Meaningful Work: Importance, Benefits And Sources

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Abstract

Work is not the same after the COVID-19 pandemic, due to factors such as digitization and globalization, challenges and competition at work have created enormous stress, emotional exhaustion, and physical fatigue among workers, and work life has become quite monotonous. Lack of physical engagement, employees have started to question the meaning of their work. The current paper discusses the importance of Meaningful Work and suggests that meaningful work is a promising workforce solution in the modern era, as it yields numerous positive outcomes for employees and organizations. Meaningful work should be cultivated consciously in the organizations by empowering the employees, giving them autonomy, and, discussing their work's impact on the larger picture. Employees find or craft it in a proactive manner when they experience alignment of values, and purpose with their work. (Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2001)

Keywords; Meaningful Work, Job Design, Wellbeing, Values.

INTRODUCTION

What is Meaningful Work?

Meaningful work is generally defined as the value of work goals seen in relation to an individual's own ideals and passions, and, specifically, as work that "gives essence to what we do and brings fulfillment to our lives" (Chalofsky, 2003). Steger et al. (2012) conceptualized meaningful work in terms of three dimensions, namely psychological meaningfulness, meaning-making, and greater good motivations. Psychological meaningfulness in work is the subjective experience that one's work matters and is important. Creating meaning through work captures the idea that work is the primary source of meaning in one's life. In this regard, meaningful work helps people understand themselves and the world around them.

Why is Meaningful Work Important?

Work is one of the most important aspects of life, as humans spend most of their waking hours at work which continues for decades. As the global pandemic, COVID-19 has affected the organization's employees are working in a completely new pattern. Be it work from home where employees have to exceed the fixed working hours impacting their personal life feel isolated from their peers, the physical connection is lost with no time left for social recreation have to exceed the fixed working hours impacting their

personal life or switching to a hybrid mode of working to re-joining offices, employees and organizations have undergone through several challenges to survive the cut-throat competition in the global era. Due to digitalization and globalization, challenges and competition at work have caused heavy stress, emotional exhaustion, and physical fatigue among the workers, and the work-life which has become quite monotonous due to lack of physical connection employees have begun to question the meaning of their work. Meaningful Work is gaining importance as employees and organizations have questions such as, "why am I working so hard? Isn't it enough to reward the employees with money? Why is money not able to attract employees entirely? As a consequence, many employees today question the nature of their work, its significance, and its impact. Not just the older people who could afford to choose work that fits with their values and is fulfilling from the inside even the young employees prefer work which has a positive impact on society as well as work that is innovative and sustainable.

Benefits of Meaningful Work

Fairlie defined meaningful work as a job and other workplace characteristics that facilitate the attainment or maintenance of one or more dimensions of meaning. When employees experience meaningfulness in their work, they feel they are part of something larger than themselves. They feel motivated by the tasks set before them and inspired to do their best possible work. When people have a position that feels significant, it helps them feel an authentic link to their career and the society around them. These types of positions help to contribute to their idea of a purpose in life. Today money is not the only motivator, employees like to know that the effort they put forth matters to the greater community.

One of the major challenges employees face today is the impact of heavy workload on their Mental health. When people feel bonded to their work and they feel that their work contribute to the greater good, and can see that the effort they put forth has value, report lower level of dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms and are more productive their work gives them the satisfaction of knowing that their efforts contribute to the good of everyone involved.

The employees themselves also feel happier, which boosts their productivity and efficiency, helping the organization thrive. Those who are in harmony with their job and who experience meaningful work, and serve some greater good are better adjusted psychologically and possess qualities desirable to individuals and organizations, they have higher levels of engagement in their work, higher levels of employee satisfaction, their commitment to the organization, efficiency, their willingness to go beyond role expectations to serve others. When the work is perceived as meaningful, people have a sense of fulfillment and purpose that provides a psychological sense of well-being. Such personal level benefits turn also into organizational level benefits, when employees are satisfied and happy with their work, they become more likely to recommend it to others and work harder for the group's success. This benefits the organization such as increased morale, lower turnover, greater productivity, increased organizational citizenship

behavior, and gives the employee the satisfaction of knowing that their efforts contribute to the good of everyone involved (Steger et al., 2012).

