this view, Bell and Khoury (2011) suggested that organizational dehumanization encompasses employees' perceptions that they are being considered as mere tools rather than human beings in order to achieve organizational goals. In other words, the prioritization of organizational goals over employees' personal development is perceived to occur through a specific mechanism, namely employees' perceived reduction to the status of instruments, which implies the denial of workers' human features. Conversely, POO only focuses on the perceived hindering role of the organization in the achievement of employees' personal goals (Gibney et al., 2009), regardless of the kind of treatment they receive from the organization that may thus not necessarily be dehumanizing.

Perceived Exploitation

Along the same lines, the dark side of the employee-organization relationship has been explored through the concept of perceived exploitation, defined as the "employees' perceptions that they have been purposefully taken advantage of in their relationship with the organization, to the benefit of the organization itself" (Livne-Ofer et al., 2019, p. 1998). This definition spotlights some conceptual overlap between perceived exploitation and organizational dehumanization. First, both constructs consider employees' perceptions of the negative aspects of their relationship with their employing organization (Caesens et al., 2017; Livne-Ofer et al., 2019). Second, scholars argue that the emphasis placed on organizational aims at the expense of employees' personal goals is a key feature of perceived exploitation (Livne-Ofer et al., 2019) as well as of organizational dehumanization (Bell & Khoury, 2011). However, perceived exploitation encompasses perceived intentionality behind the

organization's actions whereas this is not necessarily the case of other constructs that target the negative aspects of the employee-organization relationship (Livne-Ofer et al., 2019) such as organizational dehumanization. In addition, perceived exploitation focuses on the extent to which employees perceive that their relationship with their organization is voluntarily imbalanced (e.g., in terms of financial reward) (Livne-Ofer et al., 2019). Conversely, the core characteristic of organizational dehumanization lies in employees' perceptions that they are being denied their humanness in order to act as cold and rigid tools, regardless of any possible imbalances. For instance, an employee may feel dehumanized because of specific job tasks while being totally satisfied with their salary.

Perceived Organizational Cruelty

Another construct aimed at capturing the negative dimension of the employee-organization relationship is Perceived Organizational Cruelty (POC), defined as an "employee's perception that the organization holds him or her in contempt, has no respect for him or her personally, and treats him or her in a manner that is intentionally inhumane" (Shore & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012, p. 141). This definition highlights that POC and organizational dehumanization both focus on employees' perceptions regarding the extent to which their organization treats them with a clear lack of humanity. Yet, unlike organizational dehumanization, POC may include a wide range of perceived malevolent actions that are not necessarily aimed at serving organizational purposes (Shore & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012). In other words, POC involves a personified conception of the organization as a harmful and cruel entity for unspecified reasons (Shore & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012) and not primarily for the maximization of the organization's profits. Conversely, organizational dehumanization focuses on employees' perceived denial of their humanness at work in order to achieve organizational goals.

Working Objectification

Drawing on Nussbaum's (1995) theorization of objectification, scholars investigated the concept of working objectification, referred to as the object-like perception and treatment of individuals in the workplace (Andrighetto et al., 2017). In light of this definition, it appears that both working objectification and organizational dehumanization refer to the instrumentalization of workers who are considered as tools (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Andrighetto et al., 2017) devoted to serve organizational purposes (Volpato et al., 2017). Yet, scholars posit that objectification involves the perception of individuals or social groups as mere objects (e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2017). As a consequence, in contrast to organizational dehumanization, most empirical investigations involving working objectification focus on the perpetrators' perspective. For instance, it has been shown that, compared to non-work contexts, work contexts lead third parties to objectify targets to a greater extent (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). Specifically, work environments are likely to promote strategic and calculative mindsets among third parties who, in turn, objectify others (Belmi & Schroeder, 2020). More precisely, specific categories of workers have been shown to be objectified by third parties (e.g., factory workers, subordinates, garbage collectors; Andrighetto et al., 2017; Baldissarri, Valtorta et al., 2017; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Valtorta et al., 2019a; Valtorta et al., 2019b). In addition, specific characteristics of the work itself such as repetitiveness of the movements, fragmentation of activities, and dependence on the machine lead laypeople to perceive target workers as objects rather than human beings (Andrighetto et al., 2017).

