

Article

# Expanding the Demand–Resource Model by an Anthro-Organizational View: Work Resilience and the “Little Prince” and the “Self-Accountant” Approach

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**Abstract:** The authors’ intention is to conduct an analysis utilizing a purely conceptual, literary content-based investigation of two hermeneutical dimensions associated with work motivation in the public service sector. Specifically, the study focuses on public school teachers in the Italian context due to the neglected way in which they matured in literary production and the hostile work environment brought about by the numerous reforms in a kind of heterogenesis of ends. Through the use of aphorisms and metaphors, after a literature review, gap identification and a content-based analysis, the authors aim to identify an approach that can anthropologically serve as a synthesis formula for workers who are emotionally and intensely invested in their professional practice. Specifically, this includes professions, including educational ones, that are subjected to high exposure to emotional labor (EL). The authors have identified two dimensions: one oriented towards the concept of gift and the other towards possession for integrating the demand–resource model (DRM). To support this analysis, the seminal research work of Belk will be utilized as a reference in the wide range of literary production on the give-and-take approach, according to Schaufeli and Grant. Furthermore, empirical data from previous research will be used to functionally explain how sense-making, when combined with the dynamics of gift–possession, can act as a factor of resilience for professions that hold significant emotional value. In this way, the authors shape a perspective on the theoretical paradigm toward the performance measurement and management system under the lens of New Public Management reform, considering the grand challenges inherent in the educational area by identifying organizational behavioral levers for justifying high motivation-driven actions in an underestimated job segment. In this way, the greatest contribution lies in the possibility of defining a reference framework to expand the DRM in application to the clarification of the foundations inherent in resilience behaviors implemented by educational professions in the specific reference context. The main result would precisely be the ability of the latter to cope with hostile contexts through the dynamics of gift and possession that promote work resilience through the attribution of meaning and identity to the job. These perspectives are useful for deepening the understanding of performance measurement and management approaches.

**Keywords:** emotional labor; demand–resource model; sense-making; work motivation; organizational behavior; performance measurement and management



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## 1. Introduction

Often, an activity aimed at improving motivational aspects is conceived as difficult and time-consuming; in some cases, unproductive. Therefore, feeling motivated is defined as a “power”. This identification considers the possibility of offering a great quality of service produced by one’s own professional operator. In the present case, the authors refer to the teaching activity. In this sense, this professional perspective should guarantee a high level of service against a considerable investment in emotional terms. At the same time, the high quality of the service offered by the professionalism of the teachers goes hand in

hand with what can be defined as personal social responsibility, understood as an extension of the self and projection of the individual self in a socially organized context or work environment (Afsar et al. 2020). This study specifically examines emotional labor (EL) and the outcomes resulting from identifying the spheres of influence on the motivation of the profession being studied. This is done through an empirical analysis reported by Rainero and Modarelli (2020), which is then used in the current study to define the boundaries of motivation spheres. This is viewed from the perspectives of resilience, the constitution of meaning, the concept of gift (Mauss 2002), and the dynamics of acquisition and possession (Belk 1988). The research was conducted within an Italian educational context, focusing on teachers in public schools at all levels. Since teaching is a well-established profession in Italy, with around 1 million teachers out of 3 million public sector workers, the authors chose this sample for its generalizability and relevance. They drew on both conceptual–theoretical and empirical approaches for their case study. Various authors, including Arnold (1969), Zajonc (1985), Lazarus (1980), Schachter and Singer (1962), Fineman and Sturdy (1999), and Morris and Feldman (1996), emphasize the importance of emotional labor (EL) as a multifaceted aspect in organizational sciences. They highlight its significance in evolving organizations, particularly in helping professions with the demand for high work rhythms and exposure to EL. EL is crucial for public attribution, defining an organizational subculture within a sector. Public service motivation (PSM) is seen as integral to defining quality standards and impacting success in achieving public service objectives. Scholars such as Parker (2015) assert that PSM is closely tied to public service, akin to social responsibility, as suggested by Vandenabeele (2011). This aligns with the voluntary nature of actions in the not-for-profit sector, as discussed by Lawton et al. (2013) and Perry (1996) and Perry et al. (2008). The authors of the current study reevaluate this perspective, linking it to pseudo-altruism (gift) attributable to self-preservative or opportunistic motives (possession). Drawing on previous literature, which explores the interplay between human emotions and actions (Arnold 1969), the vascular theory of emotions (Zajonc 1985), the antecedents and consequences of EL, and the cognitive, social, and psychological factors of emotions (Schachter and Singer 1962; Morris and Feldman 1996), as well as emotion management and its relation to cognition (Fineman and Sturdy 1999; Lazarus 1980), this study provides a comprehensive overview of emotional labor research. This type of interactions led the authors to intuit and consider the way, indeed the cognitive, social, psychological, and operational methods through which (anthropologically and sociologically) teaching professionals (at least in the Italian context of public schools) face the adversities deriving from work environments bordering on endemic toxicity, apparently without exploiting traditional motivational levers and too often not sufficiently promoted by top management at an extrinsic level. However, this would not negatively affect the pursuit of high quality standards required by public organizations/institutions (i.e., schools) even in a period of constant change and transition, which is stressful, competitive, and not fully profitable in itself. According to the prevailing literature (Kim 2012; Li and Liu 2014; Vandenabeele 2011), this particular category of professionals—that is, teachers employed by public administrations—could be able to develop and demonstrate higher levels of motivation inherent in the service in relation to one’s position perceived as a key social role of high educational value, despite this being perceived externally as a professional sub-category, not fully valued, underestimated, and not very authentic (Rainero and Modarelli 2020). Such evidence has been taken up by authors such as Zapf (2002), Zapf et al. (1999, 2001), and Abraham (1998). The literary interest of the last decade has seen the emergence of studies that, taking advantage of various hermeneutical intuitions and original interpretations, have tended to consider the examination of the relationships between working contexts, satisfaction, worker well-being, and the core motivation expressly attributed to professions with high emotional intensity. Various studies in the literature have explored emotional labor (EL), such as Lee (2018) examining EL’s impact on organizational commitment, Wharton (1999) focusing on psychological effects, and Van Zyl and Noonan (2018) discussing emotional regulation risks for nurses. Other researchers such as O’Brien and Linehan (2014) delve into emotional

challenges for HR professionals, [Dudau and Brunetto \(2020\)](#) emphasize the importance of EL in public service equity, and [Pandey and Singh \(2015\)](#) investigate emotional labor in community health workers. Additionally, scholars such as [Locke \(1976\)](#) study work motivation cycles, [Khaskheli et al. \(2020\)](#) look at corporate social responsibility's impact on employee commitment, and [Ashforth and Humphrey \(1993\)](#) analyze EL's role in service effectiveness. Furthermore, [Rayner and Espinoza \(2016\)](#) explore EL in schools, [Li and Wang \(2016\)](#) examine the role of psychological capital in EL, [Elliott \(2017\)](#) discuss EL's link to burnout in nurses, and [Kinman et al. \(2011\)](#) investigate emotional demands on teachers. [Lu and Guy \(2014\)](#) reveal the impact of authentic emotive expression on job engagement, while [Schachter and Singer \(1962\)](#) and [Grandey \(2000\)](#) focus on labeling feelings and emotions at work, respectively, and [Leidner \(1999\)](#) highlights ethical issues of EL in interactive service work. Contrary to what might have been expected in the face of the vast literature on the subject, research on this is not able to provide unambiguous conclusions or adequately consolidated generalizations. Therefore, it is possible to consider the results derived from these studies, and not limited to those cited, as scientifically valid visions that are not always convergent. In relation to the elements of resilience, when considering the aspects of self-expression and self-extension (through gifts and possessions), the lack or absence of research output would indicate a significant gap in the completion of the proposed study. This gap is crucial for both the originality of the study, which involves the use of aphorisms and metaphors, and its scientific value, which relies on an integrated theoretical framework that is relevant and has the potential to advance knowledge in an underexplored field. This gap is particularly noticeable when focusing on the factors influencing resilience in the context of educational professionalism within the public sphere. Conversely, there has been a growing interest in professions related to help, such as those in the healthcare sector, medical and nursing fields, street-level bureaucrats, professional services, parental care, among others, as noted by [Brunetto et al. \(2016\)](#), [Hochschild \(1983\)](#), [Fineman \(2012\)](#), [Rayner and Espinoza \(2016\)](#), [Gillman et al. \(2015\)](#), [Elliott \(2017\)](#), and [Kinman and Leggetter \(2016\)](#). With regard to the development of emotional intelligence, authors such as [Salovey and Mayer \(1990\)](#) and [Yin \(2015\)](#) focus on the role of teachers, but these appear to be isolated cases. In this direction, debate and scientific production remain extremely open. By identifying EL as a crucial factor influencing both well-being and job satisfaction, the latter needs to be treated as a determinant of satisfaction, as well as an element capable of improvement and an incremental relationship in potential development, as suggested by [Stockard and Lehman \(2004\)](#) and [Collie et al. \(2012\)](#), through managerial management practices. Indeed, effective management of EL could ensure higher levels of well-being by increasing the emergence of feelings of satisfaction. While not solely concentrating on these elements, which are deemed instrumentally crucial in establishing a synthetic reference framework that is beneficial for delineating operational methods intrinsic to the subject of examination, the authors employ the concept of EL to enhance potential and offer a theoretical–popular input. This input is directed towards defining one or multiple aspects of existence in connection with professional conduct in the continuous reshaping of one's work identity, which can be anthropologically reconfigurable between gift and possession. The immaterial attribution of the conceptual–theoretical definition considers the role of the profession under study beyond the monetary and merely empirical aspects of the relationship between satisfaction, job quality, and pay ([O'Brien and Linehan 2014](#)). From this point of view, the strategic and instrumental use, at a methodological level, of metaphors and aphorisms ([Cardon et al. 2005](#)) is an indispensable tool for structuring boundaries in intangible spheres of attribution ([Cardon et al. 2005](#)). In this case, the authors make use of quotations (aphorisms and metaphors) taken from *The Little Prince* ([A. de Saint-Exupéry 1961](#)) to better explain concepts that would otherwise be proposed as evanescent ([Cardon et al. 2005](#)). This methodological choice is also, and above all, dictated by the informative perspective that the authors intend to pursue with this manuscript, which is to synthesize and clearly identify what will subsequently be defined as the “little prince” approach” in relation to the “self-accountant” approach. Through this dual vision, teaching

