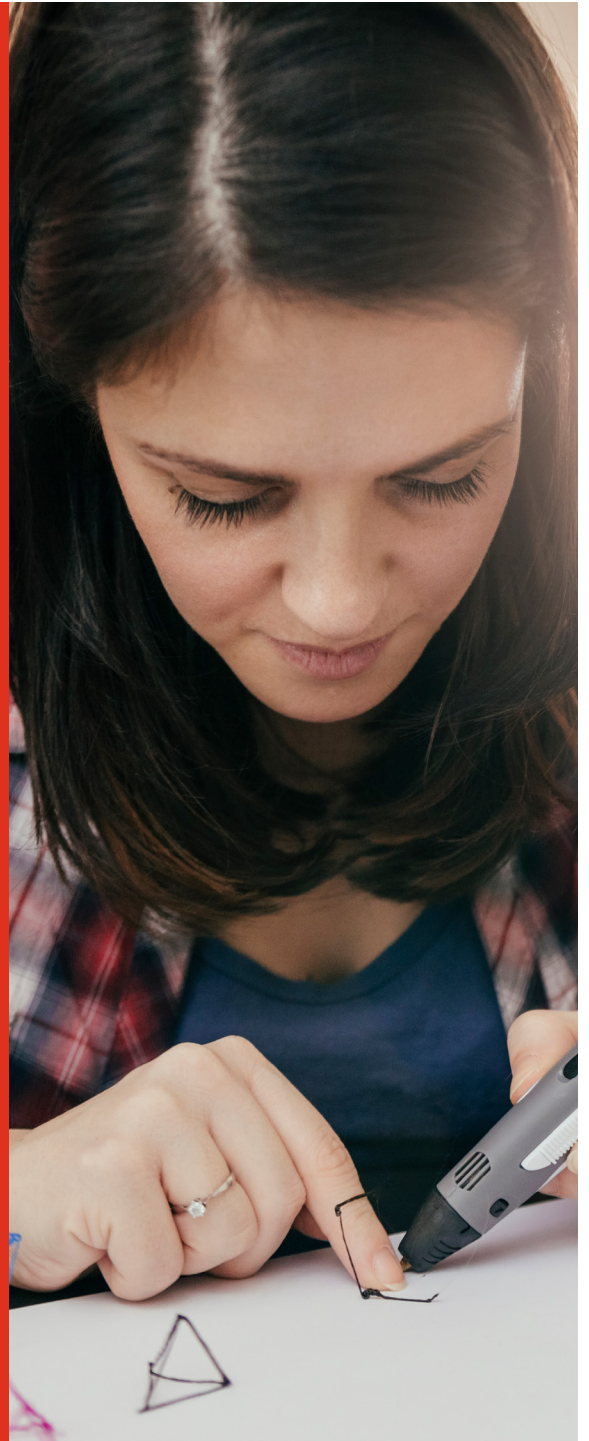


# Making work more meaningful:

Building a fulfilling employee experience



*IMPERATIVE.*

More than ever, people want to know they're more valuable than machines and are seeking out uniquely human elements of their work experience. If we want to tap into what helps people find meaning at work, how do we do it? When we explored this question, we uncovered scientific support, employee perspective, and bright spots to show how to move the needle in building a more fulfilling employee experience.

# Building a fulfilling employee experience

Emerging technologies and a rapid pace of change have given way to a fundamental transformation in the way we work. With automation and “thinking machines” entering the workplace, our human workforce is more critical than ever in helping organizations remain agile, innovative, and empathetic to customer needs.

Employees today are looking for a work experience that is optimized for meaningful work and personal fulfillment, and encourages a growth mindset and generosity. Neuroscience-backed research has revealed what fulfillment looks like—it’s about inclusion and psychological safety, making a difference, and challenging ourselves to learn and grow. The meaning we make of an experience is what brings out our humanity and separates us from even the most sophisticated machines.

Employees are the lifeblood of any organization—how does their full potential get tapped, and in turn bring a much-needed human element to business?