Although past research on working objectification mainly considered the perpetrators' perspective, a handful of studies on working objectification focused on the victims' point of view (Andrighetto et al., 2018, Baldissarri et al., 2014; Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2021; Baldissarri, Andrighetto et al., 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2019). Yet, these few studies on working objectification considering the employees' perspective do not focus on the

employee-organization relationship. Instead, these studies consider objectification arising from a specific person (i.e., the supervisor; Baldissarri et al., 2014; Baldissarri et al., 2019) or from specific types of tasks that are supposed to elicit objectification perceptions (Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2021; Baldissarri, Andrighetto et al., 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2019) mainly among undergraduate students in laboratory settings (Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2021; Baldissarri, Andrighetto et al., 2017). Conversely, empirical work on organizational dehumanization investigates employees' perceptions of being treated like mere objects by their organization (e.g., Bell & Khoury, 2011; Caesens et al., 2017) that is considered as the entity responsible for the employees' perceptions of being dehumanized (Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Bell & Khoury, 2011). In sum, working objectification literature mainly focuses on the social perception of workers or on objectification perceptions arising from concrete sources, whereas organizational dehumanization embodies the negative side of the employee-organization relationship from the employees' point of view.

Work Alienation

Built upon a sociological theoretical framework, work alienation is defined as employees' "estrangement, or disconnection from work, the context, or self" (Nair & Vohra, 2009, p. 296). Conceptual overlap between work alienation and organizational dehumanization may be found in sociological work on the dehumanization of workers (Bell & Khoury, 2011). According to Marx (1961 as cited in Bell & Khoury, 2011), the feelings of estrangement that are at the core of alienation go hand in hand with the dehumanizing capitalistic system where the human labor is commodified. Indeed, as the products of workers' labor belong to the owner of the company they are working for, employees tend to consider their work as a means to survive instead of a component of their self-concept as human beings (Shantz et al., 2015). This process results in employees experiencing a disconnection from their work (Shantz et al., 2015). Since organizational dehumanization and

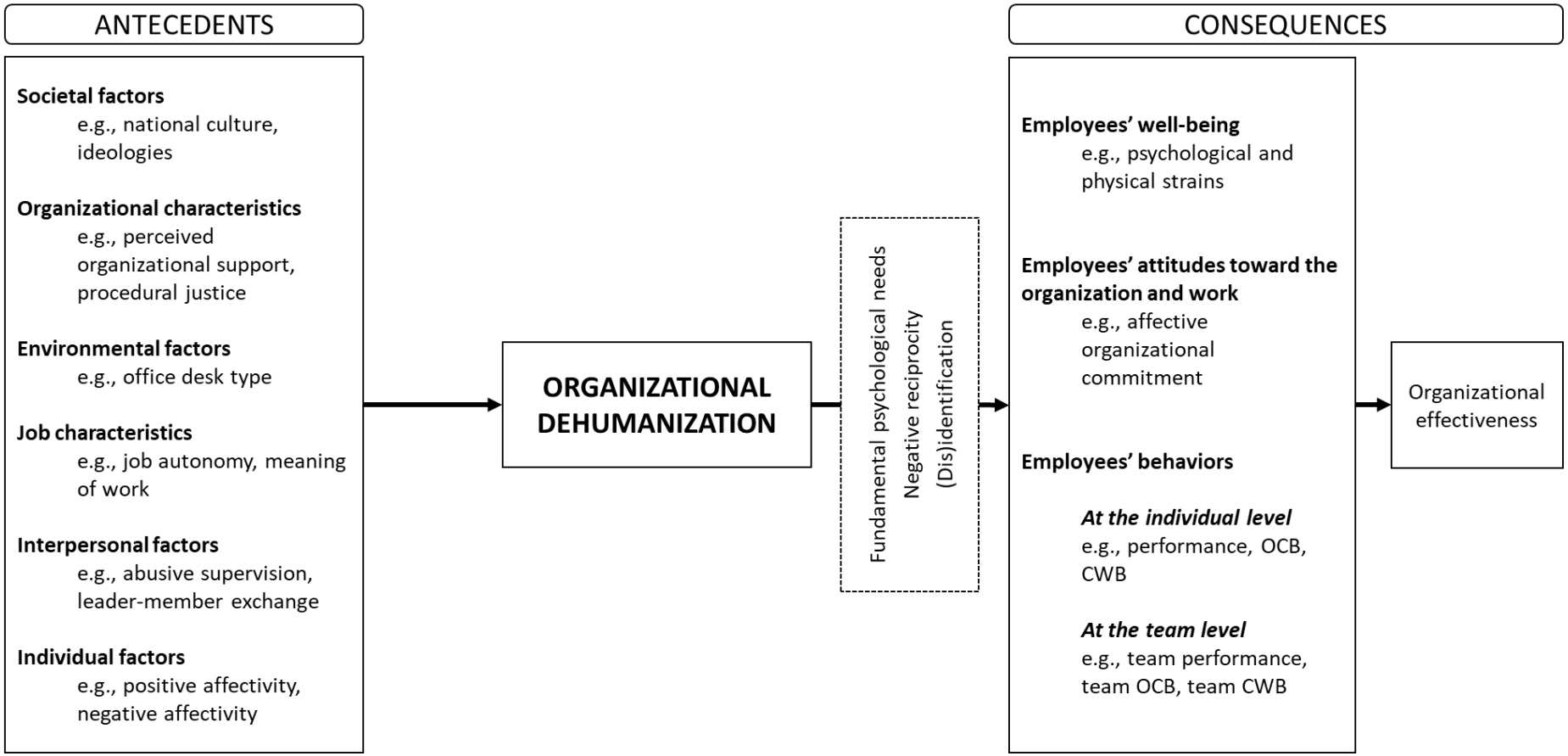
work alienation are related constructs (Bell & Khoury, 2011), some job characteristics that have been found to predict organizational dehumanization (e.g., job autonomy, professional isolation) also appear to be antecedents of work alienation (Chiaburu et al., 2014). Yet, although both organizational dehumanization and work alienation consider the victims' (i.e., employees) perceptions and feelings, they are conceptually distinct from each other (Bell & Khoury, 2011). For instance, unlike work alienation, organizational dehumanization perceptions are embedded in the employee-organization relationship literature and imply holding the organization responsible for this instrument-like treatment (Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Bell & Khoury, 2011). More precisely, organizational dehumanization refers to employees' perceptions of being treated in a dehumanizing way by their organization. Conversely, work alienation refers to employees' feelings of being disconnected from their work, regardless of the treatment they receive from their organization.