professionals might be able to demonstrate greater job satisfaction in relation to their professional activity, precisely because they can make use of motivational resources that are beyond traditionally recognized ones. For example, they could use these resources to make sense of the possibility of managing emotionally significant frustrations and pursue a broad social interest related to their role (Li and Wang 2016), which is also capable of turning into a force/gimmick of resilience. Specifically, adverse circumstances would imply impulses to act (Weick et al. 2005), and the authors draw inspiration from this cue to fill the gap existing in the literature on organizational theory, as previously expressed. The existing contextual factors can be found in the sphere of public attribution with reference to the constant and frequent reforms that have invested and are investing heavily in the school sector, modifying past regulations and providing more current ones. However, these modernization efforts often end up making an already adverse context more hostile, precisely because of the already excessive emotional effort inherent in the profession of education. Sense-making is therefore considered a crucial resource in human determination, too often neglected, but an indispensable lever capable of making education professionals act and work responsibly in the long run in formal contexts such as schools, sometimes even at high risk, resulting in higher levels of motivation/satisfaction. Within the extensive body of literature focusing on the concept of the give-and-take paradigm (Schaufeli 2006; Grant 2013), empirical evidence drawn from past studies will be utilized to elucidate how the process of sense-making, in conjunction with the interplay of gift-possession dynamics, can serve as a resilience factor for professions characterized by high emotional significance. This scholarly endeavor aims to establish a theoretical framework to enhance the understanding of the mechanisms underpinning resilience behaviors exhibited by educational professionals within a specific context. The primary outcome is anticipated to revolve around their capacity to navigate challenging environments by leveraging the dynamics of giving and receiving, thereby fostering resilience in the workplace through the ascription of significance and identity. Such insights offer valuable implications for advancing the comprehension of performance evaluation and managerial strategies.

The formal structure of the article follows the subdivision expressed in paragraphs: Section 1 provides introductory and overview aspects of the study. Section 2 is strictly connected to the literature review; specifically, Section 2.1 considers emotional work in relation to sense-making, and Section 2.2 relates emotional work to the reform of the new public management and to the Italian school context. Section 3 pertains to the methodological aspects of the research. Section 4 frames the interpretative paradigm and the theoretical aspects on which the conceptual elaboration reported in Section 5 is based. Section 5 reports the introduction to the results of the previous research used functionally in this study; Section Integrated Conceptual Model defines the boundaries of the proposed integrated model. Section 6 provides a critical discussion. Section 7 provides the conclusions of the contribution.

## 2. Literature Review: Contextualization

In this research, the authors intend to analyze, through a purely conceptual investigation, two hermeneutical dimensions related to work motivation, identifying through aphorisms and metaphors an approach that, anthropologically, can constitute a synthesis formula to be applied to workers invested emotionally and intensively in their professional practice. In addition to the general area of emotional workers, the authors promptly refer to that educational profession which is mirrored in teaching. The two dimensions that have been identified by the authors are (a) the gift-oriented one and (b) the possession-oriented one, recognized as, respectively, the “little prince” approach and the “self-accountant” approach in the conceptualized results. With this intent, the authors provide a review of the main literature on the subject. These two vectors, enabling behavioral approaches in expanding the DRM, have been highlighted by the authors thanks to the literary recognition devoted to the give-and-take area of thought (Schaufeli 2006; Grant 2013). As expressly stated by Li and Wang (2016), several studies on public service motivation demonstrate



a close connection with job satisfaction output. Among the main characteristics of the educational profession is the action of involvement. In fact, the direct correlation between a sense of responsibility for making future generations progress and the attribution of meaning to one's work would make teachers a category of workers subjected to emotional stress, but more resilient, albeit in the absence of strategically extrinsic motivational levers. The discourse and research questions of this scientific contribution revolve around the attribution of meaning. In line with what was suggested by [Locke \(1976\)](#), the authors can foresee a close connection between the motivational sphere of teachers in the public sector and the determination of high levels of job satisfaction, as these teachers find themselves operating and acting in contexts characterized by an almost total lack of rewards. This is explicitly identified not only in practice but also in the literature ([Harvey-Beavis 2003](#)). Furthermore, career developments tend not to be directly proportional to the experience gained, and there is a lack of external consideration for social value, which negatively affects the motivational sphere and has possible qualitatively negative repercussions in the service ([Rainero and Modarelli 2020](#)). Paradoxically, not only would extrinsic motivation find the teacher in a disadvantageous position with respect to job satisfaction and the quality of the work done, but intrinsic motivation would also appear to be the only determinant, which would be undermined at the root due to the difficulties caused by the onerous EL and the hostile environment. This contingent status quo seems to be fundamental for evaluating results in a performance measurement and management system logic. Unfortunately or undoubtedly luckily, when the (extrinsic) motivational levers are scarcely adoptable and/or the characteristics of the sector are properly hostile, along with the existence of legal obligations that restrain the management from creating and maintaining an expressly immovable and static state of affairs, another internal force is needed to guarantee high or at least satisfactory levels of workplace well-being and positive effects on the quality of the service offered in relation to the dimension of responsibility. The authors' intent is precisely to define the existence of this force and the declinations in which it would be expressed, including the connotations and characteristics conceptually attributable to a declaratory statement about its boundaries, its cause-effect determinants, and its virtuosity. In this regard, the extensive anthropological approaches of the self are extremely fitting: (i) gift ([Mauss 2002](#)) and (ii) possession ([Belk 1988](#)), subsequently renamed by the authors as the "little prince" (gift-oriented behavior) and the "self-accountant approach" (possession-oriented behavior), respectively. In this way, and through this investigational approach, the authors will provide the audience and the community with a renewed interpretation of a conceptual-theoretical model through the lens of possible public policy. The goal is to help people understand how to motivate themselves to take action that leads to satisfactory levels of well-being, while also meeting the grand challenges posed by SDGs.

### *2.1. Emotional Labor and Sense-Making*

The question raised by [Bos and Willmott \(2001\)](#), concerning the fact of favoring reason over emotion as a source of moral action and reflexivity ([Afsar and Umrani 2020](#)), gave rise to the consideration of emotion in professional ethics. In this perspective and in common sense, emotion would be subordinated to reason; on the contrary, in the perspective proposed by the authors, this point of view would be reversed, becoming a critical factor in structuring both comfortable working contexts and the production of qualitative standards relating to public services—in this case, education professionals. This specific profession leads workers in the sector to base their daily operations on strong emotional efforts, both from the point of view of controlling the individual emotional state (in order to provide adequate qualitatively satisfactory standards of service) and from the point of view of creating positive emotions and feelings inherent in the development of an empathic climate, in the structuring of an adequate and favorable learning context, as well as in an operative setting capable of providing adequate stimuli for the students' cultural and professional growth. This generative and self-control process necessarily involves the constant action of EL. Widely discussed, the term EL, closely related to sense-making, was first considered

