



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

**VENICE SCHOOL
OF MANAGEMENT**

Evgenia Lysova

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

IF WE STUFF OUR PRODUCTION PROCESS, PATIENTS DIE: HOW MIDDLE MANAGERS PERSONALIZE ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE

October 27th, 2026, 10.00 AM

Aula Saraceno Campus San Giobbe

Organizational purpose - which serves as a bridge between an organization's function and its value-laden intentions - has emerged as a central concept in management research. While prior research has predominantly focused on how top-down processes led by senior leaders enable embedding a purpose in organizations, this study shifts attention to the role of middle managers in internalizing organizational purpose. Drawing on archival materials and qualitative interviews with commercial middle managers at a multinational pharmaceutical company, we explore how middle managers make organizational purpose meaningful to their own work and thus internalize it. Our findings identify three mechanisms of purpose internalization—proximity, priority,

and urgency—through which middle managers relate to the organization's patient-centered purpose. These mechanisms enable managers to justify the worthiness of their work, but also reveal a tendency to moralize the economization of purpose in ways that preserve their own work practices. We contribute to research on purpose internalization by uncovering how middle managers sustain the meaningfulness of their own work through anchoring the patient focus in their day-to-day work. In doing so, we extend theoretical understandings of purpose embedding as both an individual- and organizational-level process, and illuminate the ambivalent role of work worthiness in enabling meaningful work experiences.