

Motivation through meaning



The meaning of life is to give life meaning – Victor E. Frankl

In our article, the [Drivers behind Employee Engagement](#), we looked at the three top drivers. In this article we are going to deep dive into the driver of meaningful work.

Research has found that meaningful work is a good predictor of desirable work attitudes like job satisfaction. In addition, meaningful work is a better predictor of absenteeism from work than job satisfaction.

Daniel Pink, coined the term [Motivation 3.0](#) to differentiate between previous beliefs about motivation:

- Motivation 1.0: The implementation of this motivation system presumes that the employee works for their survival (i.e. for their basic needs, salary). This reflection is linked to Maslow's theories. Research has shown that pay, albeit still an important factor, is not the principal source of motivation.

- Motivation 2.0: This motivation assumes that employees respond to the “carrot” (reward) and the “stick” (punishment), with no evolution. Consequently, this motivation system forces employees to work without thinking, doing routine and seemingly unnecessary tasks. We are raised in an education system which rewards excellence and condemns mediocrity.
- Motivation 3.0: Daniel Pink introduces the notion of intrinsic needs (the drive to do something because it is interesting, challenging and absorbing):
 - Autonomy: Autonomy is the need to direct your own life and work. To be fully motivated, you must be able to control what you do, when you do it, and who you do it with.
 - Mastery: Mastery is the desire to continuously improve at things that matter.
 - Purpose: The desire to do things in service of something larger than ourselves.

According to Michael Steger, Associate Professor of Psychology at Colorado State University there are three questions that measure whether work is meaningful for an individual:

1. Does the work have significance and purpose?
2. Does it contribute to finding a broader meaning in life?
3. Does it make a positive contribution to the greater good?

It is important to note that meaningful work does not only lie in social impact or charity organisations. Meaning can be found in any job according to Steger. Any employer can create meaning within their workplace for their employees. A two-year study carried out by Deloitte found that allowing time for relaxation, having small empowered teams, selecting the right person for the job, and giving people the tools and autonomy to succeed, all contributed to meaningful work.

Some aspects that have been found to contribute to feelings of meaninglessness are:

- A disconnect between what an employer values and what an employee values;
- Not feeling recognised or rewarded for hard work;
- Tasks being perceived as pointless;
- Employees feeling that they are not being treated fairly;
- Being micromanaged and controlled;
- Isolation from others; and
- Extreme risks associated with a job.

Most of these are fairly easy to ensure, and should be seriously considered, considering the impact meaningful work has on the employee and the organisation.

References

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