by [Hochschild \(1983\)](#). In reference to this, [Grandey \(2000\)](#), in an a posteriori analysis, states that [Hochschild \(1983\)](#) intended to use the term EL in relation to the description of the way in which workers become capable of managing and modifying emotional expressions and also feelings on a daily basis in the working context, in order to show what is expressly required by the job and the role that one is called to perform, as well as by what is expressly prescribed by employers in relation to the company objectives to be pursued. An individual's ability to control emotions and to modify emotional expressions are work activities in their own right and consume energy ([Hochschild 1983](#)). This activity is required above all for jobs involving contact with the public or professions aimed at care activities, as well as those with expressly promotional purposes. With reference to caring activities, those closest to the concept of sense-making, and therefore more in line with the perspective proposed by the authors in this research work, it must be said that compassion (from the Latin *cum*, together with, and *patior*, suffer), be it in socially useful activities or related to health, is also present in educational teaching activities. Indeed, the structuring of an empathic climate ([Rothschild 2006](#); [Bellet and Maloney 1991](#)) and the establishment of cooperative working ([Morrison et al. 1994](#)) are two milestones in the characterization of the educational profession. Therefore, when the mechanism of compassion is triggered, one cannot disregard the mechanisms for controlling the state of emotional assonance in order to establish a true helping relationship. This happens more frequently for doctors, nurses, etc. ([Van Zyl and Noonan 2018](#)), but even teachers are not relieved of this heavy burden. For this reason, see [Fiorilli et al. \(2015\)](#) in the literature. It is recognized that teachers always use EL in their daily work and that they are subject to a high level of stress, with more serious levels leading to burnout syndrome. We are now in the process of replacing humans with machines and robots, precisely to avoid high levels of stress in jobs with a high emotional impact. [Dudau and Brunetto \(2020\)](#) believe that despite the emergence of disruptive technologies that could lead to effective replacement of man in some tasks ([Roblek et al. 2016](#); [Kaplan and Haenlein 2019](#)), the incidence of EL would always remain in the human being because it is impossible to transfer. Therefore, the lever on which to act would not be so much technological as managerial ([Dudau and Brunetto 2020](#)), since an underuse of motivational levers, which are too often constrained (especially in the public sector) due to limited budgets, would make operators subject to EL unprecedented creators of sense. In particular, the sense-making perspective would prove to be a crucial factor in the development of emotional resilience, in the light of what is identified by the Job Demands–Resources model ([Hakanen et al. 2006](#); [Bakker and Demerouti 2007](#)) used by the authors and integrated with the theoretical paradigm proposed by [Belk \(1988\)](#). This would make it possible to pursue high-risk EL and burnout work practices with higher levels of responsibility, motivation, and satisfaction, thereby identifying the dimension/behavioral propensity of gift giving ([Mauss 2002](#)) and possession ([Belk 1988](#)) as critical factors in the most exemplary light of the aphorisms and metaphors ([Cardon et al. 2005](#)) considered ([A. de Saint-Exupéry 1961](#)). As suggested by [Brunetto et al. \(2016\)](#), it is important to point out that for professions with high emotional stress, workers are required to hide their real emotions during interactions with the users of the professional service or, more simply, the public. Contexts of this type have a strong impact in terms of human cost, health, and well-being. As identified by [Farr-Wharton et al. \(2016, 2019\)](#) and by [Pandey and Singh \(2015\)](#), the aforementioned burnout syndrome, which is accentuated in its manifestation by emotional efforts, could be identified as a contributing cause of low job satisfaction and low commitment. If, on the one hand, “emotional workers” are to be considered of primary importance for the creation of value, they could, on the other hand, generate a paradoxical turnaround in the destruction of value ([Lee 2018](#)). Precisely at this juncture, it is necessary to consider the sphere of attribution relating to sense-making. The internal strength of the generation of meaning would thus seem to be an energy capable of producing responsibility and commitment in the long run, particularly in the case of public service quality (PSQ), as is the situation of the educational profession under consideration. Although the literature in this regard

appears divergent, attributing performance-related pay (PRP) as the major motivational force for education professionals (Bloom and Milkovich 1998), the same literature does not converge uniquely on the higher levels of motivation represented therein (Bloom and Milkovich 1998). In support of the debate, the results on which this research is based (Rainero and Modarelli 2020) would be in line with what was reported by other authors, for example, Kellough and Lu (1993), Arrowsmith and Marginson (2010), and Greene (2019). These scholars claimed that education professionals would be able to cross the boundaries of the remunerative dimension and the more banal reward (stimulus–response), going beyond the return of positive feedback on their work, beyond the possibilities of potential development of their careers, and beyond the generalized feeling of external perception of work as useful/useless. This category of professionals would therefore be able to base their motivation and consequently their job satisfaction on the interest relating to the intrinsic self-attribution of importance, even and above all in adverse, hostile, and toxic situations, thereby continuing to pursue their own action professionally towards the common good (Zamagni 2008; Dietz et al. 2008), and reflexively (from a gift–possession perspective) towards the individual good (Belk 1988). In this context, the authors try to graft the investigation on the predominant aspects of the attribution of meaning to work (dynamics of making sense) as a determinant of the motivational factor capable of overcoming the difficulties inherent in the tasks dictated by professions based on emotion control (Grandey 2000). On a practical level, Moynihan and Pandey (2007) and Pedersen (2014) identify among workers with more motivation, inherent in public service, higher levels of commitment/attachment towards the organization they belong to. This result is in line with what was previously highlighted by Rainero and Modarelli (2020).

## 2.2. Emotional Labor and New Public Management in the Italian Educational System

With reference to the sphere of public attribution, a distinction must be made. In other words, comparing the performance levels highlighted by the public sector with those of the private sector, a diametrically opposite dimension emerges, since in the private sector, individual performance is reduced to that based on objectives, while behaviors related to organizational citizenship, as suggested by Organ et al. (2006), are considered extra-role social responsibility, which on the contrary does not occur in the public sphere (Khaskheli et al. 2020; Cheema et al. 2020), despite there being claims to that effect. With the emergence of new public management (NPM) and of the perspective aimed at equalizing and equating the public dimension with the private one, translating practices of the second into the first, the operational situation in the reference context has become increasingly complex, especially in relation to human resource management (HRM) practices related to the management of motivation and performance. Ruffini and Modarelli (2015), in an exploratory work on the dynamics of PRP and on motivation, declare that public workers are gradually tending to abandon the meaning that distinguished the civil servant years ago. Well-known authors such as Benington and Moore (2010), Alford (2009), Osborne et al. (2016), and O'Flynn (2007) confirm this trend, stating that the nature of the public service, often characterized by the more burdensome EL (doctors, nurses, teachers, etc.), should go beyond the mere contract and tend again to the sphere of attributing meaning to one's own activity and role. The NPM perspective has greatly influenced public sector working patterns. The logic underlying the operational action of employees in the sector should therefore concentrate efforts on the value created and that can be generated for the users of the services offered, both individually and collectively. This would or should be the primary objective to aim for with reference to the operational action of public services. In this direction, EL with a high incidence in the sector would be an important aspect on which to concentrate efforts from a strategic managerial point of view. Specifically, the condition of stress generated by the control of emotions (Grandey 2000) sees the worker as the creator of an exchange between individual cost and remunerative feedback. The long process of reforms, which reached its peak in public administration, especially between the '80s and '90s of the twentieth century, was inspired precisely by the "New" (or renewed) vision

of public management (Thiel and Leeuw 2002; Pollitt 2009; Diefenbach 2009; Christensen and Lægveid 2007; Bach et al. 2007; Hood 1991; Diefenbach 2009; Lapsley 2009). In the managerial direction undertaken in this area, seminal themes and basic variables inherent in the management of human resources from a psycho-social perspective have made the public context a segment of interest for the academy, given its continuous evolution. In fact, the variables of meaning, understood as the attribution of values and meaning to the work performed, the orientation towards objectives, the performance-oriented remuneration systems, performance measurement and management systems, the concept of rewarding, the management and structuring of the working climate, the sense of justice perceived, career prospects from a vertical point of view, leadership styles, feedback deriving from the operating context, as well as internal and external perception of the role performed and in the sense of motivation, have become topics of interest in relation to the biological, social, and psychological of the worker, orienting the cause-effect variables to the existing influences on individual satisfaction. Authors such as Power (2003), Hsieh et al. (2012), Lu and Guy (2014), and Du Gay (2000) assert that in the changed and changing public context, employees would be identifiable as significantly more subjected to the negative impact of EL (in addition to the already existing EL levels for specific professions). In fact, a fairly recent study considers the degree of incidence of burnout syndrome as equal to 67% in a sample of Italian teachers (public sector) (Nardella et al. 2017; Fiorilli et al. 2015).

Critical factors of influence, directly affecting the operational dimension of teachers and the contribution of EL put in place, pertain to the new legislative guidelines defined (L.107/2015, otherwise identified as “Good School”). New working conditions and new specializations, professionalism, techniques, and approaches are required of the teachers of the “Buona Scuola” (in Italy), decisively influencing the organizational structures of institutes, which on the one hand find themselves having to improve the educational system, but which, on the other hand, are subject to the criteria of maximum flexibility, effectiveness and efficiency, spending limits, diversification of the offer, competitiveness (Rosi et al. 2018), personalization, technologization/digitalization, as well as coordination/connection with the social fabric and economics of the relevant territory. Promoting autonomy, personalization, and maximum inclusion (Booth and Ainscow 2011), redesigning the educational, methodological, and didactic system, and collaborating at different levels (both horizontally and vertically) between the territory and existing hierarchies appear to be utopian and crucial factors closely related to student success. However, these practices cannot ignore organizational factors, which include the professionalism of the people who work every day in a given context. In these cases, unprecedented design needs come into play that, as suggested by Romei (1999), become the fulcrum of a multidirectional and multidimensional change, which, if not guided, can lead to disastrous malfunctions. The sense of uncertainty, inherent in change, of any kind, in any kind of organization, would lead to a further burden on subjects operating in the public sphere and, in this case, teachers (already subjects at high risk of EL). Ultimately, the latter would find themselves having to manage not only the specific operations of their role, but also an emotional overload deriving from assessments and self-assessments required by legal obligations, digital skills even for older employees, multiple reports on operations, etc., which would sometimes conflict with the criterion of freedom of teaching, generating a sense of frustration, stress, inadequacy, and even extreme burnout (Fiorilli et al. 2015; Elliott 2017). In the contemporary business setting, the development of high-quality performance measurement and management systems is crucial; namely, a reporting mechanism that offers employees feedback on the results of their actions (Bititci 2015). The objective of effective performance measurement and management design is to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between performance measurement and management (Smith and Bititci 2017; Sardi et al. 2020, 2021). Meyer (2002) delves into the intricacies of performance measurement as a novel field within the realm of management. According to him, performance evaluation is a challenging subject to put into practice, necessitating a reevaluation of the methodologies employed for its assessment. This heightened level of awareness was attained in 1990. Nevertheless, in the present-day



