

Beyond Satisfaction and Engagement to Work that Really Means Something

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Perhaps for millennia, the question of whether people enjoyed their work was never considered. Work was simply what people did with their lives so that they could continue to live. However, as the work and the global economy have become ever more interconnected and complex, more and more people have been exposed to the idea that work might not simply put food on the table, work might be fun, gratifying, or resonate with one's soul.

Businesses and organisations recognised this trend, and critically recognised that their most valuable and capable employees were the ones in the best position to seek work that was both financially and psychologically rewarding. Therefore, in recent decades, business organisations have made substantial investments to leverage the link between happiness and productivity.

Organisations who were early adopters of the emerging science of employee happiness and productivity became leaders in their industries by focusing first on job satisfaction, then later on employee engagement. By now, employee engagement surveys, and sometimes engagement programming, have become commonplace. If we examine closely at what engaged employees are supposed to look like we see an appealing picture of people working busily and with attention to detail. What we are not able to see, however, is why they are working. Why do they have that job? Why do they work for that company? How long will they work in the industry? How much of themselves are they giving, and how deep is the relationship they have with their employer?

A new science of organisations is emerging to address these questions. This is the science of meaningful work.

This emerging science shows that finding meaning and purpose in our work provides richer, more satisfying, and more productive employment for people. Meaningful work flourishes when we have a clear sense of self, an accurate understanding of the nature and expectations of our work environment, and understand how to act within our organisation to accomplish our work objectives. Meaningful work has a clear point and purpose, is closely aligned with our core values and strengths, and is highly motivating. Research shows meaningful work is tied to greater commitment, organisational caretaking, motivation, lesser absenteeism and intentions to leave an organisation.

At the forefront of this science of meaningful work is an easy-to-use survey instrument, the Work And Meaning Inventory (WAMI) that I developed with colleagues in the USA. The WAMI captures the key dimensions of meaningful work:

- Work has a positive meaning and purpose
- Work helps create meaning in one's life as a whole
- Work provides the opportunity to benefit the greater good

Researchers around the world are using the WAMI to better understand how organisations can harness meaningful work to accomplish the twin aspirations of any truly great organisation: to compete effectively in the global marketplace and to nurture dedicated, motivated, and talented employees. Consultancies are only now beginning to develop programming to help organisations move beyond satisfaction and engagement to achieve work that really means something.



Dr. Michael F. Steger is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Colorado State University, USA. He is an internationally recognized authority on meaning, purpose, happiness, psychological strengths, and positive psychology. He is particularly passionate about creating and leveraging meaning and purpose through work and organizations. His research on these topics has been published in dozens of scientific peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, and includes the publication of the most widely used measure of meaning in life in the world. His books include "Purpose and Meaning in the Workplace" (American Psychological Association Press) and "Designing Positive Psychology" (Oxford University Press), as well as the forthcoming "Handbook on Positivity and Strength-Based Approaches at Work" (Wiley-Blackwell). He is a speaker who infuses humor, enthusiasm, and practical advice for applying the science of flourishing into each engagement.

Dr Michael F. Steger is the Knowledge Partner of Logos Learning and iGROW in the area of Meaningful Work. Together, we collaborate with organisations to conduct assessments and capture a snapshot of the employees' perception of meaningful work. This snapshot will enable organisations to better develop strategies to engage and retain staff. If you are interested to find out more or to collaborate with us, please contact:

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