The Nomological Network of Organizational Dehumanization

Prior empirical investigations on organizational dehumanization has enabled the elaboration of its nomological network by providing insight into its consequences as well as their underlying mechanisms, its antecedents, and its moderators (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Nomological Network of Organizational Dehumanization



Note. OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behaviors; CWB = Counterproductive Organizational Behaviors

Consequences of Organizational Dehumanization

Since dehumanization is described as a harmful everyday phenomenon (Christoff, 2014), a considerable body of empirical work has investigated the consequences of organizational dehumanization for both employees and organizations. To date, it is widely assumed that the negative consequences of organizational dehumanization fall into three main outcome categories, namely: employees' well-being; employees' attitudes toward their organization and their work; and employees' behaviors (Taskin et al., 2019)[1] (see Figure 1).

Employees' Well-Being

A significant amount of studies highlighted that organizational dehumanization tends to impair employees' well-being. Specifically, organizational dehumanization was found to be deleterious for employees' mental health. Indeed, organizational dehumanization positively relates to employees' emotional exhaustion (Caesens et al., 2017; Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019; Nguyen, Besson et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., in press; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020; Stinglhamber et al., 2021), psychological strains at work (i.e., anxiety, anger, tension and nervousness at work) (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019; Lagios et al., 2021; Taskin et al., 2019), job stress (Sarwar et al., 2021) and to employees' negative emotions (e.g., 'sad', 'blameworthy', 'angry') (Demoulin et al., 2020). In the same vein, organizational dehumanization also seems to harm employees' physical health as it is positively linked to employees' various psychosomatic symptoms (i.e., trouble sleeping, headache, acid indigestion or heartburn, eye strain, loss of appetite, dizziness, and fatigue) (Caesens et al., 2017; Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019). Moreover, organizational dehumanization impairs employees' self-perceptions by decreasing their organization-based self-esteem (Demoulin et al., 2020) as well as their core self-evaluations (i.e., "fundamental, subconscious conclusions

[1] For the sake of clarity, we present these three categories of consequences as independent of each other. A handful of studies however shows that they may be interrelated and influence each other (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019; Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020; Sarwar et al., 2021).

individuals reach about themselves" including self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control and neuroticism; Judge et al., 1998, p. 18) (Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2021). Taken together, these studies highlight that the deleterious impact of organizational dehumanization perceptions extends beyond the scope of professional life by severely impairing employees' health and self-perceptions.

Employees' Attitudes Toward the Organization and Work

In addition to impairing employees' well-being, employees' perceptions of being dehumanized by their organization are also thought to impede organizational functioning (Bell & Khoury, 2011). Corroborating this suggestion, organizational dehumanization has been shown to influence employees' attitudes toward their organization (Caesens et al., 2019; Stinglhamber et al., 2021; Taskin et al., 2019). More precisely, empirical research shows that organizational dehumanization is negatively linked to employees' affective commitment to their organization (Caesens et al., 2019; Lagios et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., in press; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020; Stinglhamber et al., 2021; Taskin et al., 2019). In the same vein, organizational dehumanization decreases employees' positive attitudes toward their work as it negatively relates to employees' job satisfaction[2] (Caesens et al., 2017; 2019; Lagios et al., in press; Nguyen, Besson et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., in press; Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020, 2021; Taskin et al., 2019).