scenario, amid the emergence of novel disruptive technologies (Bresciani 2016), a new landscape of pervasive intricacy has emerged, characterized by uncertainty, volatility, ambiguity, and immediacy, driven by the imperatives of effectiveness and promptness, thereby demanding the fulfillment of fresh business and organizational requirements. By contrast, several segments and sectors are not totally pushed and moved by the overemphasized need for performance by the origin. In this sense, the authors would uncover a niche of workers in the public organizational ambit who are always stressed by emotional pressure and underestimated by the external/internal environment, but who still perform efficiently with high motivational levels. With the aim of meeting the grand challenges highlighted by the SDGs, the authors hope that this critical advancement of the theoretical dimension in management will help public policy move toward more conscious performance measurement and management, specifically for workers subjected to EL.

### 3. Methodological Aspects, Objectives, Gap Evaluation, and Research Questions

The authors' goal is not so much to explore the teaching profession as a professional category, nor the performance measurement and management systems per se, but to analyze the peculiar features of this category in the light of the New Public Management (NPM) reform, the emerging ministerial guidelines and legislative changes, in reference to the possibility of deriving important characteristic fragments subject to generalization. The main perspective is the construction of an integrated model that can be used both for theoretical advancement of the literature and for managerial applications and empirical tests. The authors consider an investigation centered on the identified subjects, particularly professional workers with a high emotional contribution, by concentrating their efforts on the specificity emerging from the educational profession, recognized in the literature as having high satisfaction and a high incidence of stress (Travers and Cooper 1996; Rayner and Espinoza 2016). Having reconsidered the research design (Figure 1) and the main objectives, based on the identification of the literary gap, as shown in Figure 2, the authors proceeded to structure an integration of the model proposed by Hakanen et al. (2006) and by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), redefining the dimensions of gift and possession identified by Belk (1988). Once convinced that no scientific contribution took into account the results emerging from the queries proposed in Figure 2, the authors, using the search engine of the largest existing scientific database (SCOPUS), completed a search in relation to the topics of the public sector, emotional work, motivation, resilience, and the gift–possession dynamic, taking steps to limit the range of action in order to fill the literary void in a less stringent way, thus considering exclusively the criteria used in the first query up to motivation, while excluding resilience, gift, and possession. This last query returned 15 results, but none of them was attributable to the educational profession. Therefore, having ascertained the relevance of the investigation, the authors provided for the structuring of the research design by drawing from a work of extreme originality (Cardon et al. 2005) and reproducing some peculiar features relating to the construction of the synthetic and synoptic parallels enucleated through the use of metaphors and aphorisms taken from the book *The Little Prince* (A. de Saint-Exupéry 1961). This particular and unusual investigation mode was made possible using a structured content analysis, implemented with the specific aim of making readable and understandable specific behaviors otherwise difficult to perceive (Harwood and Garry 2003). In this sense, the use of aphorisms/metaphors, according to the authors, would have helped clarify otherwise smoky and elusive aspects more clearly. The conceptual and theoretical part followed the lines traced at a methodological level by Jabareen (2009). The proposed integrated vision then strengthened the interpretative possibilities by outlining the features of the intangible forces that operate in synergy in the pursuit of the objectives of quality in the public service at the hands of teachers and the underlying reasons why the latter, despite the existence of degrading factors and a hostile work environment, demonstrate higher levels of motivation and satisfaction. This operating process can be observed graphically in Figure 1. The main steps of the design start from a gap evaluation, moving to research questions and objectives and confirming the relevance

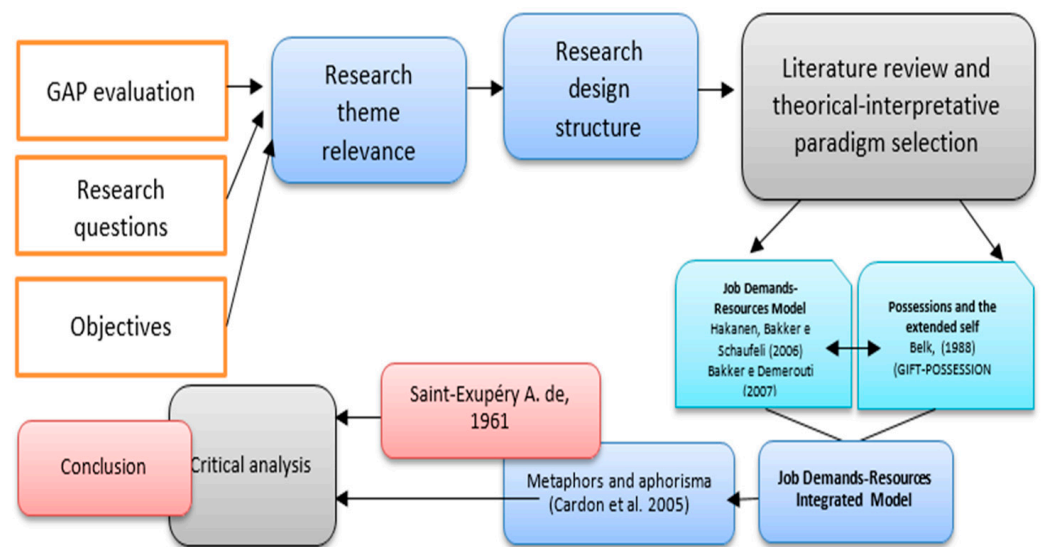
of the theme according to the specificity of theoretical interpretative paradigms (DRM and give–take/gift–possession). The integration of the DRM was possible considering metaphors derived and extracted from the well-known book *The Little Prince*, providing a critical perspective on the results.

From this model of evaluation and recognition of the literary gap, derived from the major database online, the authors drafted the following research questions:

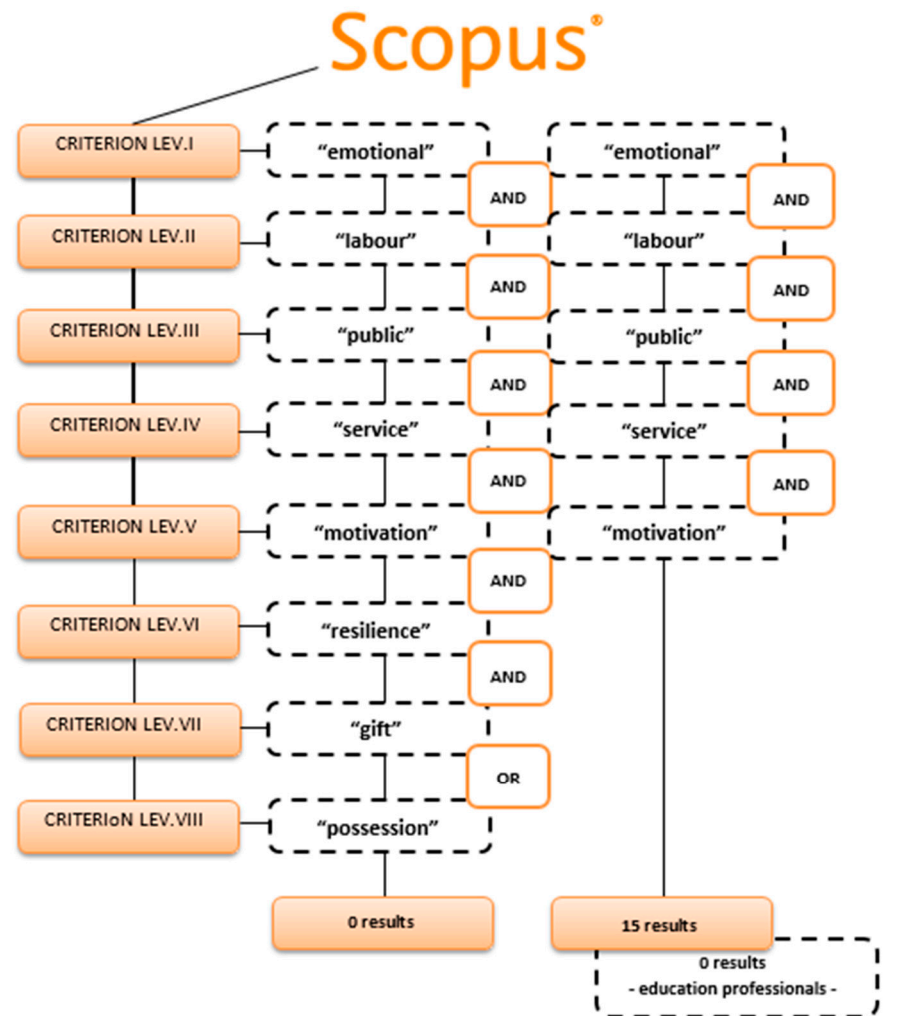
**RQ1:** *How are educational professionals (as emotional workers) able, on an individual level, to produce internal forces of resilience to hostile contexts to maintain high levels of service, motivation, and job satisfaction?*

**RQ2:** *Which levers do they refer to and what kind of approach do they put in place?*

**RQ3:** *Considering the conditions expressed above, in which way can managers in the public sector move motivational levers by overcoming performance measurement and management systems?*



**Figure 1.** Research design and operative process. Source: Authors' elaboration; referring paradigms from Schaufeli (2006), Bakker and Demerouti (2007), Belk (1988); methodological reference retrieved from Cardon et al. (2005); documental analysis based on A. de Saint-Exupéry (1961).