Cultivating Meaningful Work

Employees should be aware of the impact their work have on the Society and community at large, it's not necessary that the source of meaning may be found only in particular roles (e.g., health professionals, teachers) rather a traditional office job which may not seem meaningful from the outside but becomes fulfilling over time. As they also offer a chance to form bonds and emotionally support co-workers. Employees may also perceive their job as meaningful by knowing the impact on their customers: exceeding their expectations; making their lives better, easier, and safer; and providing innovative and sustainable products or services.

Employees find meaning through experiences they had while working for Organizations, such as receiving acknowledgment for their contribution, having enough autonomy to grow and develop with their work, working in positions and roles which are fulfilling inside out, and being empowered enough to bring the best out of their skill and potential. As the self-determination theory of motivation suggests that intrinsic motivation is experienced when three needs are met: autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

Therefore, meaningful work has become a source of personal fulfillment and a protective factor against those negativities in work (Simonet & Castille, 2020).

Literature Review

Meaningful work is a widely studied topic by both HRM and OB scholars as it relates positively to several organizational and individual outcomes (Vuori et al., 2012). Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) described the concept of meaningfulness, as, according to them, it explains "why am I here?". According to Pratt and Ashforth (2003), meaning is primarily concerned with the type of meaning an individual prescribes to their work and everyday experiences. Meaning is, hence, a descriptive concept that guides us in our everyday lives to interpret and make sense of the world around us (Martela & Pessi, 2018). One meaning attributed to work could, therefore, be a higher calling (Rosso et al., 2010). Meaningfulness, on the other hand, is more concerned with the importance attributed to these meanings. Hence, meaningfulness has an evaluative component as opposed to meaning (Vuori et al., 2012; Martela & Pessi, 2018).

Job Characteristics Theory (Oldham & Hackman, 2010), proposes meaningful work, should be cultivated in organizations to establish higher productivity and engagement. JC theory proposes that particular job characteristics--including skill variety, task identity, and task significance--influence the meaningfulness of work, which ultimately influence organizational outcomes (as cited in Fried & Ferris, 1987). Another theory that is often referred to is the self-determination theory (e.g. Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Martela & Riekki, 2018; Nikolova & Cnossen, 2020). This theory

explains that three psychological needs--competence, autonomy, and relatedness-- should fulfilled that are critical in motivating and enabling a purpose for individual workers

Steger et al. (2012) in their study found that meaningful work benefits the organization such as increased morale, lower turnover, greater productivity, increased organizational citizenship behavior, and gives the employee the satisfaction of knowing that their efforts contribute to the good of everyone involved. Most research scholars agree about the positive outcomes that meaningful work brings, which further include, among others, happiness, and personal fulfillment (Pavlish & Hunt, 2012). People who perceive their work to be a calling experience higher levels of satisfaction from their job as opposed to the satisfaction gained from leisure time (Wrzesniewski, 2003).

Discussion And Conclusion

Many scholars have tried to define Meaningful work as a subjective concept of work that is perceived as significant, worthwhile, and valuable, while some also propose that it is work that is perceived to align with one's own values and desires to serve a greater good or is aligned to one's own values and desires, Employees from every generation demand much more than a good salary from their jobs. Money may lure people into jobs, but purpose, meaning, and the prospect of interesting and valuable work determine both their tenure and how hard they will work while they are on the job. A large number of studies have proved that Meaningful Work has bidirectional benefits i.e., both for the individual and the organization. The benefits for organizations include higher commitment and engagement, improved work behaviors, a reduction in withdrawal behaviors and sickness, and, ultimately, results in better overall performance. For individuals, these include job satisfaction, organization commitment, happiness, personal fulfillment, improved creativity, and less burnout and stress. Employees experience overall well-being and enhanced meaning in life. As the studies say that meaningful work perceptions are subjective and are experienced through coordination between self and the organization, it is proposed that HR managers and organizations can foster meaningful work experiences by building strong organizational cultures and identities, and through transformational and visionary leadership (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Organizations should focus on the job designs as Kahn (1990) proposed that experience of meaningfulness in work arises mainly through the design of jobs which offers autonomy, variety and challenge, a good person-job fit; and healthy social connections.

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