Employees' Behaviors

More importantly, the negative consequences of organizational dehumanization go beyond employees' attitudes towards the organization as employees' perceptions of being dehumanized further affect their behavioral intentions and tendencies as well as their actual behaviors (e.g., Demoulin et al., 2020; Stinglhamber et al., 2021; Taskin et al., 2019).

[2] Some scholars suggest that job satisfaction can also be considered as representative of employees' well-being rather than of their attitudes toward work (e.g., Caesens et al., 2017; Lagios et al., 2021; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020).

Specifically, employees' organizational dehumanization perceptions are negatively associated with their supervisor-rated in-role performance (Sarwar & Muhammad, 2020), their extra-role performance (Taskin et al., 2019) as well as their promotive voice behaviors (i.e., "expression of constructive challenge intended to improve work environment rather than merely criticizing it"; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p. 854) (Stinglhamber et al., 2021). Prior research has shown that organizational dehumanization positively relates to employees' absenteeism rate (Lagios et al., in press) and intentions to leave the organization[3] (Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Bell & Khoury, 2016; Caesens et al., 2019; Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019; Lagios et al., in press; Nguyen et al., in press; Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020; Taskin et al., 2019). In addition, employees' perceptions of being dehumanized by their organization positively relate to their tendency to engage in counterproductive work behaviors directed toward the organization (i.e., organizational deviance) (Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Sarwar et al., 2021) as well as toward organizational members (i.e., interpersonal deviance) (Ahmed & Khan, 2016). Moreover, organizational dehumanization has been found to lead employees to adopt particular types of regulatory behavioral strategies. Specifically, there is empirical evidence highlighting positive relationships between organizational dehumanization perceptions and avoidance coping (i.e., "avoiding or engaging in active attempts to get away from the stressor"; Feifel & Strack, 1989, p. 27) (Demoulin et al., 2020) as well as employees' tendency to engage in surface acting (i.e., subdimension of emotional labor defined as "the expression of unfelt emotions by faking, suppressing, or amplifying emotions"; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020, p. 832) (Nguyen, Besson et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., in press; Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020, 2021).

[3] Some scholars propose that employees' turnover intentions better embody a negative attitude toward the organization (e.g., Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021).

The Processes that link Organizational Dehumanization to Outcomes

There is considerable empirical evidence showing the negative consequences of organizational dehumanization for both employees and organizations (e.g., Stinglhamber et al., 2021). In light of three main theoretical frameworks, researchers have started to identify the underlying mechanisms through which organizational dehumanization perceptions lead to these negative consequences (see Figure 1).

First, scholars suggest that self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) may provide insight into how organizational dehumanization leads to deleterious consequences for employees (Christoff, 2014; Lagios et al., in press). At the theoretical level, it has been suggested that organizational dehumanization perceptions would threaten employees' fundamental psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, belonging, and competence), which in turn are thought to impair employees' well-being (Caesens et al., 2019; Christoff, 2014). Consistent with this reasoning, organizational dehumanization has been shown to decrease employees' sense of autonomy, belonging, and competence (Lagios et al., in press). In line with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this threat to their fundamental psychological needs was linked to increased absenteeism rate, psychological strains, and turnover intentions as well as decreased job satisfaction and affective commitment toward the organization (Lagios et al., in press).

Second, in an attempt to explain how organizational dehumanization impedes organizational functioning, it has been argued that social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) may be insightful to understand how organizational dehumanization entails negative attitudinal and behavioral consequences (Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Stinglhamber et al., 2021). Indeed, according to social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), employees who feel treated badly by their organization may want to reciprocate this negative treatment. Accordingly, some scholars proposed that employees' perceptions of being

dehumanized by their organization may lead them to return negative attitudes and behaviors towards their organization (Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Stinglhamber et al., 2021). This suggests that negative reciprocity may be at stake in the relationship between organizational dehumanization and its negative attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

Third, researchers in the field also suggested that social identity theory could be another useful theoretical framework in order to understand how organizational dehumanization is linked to deleterious outcomes (Stinglhamber et al., 2021). For instance, organizational dehumanization may result in negative attitudes and behaviors towards the organization because employees tend to dissociate themselves from their organization to escape a diminishing experience (Bell & Khoury, 2011). In other words, employees would no longer identify themselves with a dehumanizing organization, as it may be too harmful for them to incorporate their organizational membership into their self-concept. Moreover, degrading work conditions lead employees to ask themselves why they attend a demeaning workplace on a regular basis, which elicits a dissonance (Schaubroeck et al., 2018). Consequently, employees solve this dissonance by maintaining a greater psychological distance between themselves and their workplace (i.e., disidentification) which, in turn, lead them to adopt congruent negative attitudes and behaviors (Schaubroeck et al., 2018). This suggests that organizational identification or, more aptly, organizational disidentification could act as underlying mechanisms between organizational dehumanization and its consequences. However, despite these theoretical insights, these claims have never been investigated at the empirical level.