**QUERY 1:** (emotional AND labour AND public AND service AND motivation AND resilience AND gift OR possession) → (0)

**QUERY 2:** (emotional AND labour AND public AND service AND motivation) → (15) no reference to educational professions

**Figure 2.** Literary gap evaluation. Source: Authors' elaboration of data retrieved from SCOPUS. Photo source: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scopus\_logo.svg.

#### 4. Interpretative Paradigm and Theoretical Frame: Prospects of Influencing Motivation and Job Satisfaction

Using a theoretical and interpretative reference model, the authors consider an integrated approach as a valid constituent support for the structuring of adequate conceptual results in the present research. On the one hand, to identify the processes of stress/motivation generation, they use the Job Demands–Resources model proposed by [Hakanen et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Bakker and Demerouti \(2007\)](#) and, on the other, for the behavioral dimensionality perspective in the analysis of the individual approach (gift/possession) of resilience to hostile cases, they use that of [Belk \(1988\)](#).

Starting from the assumption that, as explained by [Bakker \(2011\)](#), work is “a process involving hands, head and heart” ([Rich et al. 2010](#); [Ashforth and Humphrey 1993](#)), according to the first reference model (general) ([Bakker and Demerouti 2007](#)), the job well-being and/or negative influence variables can be traced back to two sources: (a) job demands and (b) job resources. In this direction, it is understandable that the first group (a—Job Demands) refers to the mental, physical, emotional dimensions, etc. (identifying also the hostile contextual ones). The second group (b—Job Resources) could be attributed to the positive factors of support, autonomy, positive responses, etc. When explained, it would be

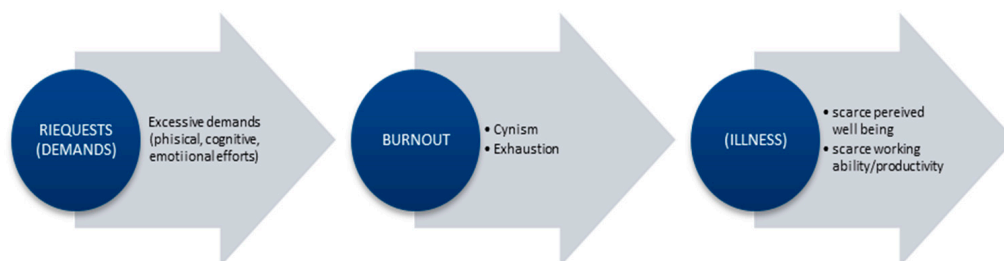
possible to highlight a direct incidence of the factors belonging to group (a) as negatively influencing in relation to stress and motivation; conversely, the factors belonging to the second group (b) would be positively influencing in relation to stress and motivation. Both groups (a–b) would directly affect organizational outcomes—on the one hand, in a positive way if stress levels are reduced and motivating factors are highly present and, on the other, in a negative way if stress levels are high and motivating factors absent. The proposed model was tested on a sample of teachers (Hakanen et al. 2006). In this regard, reference is made to the processes that can be highlighted in relation to the working well-being expressed by this particular category of professionals. The one by Hakanen et al. (2006) is therefore used as a quasi-unique reference model and the two reported outputs are taken into consideration:

- (i) the first capable of outlining an “energetic process”, in which work demands create a frame of stress, burnout, and ill health conditions (Saks 2006; Maslach et al. 2001), declining as expedients (a) exhaustion and (b) cynicism, and
- (ii) the second capable of outlining a “motivational process”, in which work resources (understood as factors capable of reducing the burden of work) are directly proportional to the reduction in health costs and the improvement in work performance (Kahn 1990).

In this way, the expressed variables related to job demands refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organizational elements within a job that necessitate ongoing physical and/or cognitive exertion or expertise, consequently leading to specific physiological and/or psychological consequences. Examples include stress from workloads and emotional requirements.

On the other hand, job resources encompass the physical, psychological, social, or organizational components of a job that are either instrumental in accomplishing work objectives, mitigating job demands and the resulting physiological and psychological toll, or encouraging personal advancement, education, and growth. Instances of such resources are career advancement opportunities, guidance from supervisors, clearly defined roles, and autonomy.

Therefore, if in the first conception the frame of work requests involves, on the one hand, burnout syndrome (with expedients (a) exhaustion and (b) cynicism), as well as low productivity and ability to work, in the second process the cases activating and determining cause–effect would involve vigor and dedication (expedients) starting from the generation of engagement. In this sense, the resulting output would be attributable to a greater commitment, which can also decline with greater attachment to/investment in the corporate mission and with a more positive perception of the role played and the objectives pursued in terms of importance. What has been stated has been schematically formalized according to what is reported in Figure 3 in relation to the “energy process” and in Figure 4 in relation to the “motivational process”.



**Figure 3.** (i) Demand process (energetical process). Source: Authors’ elaboration—readapted from Hakanen et al. (2006), and Bakker and Demerouti (2007).





**Figure 4.** (ii) Resource process (motivational process). Source: Authors' elaboration—readapted from Hakanen et al. (2006), and Bakker and Demerouti (2007).

What is expressly stated by the authors, taking into consideration and as a reference the model proposed by Hakanen et al. (2006), is also confirmed in the literature (Steinhaus and Perry 1996; Afsar et al. 2020; Macey and Schneider 2008) in relation to the condition of performing extreme psychological, physical, social, and/or organizational tasks. These can negatively affect motivation and performance. On the contrary, positive factors of support, autonomy, positive responses, etc., deriving from the working context, from internal/external sources, drawing on sources (resources), can mitigate the negative contribution of the excessive working demands (demands) inherent in their costs in terms of health, performance, and sense of self-efficacy, virtuously generating involvement and organizational commitment, as well as consequently increasing motivational levels (Kahn 1990; Schaufeli et al. 2002a, 2002b; Shuck et al. 2011; Bakker et al. 2008; Richman 2006; Bates 2004).

Work motivation, in addition to being read in the ranks of its influencing variables, in the authors' conception, can be hermeneutically traced back to the two poles of the extension of the self:

- (a) extension of the self as a gift;
- (b) extension of the self as possession.

Therefore, the theoretical framework intervenes by making use of the concept of reciprocity. In this sense, reciprocity is understood as (non)-balanced; therefore, through the act of donation (the gift), an alter-advantageous behavior is triggered that is only apparently altruistic for the donation and reflex-advantageous in relation to the feedback that follows the pattern procedure below:

- (a) reciprocity → gift → alter-beneficial/reflex-beneficial ← feedback

In the case of possession, a conceptual framework relating to reciprocity is derived from the object–possessor relationship triggered by an acquisition action heralding an opportunistic self-advantageous behavior for the reflex-advantageous in relation to the action of care and maintenance of the possessed object. In this sense, reference is made to the procedural scheme shown below:

- (b) reciprocity → acquisition → self-beneficial/reflex-beneficial ← care

In support of this conceptual–theoretical perspective of critical re-reading of work motivation, the authors intervene in the use of the simplest dynamic inherent in metaphors and aphorisms (Cardon et al. 2005), which will be considered at the end of the idea elaboration, bringing the scientific–theoretical–conceptual parallelism back to the popular analysis deriving from the widely known book *The Little Prince* (A. de Saint-Exupéry 1961).

From this literary contribution, a synthetic attribution of connotations inherent to work motivation and to the extension of the self based on gift and possession will be drawn, in particular for professions with a high emotional value such as the educational ones: teachers (object of the study).

Before focusing on this perspective, scientific–empirical support was provided by the authors, proposing a survey aimed at enhancing and defining the elements of influence on motivation itself in order to reinforce what is already known in the literature.

In this direction, it was possible to attribute, thanks to a previous research work (Rainero and Modarelli 2020), to the dynamics of the gift, in an interacting relationship with that of possession, a close relationship with the dimension of mediation in the attribution of meaning.

On the other hand, as reported by Koumenta (2015), quoting Akerlof (1982), unpaid overtime would be understood as an “exchange of gifts”, a sort of reciprocal act in response to the generosity of the employer (Akerlof 1982). For the study proposal, the payback effect for excessive effort in terms of EL and knowledge transfer (even beyond what is necessary) would be expressed (in the educational context) by the contextual feedback (learners, colleagues, and hierarchical superiors to whom the working action is directed), but not exclusively. At this point, to better understand the theoretical–conceptual progression, the authors propose a first case (C.1):

**C.1.** For example, the teacher fits into a logic of control that redefines the schemes of possession through a gift.

Therefore, reciprocity would not only be balanced, or better balanced by reflection in the loss of part of the self with each gift action, but also only apparently altruistic.

As will be explained later, tracing the connotations of the obviously counterintuitive results, the teacher in daily operations and in coping with the pressure deriving from EL necessarily puts in place resilience mechanisms that inevitably pass from the more atavistic gift–possession system (Schaufeli 2006; Grant 2013) in the extension of one’s self (Belk 1988).

Specifically, this extension (which sees a physiological loss of part of the self in the gift), triggered by a balancing mechanism of attribution of meaning and by the mediation of the latter, would lead, according to the authors, to the broadest (and in contrast) result of satisfaction/motivation expressed by this particular category of professionals.

This is attributable to what is expressed both in the literature and in the work previously done by Rainero and Modarelli (2020) and used as an instrumental source for this study.

In this sense, the second case moves (C.2):

**C.2.** For instance, when examining the significance of feedback (Steelman and Rutkowski 2004; London 1995), if construed as a favorable factor in the “energetic process”, it could be categorized within the dual nature of gift–possession (Belk 1988; Schaufeli 2006; Grant 2013). This is evident in the reciprocal exchange between the teacher (imparting knowledge to students—give) and students and the subtle sense of possession towards them, as they receive the gift of knowledge, relinquishing a part of their identity to the teacher (Belk 1988). The positive feedback loop, which also involves the students exerting control and possessing influence over the teacher, manifests in a tangible feedback dynamic.

In this context (specifically in the example provided), it becomes apparent how the aforementioned elements directly stimulate motivational mechanisms that enhance positive behaviors and job satisfaction responses. This is achieved through resilience strategies that entail expanding one’s sense of self in relation to attributing significance to one’s own work (via feedback mechanisms—reflex action). Consequently, this leads to an elevation in the service quality delivered, accompanied by heightened motivation levels, notwithstanding the persistent challenges posed by external EL pressures and a hostile work environment (which can significantly impact professionals more than others).

## 5. Summarized Results of Previous Empirical Analysis: Premise

The results of the previous research conducted by Rainero and Modarelli (2020) would demonstrate how—although there is a broad conception of the school working environment as stressful—with little perception of value attributed from the outside, little possibility of career development, little implementation of reward systems and incentives, and low remuneration, teachers demonstrate high levels of motivation and a well-structured perfor-

mance despite the fact that the factors of negative influence are present in a massive way in their almost totality. There are two reasons for the resilience expressed: on the one hand, the high conception of teaching professionals of their role and, on the other, the high social value that they attribute to the task performed (considering the grand challenges by SDGs). This approach can only be traced back to the attribution of meaning and grafted into the “energy process” proposed by [Hakanen et al. \(2006\)](#) as a mediator capable of responsibly guaranteeing qualitatively valid performance and dedication in the long term, despite the presence of a work context often bordering on toxicity ([Wharton 1999](#)).

#### *Integrated Conceptual Model*

By virtue of what has been above expressed and in the light of the synthetic results ([Rainero and Modarelli 2020](#)) referred to in the premise, the authors used them as an empirical basis on which to build the theoretical–conceptual contribution of the integrated model ([Hakanen et al. 2006](#); [Bakker and Demerouti 2007](#); [Belk 1988](#)) (formally shown in Figure 5). In Table 1, the authors provide a synoptic view of the main evidence relating to the variables inherent in energy and motivational processes in parallel with the dimensions of gift and possession that can be extrapolated from aphorisms and metaphors inherent in the literary product referred to ([A. de Saint-Exupéry 1961](#)).

The variables presented in Figure 5 reproduce the scheme provided in Figures 3 and 4, with the added value of the results provided by this research, expanding the DRM by the dimensions of give–take/gift–possession expressed in the literature by, respectively, [Hakanen et al. \(2006\)](#), [Bakker and Demerouti \(2007\)](#) (concerning DRM), [Belk \(1988\)](#) (concerning the gift–possession approach), and [Schaufeli \(2006\)](#) and [Grant \(2013\)](#) (concerning the give-and-take approach), also highlighting the conceptual evaluation provided by the authors through the critical view on the exemplification for defining the two approaches, the “little prince” and the “self-accountant”. In addition, the authors underline the role of mediation expressed by sense-making in terms of resilience outcome.

As explained in Table 1, in the majority of cases, it is possible to identify a coexistence and concomitance of gift and possession dynamics, in parallel with the feeling of loss. This, as explained in the theoretical part, is useful in identifying the anthropological and atavistic/primordial human connection to the trinomial gift–possession–loss, which if outlined and explained according to the paradigms proposed by the research authors can become a valid support to the specific of hermeneutical validation deriving from the analysis of the operational activity of professionals with a high emotional contribution, such as teachers.

Having known the various drivers activating motivation to work and the disruptive factors of this condition ([Rainero and Modarelli 2020](#)), it is possible to draw conceptual conclusions on the perspective of mediation operated by the attribution of meaning in the absence of positively influencing factors in terms of motivation, commitment, and involvement, designed to protect and implement work performance.

Investment in physical, psychological, and emotional efforts in the context of the required work tasks contributes substantially to the achievement of organizational objectives. Conversely, when this dynamic turns out to be unbalanced and excessive, in relation to the demands deriving from the operating context or in the absence of factors of positive motivational influence, it is possible that the workers are displaced until the occurrence of dramatic syndromes such as burnout.

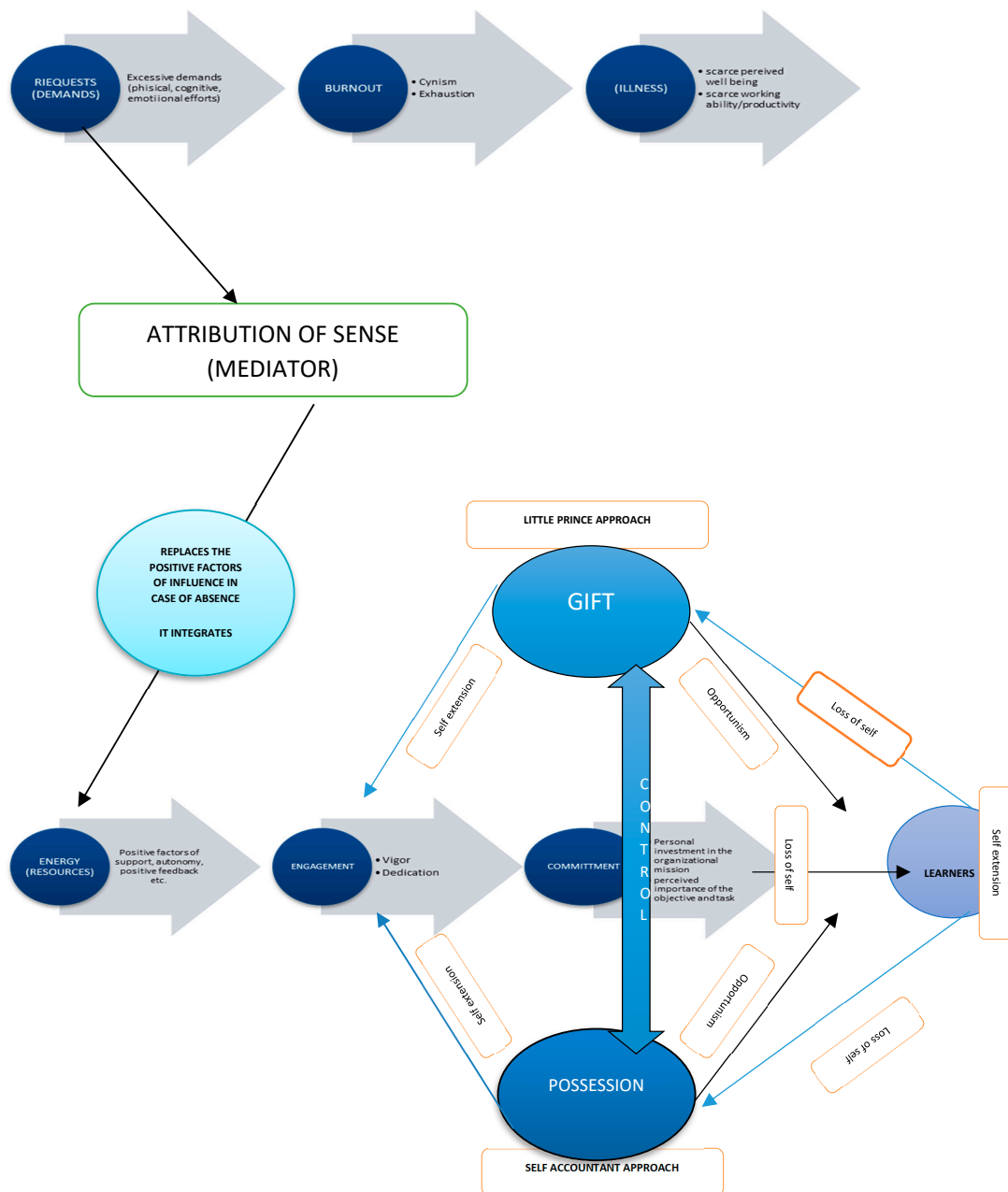
For professionals with a high social value and a high emotional contribution, as in the case of educational ones, this would seem not to happen, or rather it would happen in a more limited way, as the latter would be able to draw on energy resources aimed at balancing individual costs with the performative achievement of the objective (perceived as having a high value).