Antecedents of Organizational Dehumanization

Given the deleterious consequences of organizational dehumanization perceptions for both employees and organizations, it was of primary importance to advance theory regarding the factors that contribute to the development of such perceptions in employees (Stinglhamber

et al., 2021). Accordingly, the antecedents of organizational dehumanization received substantial empirical attention (e.g., Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Bell & Khoury, 2016; Caesens et al., 2017, 2019; Demoulin et al., 2020; Stinglhamber et al., 2021; Taskin et al., 2019). Drawing on prior research, six categories of predictors can be identified (see Figure 1).

Societal Factors

First, organizational dehumanization perceptions may emerge from societal factors. Indeed, dehumanization in work settings may arise from the ideologies in which organizations are embedded. For instance, organizational dehumanization finds part of its roots in the western working system ruled by capitalism (Bell & Khoury, 2011). Since many organizations seek to improve their profits, productivity prevails over consideration of employees' personal subjectivity and well-being (Bell & Khoury, 2011). Accordingly, dehumanization in organizational contexts might be considered a necessary and acceptable strategy in order to meet capitalistic requirements (Christoff, 2014). As a result, an economic context characterized by competitive strategies where the employee-organization relationship is instrumental and performance-based (e.g., liberal market economy; Cristiani & Peiró, 2018) is thought to be an antecedent of organizational dehumanization perceptions. Consequently, the odds for dehumanization are higher in organizations that obey the rules of the liberal market economy. In addition, organizational dehumanization might arise in government agencies where bureaucracy is at stake. Since bureaucracy is impersonal and goes hand in hand with a formalized and rule-based division of the labor (Olsen, 2006), it may be thought of as a dehumanizing iron cage that separates individuals from their own actions (Bell & Khoury, 2011). In addition, national culture predicts organizational dehumanization perceptions among employees (Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021). Specifically, compared to British employees, Vietnamese workers were found to feel less dehumanized by their organization (Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021). This finding can be understood in light of the different societal

norms that are conveyed in both cultures. By promoting the idea that employees should be entirely devoted to their organization and help the latter achieving its goals, Vietnamese culture encourages employees to be efficient at work and trivializes individual subjectivity (Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021).

Organizational Characteristics

Second, some organizational characteristics were found to elicit organizational dehumanization perceptions among employees. It is argued that the way organizations are perceived to treat their employees lead workers to make inferences regarding the extent to which they are considered in all their personal subjectivity (Caesens et al., 2017; Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018). Accordingly, the extent to which organizational values and practices are people-oriented influences the development of organizational dehumanization perceptions in employees. In line with this claim, procedural justice is negatively linked to organizational dehumanization (Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Bell & Khoury, 2016). Additionally, perceived organizational support negatively predicts organizational dehumanization (Caesens et al., 2017).

Environmental Factors

Third, past research highlighted that specific environmental factors are strong determinants of organizational dehumanization. Indeed, some work environments do not fulfil workers' basic needs as human beings (Taskin et al., 2019), which has been found to elicit organizational dehumanization perceptions (Demoulin et al., 2020). For instance, since they are thought to threaten employees' need for distinctiveness, collective and shared workspaces - flex-desks - (Taskin et al., 2019) increase employees' perceptions of being dehumanized by their organization.

Job Characteristics

Fourth, specific job characteristics are also important predictors of organizational dehumanization. Since they are offered by the organization, job characteristics may influence

employees' perceptions of the way they are treated by their organization. For instance, perceptions of dehumanization arise when individuals feel that their autonomy and agency are deliberately being denied by the dehumanizing entity (Bell & Khoury, 2011) and that their work is meaningless as it reduces them to the status of working tools (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018). Corroborating these claims, job autonomy (Caesens et al., 2019; Demoulin et al., 2020) and meaning of work (Caesens et al., 2019) have been found to negatively predict organizational dehumanization. Conversely, prior research highlights that performing one's job under conditions of professional isolation (i.e., "state of mind or belief that one is out of touch with others in the workplace"; Diekema, 1992 as cited in Golden et al., 2012, p. 1412) is positively linked to organizational dehumanization (Caesens et al., 2019; Demoulin et al., 2020). In the same vein, qualitative data suggest that a lack of social connections due to social distance (e.g., remote working, geographically separated or large work sites) is associated with employees' perceptions of being dehumanized (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018).