Therefore, a relationship exists between the inclusion of an object in the extension of the self and the dimension of care for the maintenance of this work object. Here, the aphorism taken from [A. de Saint-Exupéry \(1961\)](#)—“it is the lost time for your rose that

makes your rose so important”—would find its *raison d’être* more than ever. This is all the more valid if we refer to how many education professionals invest time as well as physical, psychological, and emotional energy in carrying out their duties, reinforcing (through the gift–possession perspective) more or less consciously the individual orientation towards performance and the quality of the service offered.

It is possible to deduce that the more the resources requested increase and the factors of positive motivational influence decrease, the more these specific professionals will refer to the gift–possession dimension activated by the attribution of meaning as an extension of the individual self.

In light of the above, the results converge towards the category of educational professionals, as examples neglected in the literature, but with a great capacity for work resilience (Southwick and Charney 2018).



**Figure 5.** Integrated demand–resource model with gift–possession dimensions (education professionals). Source: Authors’ elaboration—readapted from Hakanen et al. (2006), Bakker and Demerouti (2007) (DRM), Belk (1988) (gift–possession), Schaufeli (2006), and Grant (2013) (give–take).



**Table 1.** Synthetic/synoptic vision of metaphors and aphorisms—possession–gift dynamics (*The Little Prince*). Source: Authors’ elaboration—sentences taken and translated from A. de Saint-Exupéry (1961), elaborating on the literary contributions of Belk (1988), Schaufeli (2006), and Grant (2013).

Approach	Self-Accountant		Little Prince	Explanation
	Possession Dynamic	Gift Dynamic		
(1) <i>If someone <u>loves</u> a flower, of which there is only one specimen in millions and millions of stars, this is enough to make him <u>happy when he looks at it.</u></i>	X	X	X	<i>The dynamics of possession reside in the reflected (given) happiness of admiring the unique flower possessed; the dynamic of the gift lies in the process of triggering happiness, which causes a loss of extension of the self by the donor (rose—object of the work).</i>
(2) <i>But if the sheep <u>eats</u> the flower, it’s as if for him all of a sudden, <u>all the stars go out!</u></i>	X	X	X	<i>The dynamic of possession lies in the action of eating the rose, which is given to the sheep. Again, there is a loss of self-extension in gift-giving concomitant with the sense of loss and possession.</i>
(3) <i>“And what do you do with five hundred million stars?” “What do I do with it?” “Nothing. I own them.” “Do you <u>own</u> the stars?” “Yes! When you find a diamond that doesn’t belong to anyone, it’s yours. When you find an island that belongs to no one, it’s yours. When you have an idea for the first one, you get it patented, and it’s yours. And <u>I own</u> the stars, because no one before me has ever dreamed of owning them.”</i>	X		X	<i>The acquisition of several thousand stars, in their unusability, produces an effective dynamic of possession concomitant with a feeling of loss (in the book, we refer to the action of keeping the accounting records updated on the number of stars owned). While the dynamics of the gift, expressed according to the identification of the “little prince” approach, is easily understandable, the authors propose the identification of the “self-accountant” approach in relation to this particular case deriving from a chapter in the book by A. de Saint-Exupéry (1961) that is inherent in the planet inhabited precisely by the “accountant”, who by counting the stars and keeping their updated registers, in fact, owns them.</i>
(4) <i>“I”, said the little prince, “have a flower that I water every day. I own three volcanoes whose chimneys I sweep every week. Because I sweep the fireplace even the one that’s off. You never know. <u>It is useful to my volcanoes, and it is useful to my flower that I have them.</u>”</i>	X	X		<i>The dynamics of possession in this case shift to the flower, which is watered every day (gift) and to the volcanoes, which are swept away every week (gift). In this case, the dynamics are concomitant both as regards the possession and as regards the gift, since the utility (the loss of extension of the self by the two subjects) contributes to a beneficial/positive action of the possession.</i>

Table 1. Cont.

Approach	Self-Accountant	Little Prince		Explanation
Aphorism—Metaphor	Possession Dynamic	Gift Dynamic	Loss Dynamic	
<p>(5) What does “tame” mean? “It’s something long forgotten. It means creating bonds.” “Creating bonds?” “Of course,” said the fox. “You, until now, are to me but a little boy equal to a hundred thousand little boys. And I don’t need you. Nor do you need me. I am to you but a fox equal to a hundred thousand foxes. But if you tame me, we will need each other. You will be unique to me in the world, and I will be unique to you in the world.” And when the hour of departure drew near: “Ah!” said the fox, “.. I will cry.”</p>	X	X	X	<p>The creation of a bond finds in itself both the dynamics of possession and that of the gift with the aggravating feeling of loss identified in the reciprocal need connected to crying.</p>
<p>(6) “You are beautiful, but you are empty”, he said again. “I can’t die for you. Certainly, any passerby would believe that my rose looks like you, but she, she alone, is more important than all of you, because it is she that I watered. Because it is my rose.” “It’s the time you lost for your rose that made your rose so important.”</p>	X	X	X	<p>The dynamic of possession, in the creation of the bond, is inherent in the gift and in the fear of loss. This makes it possible to make the rose (the object of the work) to which the gift is directed (time) unique, also revealing the sensation of loss of part of the extension of the self bidirectionally (donor/possessor-recipient; recipient-donor/possessor). Lost time and protective actions (e.g., watering) return the projection of work onto the produced/possessed object, thus qualifying its importance and identifying the devastating features of the loss.</p>
<p>(7) “What makes the desert beautiful,” said the little prince, “is that somewhere it hides a well.”</p>	X	X	X	<p>The desert hides (gives) a well from (to) the seeker (the one who works to look for it) and who therefore can enjoy and dispose of the benefit of possessing, while losing part of the extension of his self. In the enjoyment of the object, there is a dynamic of reciprocal gift, which is also not without loss of extension of the self.</p>

## 6. Critical Discussion

Possession and gift, at the basis of anthropological studies, allow us to understand the tools of primordial economies and societies (Sahlins et al. 2020), but not exclusively. In the present case, they become interpretative models aimed at considering human perspectives of resilience in the world of work, outlining features of development possibilities, especially for certain professional categories.

By virtue of the fact that “we are what we own”, but “we are also what we give” (Belk 1988), referring to the extension of the self, teaching professionals, in a sense, own the classroom, the students, their knowledge, and the power to mark, just as doctors and nurses, for example, own their knowledge, the treatments and the patients, as well as the diseases and the repercussions they produce.

In this sense, the extension of the self, which inevitably passes through the possession/gift, increases work commitment (Redman and Snape 2005) and work performance (in one way or another). Therefore, only the attribution of meaning (transition mediator from the demand process to the energy one in the absence of positively influencing factors), precisely in the case of subjection to extreme levels of work as well as emotional, psychological, and physical demands, would lead to greater satisfaction, attachment, commitment and involvement for particular types of professionals (e.g., teachers) in relation to their work and the quality of the service offered.

Therefore, if possessions and gifts are recognized as indispensable parts of the extension of the self, even the relative loss of possessions (objects of one’s work from the point of view of gift and possession) would represent a loss of oneself, of one’s identity, of one’s uniqueness—in other words, a violation of the person (Goffman 1961).

Still considering the figure of the teaching professional, it can be said that this is inextricably linked to the immaterial object of his work (public education service). At this juncture, teachers possess this object as well as produce it because the possibility of possessing it and giving it as an extension of one’s self is expressed precisely in the activity of production. In this sense, it is subjected to performance evaluation. Furthermore, the possession of culture, of learners, and of transferred knowledge goes hand in hand with the need and feeling of self-realization (Maslow 1943), a further case of positive motivational influence.

Fromm’s (1976) vision of existence in general is an explication of and prevailing propensity for being rather than having. Fromm (1976) rejects the hedonistic vision of having and considers the alternative of the gift to be valid and univocal. As expressly reported above, however, the two types of gift and possession are anthropologically bound and coexist. Above all, in this way, with regard to the figure of the teacher, the authors consider the case of the gift and that of possession as contextual, capable of regenerative and resilient virtuosity towards excessive “demand processes”.

It is Sartre (1943) who, before Fromm (1976), considered the gift–possession relationship, such that a non-altruistic vision and interpretation of the subjects (a) donor and (b) recipient of the gift would be valid. In both cases, there would be a loss of identity in both the act of giving and the act of receiving. On the contrary, inherent in this exchange, an action of possession would be identifiable in relation to that of the will to control (for self-interest).