Interpersonal Factors

Fifth, since dehumanization perceptions arise from the feeling that one's has been treated in a degrading and humiliating way by others (Bastian & Haslam, 2011), it also appears that interpersonal factors are responsible for the emergence of organizational dehumanization perceptions. Specifically, previous research shows that perceived interpersonal justice from the supervisor is negatively linked to organizational dehumanization (Bell & Khoury, 2016). In addition, abusive supervision (i.e., "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact; Tepper, 2000, p. 178) increases employees' organizational dehumanization perceptions (Caesens et al., 2019). Conversely, high-quality Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) (i.e., a high-quality relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate) is negatively associated with the subordinate's perceptions of

organizational dehumanization (Stinglhamber et al., 2021). Explanations for these findings may be found in the fact that supervisors are considered as representative agents of the organization, which is thus held responsible for their abusive behaviors (Caesens et al., 2019). Although these studies focus on the supervisor-subordinate relationship, it has been suggested that interpersonal mistreatments emanating from other significant organizational entities (e.g., coworkers, clients) may also entail organizational dehumanization perceptions (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019).

Individual Factors

Eventually, organizational dehumanization perceptions have further been found to result from individual factors. Employees' vary in terms of personality traits and this may lead them to make sense of their environment in light of different frameworks. For instance, individuals high in negative affectivity are more likely to perceive situations in a negative way (Watson & Clark, 1984). Accordingly, since those people have personal dispositions to detect negative clues within their environment, negative affectivity is positively linked to organizational dehumanization perceptions whereas positive affectivity negatively relates to organizational dehumanization (Nguyen, Besson et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., in press; Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020).

Moderating Mechanisms

Alongside from examining the antecedents and consequences of organizational dehumanization, scholars also identified moderating mechanisms that strengthen or weaken the relationships between organizational dehumanization, and its predictors and outcomes (e.g., Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Bell & Khoury, 2016; Caesens et al., 2019; Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021; Sarwar & Muhammad, 2020; Sarwar et al., 2021; Stinglhamber et al., 2021).

First, earlier work on dehumanization in the workplace showed that demographic characteristics could exacerbate the influence of some predictors on organizational

dehumanization. Accordingly, gender was found to moderate the negative relationship between procedural justice and organizational dehumanization, with stronger effects for women than for men that carry over to outcomes (Ahmed & Khan, 2016; Bell & Khoury, 2016). These results suggest that men and women do not make sense of organizational characteristics (i.e., organizational justice) in the same way, leading them to develop organizational dehumanization perceptions to varying extents.

Second, the extent to which some antecedents of organizational dehumanization lead employees to feel dehumanized by their organization also depends on specific contextual factors (Caesens et al., 2019; Stinglhamber et al., 2021). For instance, the relationship between abusive supervision and organizational dehumanization is stronger when employees perceive high coworker support than when they perceive low coworker support (Caesens et al., 2019). This interactive effect then carries over to outcomes (Caesens et al., 2019). These findings were unexpected as the authors instead hypothesized that perceived coworker support would buffer the negative impact of abusive supervision (Caesens et al., 2019). Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Wu & Hu, 2009), these surprising results suggest that employees who benefit from high coworker support are more likely to become aware, for instance through consolation and discussions, of the inappropriateness and the harmfulness of abusive supervision. As a result, this exacerbates its negative consequences (Caesens & al., 2019; Wu & Hu, 2009) such as increasing organizational dehumanization perceptions (Caesens et al., 2019). In addition, Supervisor's Organizational Embodiment (SOE) (i.e., "employees' perceptions concerning the extent of their supervisor's shared identity with the organization", Eisenberger et al., 2010, p. 1086) moderates the relationship between Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and organizational dehumanization (Stinglhamber et al., 2021). More precisely, the relationship between LMX and organizational dehumanization is stronger when SOE is high (Stinglhamber et al., 2021). These findings suggest that employees whose

supervisor is perceived as highly representative of the organization are more likely to attribute the positive exchanges they have with their supervisor (i.e., high-quality LMX) to the organization (Stinglhamber et al., 2021). Accordingly, attributing these favorable supervisor-subordinate interactions to the organization reduces organizational dehumanization perceptions (Stinglhamber et al., 2021). As a whole, these studies show that interpersonal factors (e.g., abusive supervision, high-quality LMX) do not entail or reduce organizational dehumanization perceptions to the same extent depending on the professional context in which they take place.