Again, in the case of the teaching profession, a teacher donor (of culture) would assume a form of control (therefore of possession) over the recipient of the gift (the learner), but although the learner maintains hypothetical control over the gift (transferred culture), the latter would lose part of his own self as he lacks the ability to have total control over the gift, with reference to the expectation that this gift will be reciprocated (e.g., in terms of positive feedback).

From this point of view, it is therefore possible to consider the action of gift-giving as not totally altruistic, but extensively self-opportunistic, capable of guaranteeing (motivational) resilience in a potentially hostile context. From this, with a view to rational maximization of one’s goals (Posner 1997), the gift proves to be a useful tool for controlling

learners, and precisely through the gift of the transferred culture, an extension of the self would take place through possession. Thus, gift and possession should be considered concomitant and interacting connotations, capable of converging towards the same decisive outcome (RQ1 answer) through different approaches defined by the authors as follows:

- (i) The “little prince” approach;
- (ii) The “self-accountant” approach.

In this way, just as in the book *The Little Prince*, the protagonist dedicates attention and care to his rose, preserving it against external altering variables, teachers consider their students an object of their care, exemplifying their action of gift-giving, but conversely and at the same time, the teachers can act as another character of the book, “the accountant of the stars”, who counts his stars with the aim to possess. In the former case, the approach of gift-giving can be named the “little prince” approach, and in the latter case, the approach of possession can be named the “self-accountant” approach, referring to the extension of the self theory provided by [Belk \(1988\)](#) and the give-and-take dimensions ascribable to [Schaufeli \(2006\)](#) and [Grant \(2013\)](#).

[Schaufeli \(2013\)](#) suggests that in modern organizations, employees are called to bring themselves to the workplace in all their integrity. [Ulrich \(1997\)](#), in addition to what has been expressed, agrees by stating that organizations could not find any potential improvement possibilities in terms of increasing work performance without involving all employees in a real task-based culture ([Kahn 1992](#)). What has been said is all the more valid when considering situations relating to the quality of public service with reference to individual/institutional social responsibility. So, how should one move and boost motivation and performance under these conditions? The professional category of teachers (selected for the case study), in its specificity, like doctors and nurses, massively uses the contribution of EL, especially in the absence of organizational possibilities for using motivational levers aimed at holistic involvement of the worker. Therefore, as conceptualized, these subjects can self-induce motivation (RQ2 answer) and autonomously generate a positive force (through the dimensions of gift and possession) to face the difficulties inherent in the environment in which they find themselves operating. Probably for teachers, standardized extrinsic motivational levers cannot be useful. By contrast, factors affecting internal motivation should be moved and are more valid for enhancing work performance and satisfaction (RQ3 answer). This study differs from previous studies because, on the one hand, it expands a model and deeply problematizes possible solutions to hostile working contexts for a quite neglected cluster and, on the other hand, it puts the lens on the poorly investigated area of cognitive and emotional exposure at work, marking alternative ways of understanding in the organizational field. The use of an alternative methodology of interpretation concerning human behaviors and approaches makes this study original and differentiates the efforts implemented by the authors through a renewed conceptual view.

## 7. Conclusions

The study carried out—already based on results ([Rainero and Modarelli 2020](#)) that seek to focus attention on a potential reversal of the evidence expressed in public contexts for administrative employees in general ([Ruffini and Modarelli 2015](#)) in terms of motivation and engagement ([Pech and Slade 2006](#))—does not aim to highlight the current state of affairs, but to build an integrated and reference model that the academic community can consider in relation to the definition of the phenomenon being analyzed. To this end, a research design was structured with the aim of highlighting paradigms of resilience in the case of professions with a higher emotional content (e.g., the educational profession), in contexts marked by multiple structural, wage, and often social difficulties.

Highly successful individuals are moved by motivation, ability, and opportunity. But another, often overlooked, factor for success needs to be emphasized for its importance: interpersonal interaction ([Grant 2013](#)). For this reason, using reciprocity relations ([Sahlins et al. 2020](#)) as an interpretative solution, the authors decided to start investigating the



DRM and the possibility of its expansion in relation to a specific sector and cluster of professionals. Research in this area shows that people vary in their reciprocity preferences, with some being takers who prioritize self-gain and others being givers who focus on helping others. Givers aim to be generous by sharing their time, skills, and resources with others, while takers prioritize their own interests and benefits. Takers seek to benefit themselves, while givers prioritize assisting others without expecting immediate returns. In the workplace, givers are rare, choosing to give more than they receive, while takers are self-focused, aiming to gain more than they give. The distinction between givers and takers lies in their attitudes and behaviors towards others, rather than in their financial contributions or professional achievements (Schaufeli 2006; Grant 2013).

Starting from that, the research generates room for maneuver and evidence to explain the existence of a broad spectrum of perspectives, in which the attribution of meaning (making sense) is proposed as an activating and mediating force between demand processes and motivational processes (Hakanen et al. 2006; Bakker and Demerouti 2007) through anthropological dimensions of gift–possession as an extension of the self (Belk 1988), overcoming performance measurement and management systems. In this sense, it was possible to recognize two approaches: (a) one defined as the “little prince” and (b) the other defined as the “self-accountant” approach. The first is based on the perspective of the gift, and the second on the perspective of possession.

From this point of view, low salary, the absence of positive feedback, or the presence of frustrating situations and difficulties in career progression emerged as facilitators in making known the existence of a niche of public service professionals who find their action to be based on atavistic yet inevitably effective motivating pillars. As for professions in the health sector (e.g., doctors and nurses), in addition to the risk of incurring burnout syndrome, consequent to the extreme effort due to EL, the trend highlighted by Elliott (2017) is that of giving up the job position. This dropout trend was not recorded in the case study.

In addition to providing a socio-anthropological and organizational reinterpretation of the demand–resource model (Hakanen et al. 2006; Bakker and Demerouti 2007), integrated with the gift–possession (Schaufeli 2006; Grant 2013) dimensions proposed by Belk (1988) and simplified by graphic and synoptic contribution (with the help of aphorisms and metaphors), the results of this research indirectly demonstrate (RQ1), through the attribution of meaning and the so-called “little prince” approach and the “self-accountant” approach (identified by the authors to better define the individual contribution of the research), as regards the educational profession, that the operators of this sector are capable of activating an otherwise unobservable force of resilience. This study established that, ideally, the selected workers operating under the conditions presented implement approaches, defined by the authors as the “little prince” and “self-accountant” approach based on the mechanisms of gift and possession, leading to the same performance and motivational result. What has been done outlines a dynamic of resilience that does not require external interventions in terms of performance management. Rather, a measurement dynamic that is not merely formal and operational solutions connected to a reward system, even if it is not remunerative, could unleash the potential already present in the attribution of meaning to the profession towards broader horizons of alignment with the efforts in the great challenges (RQ2). In this direction, an expansion of the model thus proposed could derive from the effective introduction of reward mechanisms and the operational implementation of technological systems to support teaching, which are currently still poorly enhanced beyond classic computers or multimedia boards (RQ3). Therefore, if the logic of a performance measurement and management system in the specific sector currently seems outdated and only a burden for the organization and the workers in question, its more conscious and guided application could be structured as a mediator between the levels of motivation, satisfaction, and performance.

The paradigms of possession and gift would not only integrate (on a qualitative level) the reference model used by the authors and widely recognized in the literature (Hakanen

et al. 2006; Bakker and Demerouti 2007), but also provide new insights of investigation in the field of business anthropology, human resource management, and the broader perspective of organizational behavior, trying to fill a gap made evident in the light of recent disasters (COVID-19, earthquakes, floods, landslides, wars, infrastructural instability, etc.).

Considering the aforementioned discussion and following the assumptions provided by Schaufeli (2006) and Grant (2013), the research theoretically contributes to disambiguating the results emerging from the literature in the area, thereby, on the one hand, building an expanded reference frame related to the persistence of higher motivation and performance expressed by educational professionals exposed to hostile contexts (public sector) and heavy EL and, on the other hand, elucidating the existing overlap between behaviors and tendencies (the gift-giving approach of the “giver” and the possessive approach of the “taker”) in the cluster of educational professionals who can converge toward the same outcome: work resilience. Practically, the research could be useful for school managers and directors in the public sector to understand the behavioral functioning of the motivational process of their employees. In these terms, they can also intervene timely if something goes wrong, adjusting and manipulating the levers that are inextricably linked to the myopic view of policy makers, overcome by the self-productive PSM and high-quality service provided directly by the teachers.

The research contributes theoretically by clarifying results in the literature on the persistence of motivation and performance among educational professionals in challenging contexts, while also exploring the overlap between different behaviors in the educational field that lead to work resilience; practically, it can help school managers understand and intervene in the motivational processes of their employees, especially guaranteeing factors that can move internal motivational forces, such as external recognition, feedback, non-monetary rewards, etc.

Precisely in this direction, future research developments could bear the best results, testing not only qualitatively but also quantitatively the proposed model and the variables intercepted in relation to the high intensity and pervasiveness of EL in the event of exogenous shocks such as those indicated previously.

The probable limits of the research are inherent in the conceptual and theoretical nature of the study, although it is, in any case, based on empirical foundations and previous field analyses. The originality (use of aphorisms and metaphors) of the study should be able to balance its limits, at least in terms of the dissemination and breadth of the audience in question.

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