Third, variables moderating the relationship between organizational dehumanization and its outcomes have also been identified (Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021; Sarwar & Muhammad, 2020; Sarwar et al., 2021). For instance, the relationship between organizational dehumanization and work-related outcomes (i.e., decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions) has been found to be weaker in high power distance countries (e.g., Vietnam) (i.e., "indicator of a country's preference for authority and power inequality in the workplace"; Hofstede, 1980 as cited in Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021 p. 4) as compared to low power distance countries (e.g., UK) (Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021). These findings suggest that power distance legitimates the instrumentalization of workers. Specifically, workers in high power distance countries are more likely to find it acceptable to be reduced to the status of a mere tool to serve the goals of a hierarchically superior entity (i.e., the organization). In turn, they experience fewer negative consequences as they see their situation as fair and normative. Additionally, scholars demonstrated that individual factors may also moderate the relationship between organizational dehumanization and its deleterious consequences (Sarwar & Muhammad, 2020; Sarwar et al., 2021). Accordingly, psychological capital (i.e., "an individual's positive psychological state of development" characterized by self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience"; Luthans et al., 2007, p. 3) weakens the influence of

organizational dehumanization on outcomes (Sarwar & Muhammad, 2020). Moreover, the relationship between organizational dehumanization and its consequences is weaker under higher levels of occupational coping self-efficacy (i.e., an individual's belief about their ability to cope with job-related stressors; Pisanti et al., 2015) as compared to lower levels (Sarwar et al., 2021). Taken together, these findings highlight that not all employees are equally affected by organizational dehumanization. Employees vary in terms of individual characteristics and operate in different cultural contexts, which may lead them to suffer more or less from being dehumanized by their employing organization.

A Future Research Agenda

First, given the conceptual similarities and differences between organizational dehumanization and several other constructs, it is of primary importance that researchers in the field make informed decisions about which construct is most relevant to their research goals. Therefore, it is recommended that appropriate labels and measurement scales be used to avoid confusion between organizational dehumanization and its related constructs (in particular, with working objectification). Since the mechanistic form of dehumanization of Haslam's model (2006) is considered the most prevalent in work settings (Bell & Khoury, 2011), the majority of studies on organizational dehumanization has focused on victims, that is employees' perceptions to be used as interchangeable tools or robots. However, it has been suggested that the animalistic form of dehumanization could also occur in the organizational world (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Caesens et al., 2017), particularly in employees working in specific industries such as housekeeping and cleaning (Nisim & Benjamin, 2010). Therefore, future research should consider exploring the antecedents and consequences of animalistic dehumanization within organizations in order to identify similarities and differences with mechanistic dehumanization (e.g., Caesens et al., 2017; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2021). Moreover, although seminal work on organizational dehumanization focuses on employees'

individual perceptions of the dehumanizing aspects of their own employee-organization relationship, future research could broaden this conceptualization. For instance, organizational dehumanization may be conceptualized as a climate shared by all the employees and could therefore be studied at the organizational level (Nguyen et al., 2021). Supporting this claim, prior research has shown that the treatment received from the organization at one hierarchical level tends to percolate to lower levels, suggesting the existence of a common organizational climate (Stinglhamber & Caesens, 2020). Therefore, beyond individual perceptions, the extent to which a specific work environment is globally dehumanizing could be assessed via multi-level analyses (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Second, despite researchers' increasing interest for dehumanizing phenomena within workplaces, the organizational dehumanization literature is still in its infancy. Hence, insightful directions for future research would be to extend its nomological network. In accordance with this view, only a scarce amount of studies examined the attitudinal consequences of organizational dehumanization (e.g., Caesens et al., 2017, 2019; Nguyen, Dao et al., 2021; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2021; Stinglhamber et al., 2021; Taskin et al., 2019) and most of them remain unknown. For instance, future studies could investigate how employees' organizational dehumanization perceptions affect their normative and continuance commitment to their organization and their work engagement. In addition, scholars call for the identification of innovative behavioral outcomes such as counterproductive work behaviors (Stinglhamber et al., 2021) and hostile behaviors directed toward the organization that may be held responsible for the dehumanizing treatment (Ahmed & Khan, 2016). These behaviors aimed at retaliating against the organization could be explored at the individual level as well as at the team level (e.g., collective actions such as striking). Besides, future research should also examine whether the negative behavioral consequences of organizational dehumanization expand beyond the organization itself and involve specific organizational

stakeholders (e.g., supervisors, colleagues, customers) (Stinglhamber et al., 2021) or even external targets (e.g., family, friends). Based on the trickle effects (Wo et al., 2019), supervisors who feel dehumanized by their organization may act rudely toward their subordinates who, in turn, would act rudely within their families as it is too costly to retaliate against their supervisors. Overall, while past research has extensively explored the consequences of organizational dehumanization for employees, little attention has been paid to the outcomes for the organization itself (e.g., organizational effectiveness). Since employees' performance is severely affected by organizational dehumanization, its impact on organizational functioning would be worth being quantified to warn practitioners that pushing employees to act like robots is not a golden avenue to greater profits.

Third, several scholars call for empirical investigations of the mechanisms underlying the relationship between organizational dehumanization and its consequences (e.g., Stinglhamber et al., 2021). As mentioned before, social exchange theory (e.g., negative reciprocity) and social identity theory (e.g., organizational disidentification) could be relevant theoretical frameworks to this end (Stinglhamber et al., 2021). Moreover, drawing on social psychological work on dehumanization (Demoulin et al., 2021), it may be that disidentification processes occur at the individual level through self-dehumanization as an underlying mechanism between organizational dehumanization and its negative consequences. Indeed, employees who feel dehumanized by an external entity (i.e., their organization) may integrate the idea that they are less than humans and start considering themselves as such, leading to deleterious outcomes.

In the same vein, new predictors of organizational dehumanization could also be identified (e.g., Caesens et al., 2019). For instance, it may be of particular interest to identify clusters in which organizational dehumanization is most prevalent depending on the work domain, the sector (e.g., private or public sector), or the size of the organization. Specifically,

future research should examine whether organizational dehumanization is more pervasive within informal work contexts (i.e., “activities that are not covered, or are insufficiently covered, by formal legal and political arrangements”, p. 340) where indecent and degrading work conditions are common (Gloss et al., 2017). Additionally, the role of technological breakthroughs embedded in HR practices (e.g., digitalization and automation of work processes) (Stinglhamber et al., 2021) and interpersonal mistreatments from other organizational entities than supervisors (e.g., coworkers or customers) in the rise of organizational dehumanization perceptions among employees would be worth being explored. Along similar lines, organizational dehumanization literature may benefit from studies examining which other job characteristics (e.g., task variety, task identity, feedback) and which individual factors affect dehumanization perceptions.

Fourth, the underlying mechanisms through which the antecedents of organizational dehumanization elicit these perceptions among employees remain unknown, which is a promising avenue for future research. For instance, drawing on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), future research should elucidate the theoretical controversy regarding the role of employees’ fundamental psychological needs thwarting in the nomological network of organizational dehumanization. On the one hand, some scholars argue that organizational dehumanization undermines employees’ basic needs (e.g., autonomy, belonging, competence), which in turn impairs their well-being (Christoff, 2014; Lagios et al., in press). On the other hand, other researchers propose that organizational dehumanization perceptions arise when employees’ fundamental psychological needs are thwarted (Demoulin et al., 2020). In sum, it remains unclear whether fundamental psychological needs thwarting is a process explaining both the development of organizational dehumanization and its effects. Future research should try and make sense of these seemingly adversarial views. For instance, it may be that a vicious circle is at stake, according to which organizational dehumanization

thwarts employees' needs which in turn reinforces organizational dehumanization perceptions. Specifically, when feeling more like robots or tools in the workplace rather than human beings, employees feel like their psychological needs are not being fulfilled. As a result, the fact that their fundamental needs as human beings are not met may exacerbate organizational dehumanization perceptions as their humanity is being threatened at work.

Finally, organizational dehumanization literature shows two main methodological limitations. First, most studies on organizational dehumanization are cross-sectional, which leaves room for cross-lagged panel and experimental designs in order to draw conclusions regarding causality (e.g., Lagios et al., in press; Stinglhamber et al., 2021). Second, since most empirical investigations of the nomological network of organizational dehumanization rely on data samples derived from single-source measures, future research should replicate and extend current findings using alternative measurement methods (e.g., Caesens et al., 2017, 2019; Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019; Demoulin et al., 2020; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2021; Stinglhamber et al., 2021; Taskin et al., 2019). For instance, the dehumanizing aspects of a particular employee's work environment could more objectively assessed using customers', coworkers' or supervisors' ratings of the construct. Similarly, the behavioral outcomes of organizational dehumanization could be peer-rated (e.g., job performance assessed by a direct supervisor, family undermining assessed by a family member) or rated objectively (e.g., real absenteeism rate), which would allow inferences regarding organizational effectiveness.

Conclusion

Twenty-first century workplaces are facing various challenges that are likely to undermine workers' humanness such as technological breakthrough, indecent work conditions, or specific economic ideologies to name a few. Consequently, workers may feel used as interchangeable tools aimed at serving organizational goals. In turn, organizational

dehumanization perceptions impair workers' well-being and negatively affect their attitudes toward their work and organization as well as their behaviors at work. Accordingly, practitioners should bear in mind that organizational effectiveness rhymes with humanness.

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