Employee engagement framed the talent philosophy that emerged more than 20 years ago. It created a common language that continues to enable us to greatly improve work for millions of people and to increase employee satisfaction and productivity.

But we believe there’s even more human potential to unlock. By creating a workplace with a fulfilling employee experience at its heart, organizations can begin to create an environment where their people are not only motivated, but gain a sense of purpose.

This study asserts that employees want and need this kind of experience. And, it confirms that business leaders are listening—they are convinced that fulfillment is a smart strategic response to the fast-changing, technology-driven times in which we live and work, and they’re beginning to activate it within their organizations. We hope you are able to implement these insights at your organization to unlock fulfillment and bring purpose to life.



**Daryl Brewster**  
CEO, CECP



**Aaron Hurst**  
CEO and Co-founder,  
Imperative



**Shannon Schuyler**  
Principal and Chief Purpose  
Officer, PwC



# Executive summary

## **An evolution of the employee value proposition.**

We are in a new era, where employees are looking for more from their work experience—one that is optimized for meaning and personal fulfillment, and encourages development and generosity. This report explores the implications of these evolving expectations for business leaders and how a better understanding of neuroscience can help shape a more human employee experience with relationships, impact, and growth at its heart.

**What we mean by fulfillment.** Over the past two decades, engagement as a human capital concept has elevated employees as stakeholders in their own right. They have individual needs which an organization must meet if it's to succeed in the competition for talent and drive innovation. A more personal relationship with employees has paved the way for a work experience that goes beyond traditional measures of commitment, satisfaction, and discretionary effort—one that is based on purpose.

Fulfillment is a feeling people have when we are working with a sense of purpose, in alignment with our intrinsic motivations. The feeling is biologically generated by the neurochemicals oxytocin and dopamine, which reward behaviors that we have evolved to value for our survival. We can create this at work through opportunities that emphasize relationships, impact, and growth.

**Employees make the meaning.** While the organization plays a critical role in providing the right environment for a fulfilling employee experience, it's the employees

who shape how to make work more meaningful for themselves. Indeed, an astounding 82% of employees agree that it is primarily their own responsibility, and 42% say that they are their own greatest barrier to finding fulfillment at work. Organizations can support employees in unlocking this insight through tools such as personalized resources and facilitated reflection.

## **Programs provide structure—but not too much.**

Efforts to build a more meaningful work experience will only endure if employees feel they can explore. Providing them the space to build deeper relationships, create impact that matters to them, and grow in meaningful ways will reward both the employee and the organization.

**Culture is critical.** By focusing on select behaviors that promote belonging, enable people to make an impact, and foster individual growth, organizations can begin the shift toward a culture that values and cultivates a fulfilled workforce. We know that a staggering number of employees—96% of survey respondents—believe fulfillment at work is possible, but they need to see and feel what it looks like in practice. Thirty one percent of workers surveyed identified senior leaders as barriers to their fulfillment at work. Senior leadership must pave the way for more meaningful work; they must rise to the occasion with behaviors and authentic stories that exemplify that purpose at work is possible. In addition, mobilizing informal influencers at all levels will accelerate a shift toward a fulfillment mindset.



**Shared experiences can be especially potent.**

Not all team experiences are created equal. When designed effectively, they facilitate human connection and a collective sense of impact. Getting people to come together for ongoing, shared experiences can accelerate fulfillment while building stronger teams in the process. Aim for the sweet spot of highly meaningful, highly challenging activities that will reframe how people think about their work and how it creates meaning for themselves and others.

**Employee surveys need an update.** Reconsider your approach to employee surveys, as both the questions and frequency with which they're asked matter when attempting to capture how fulfilled your people are. More frequent pulse surveys reveal how consistently meaningful work is being supported and reinforced. They don't have to be taxing—try asking three simple questions on the major sources of fulfillment: sense of belonging, impact, and growth.

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**About the study**

This study, a collaborative effort of CECP, Imperative, and PwC, examines how organizations are building workplaces that foster fulfilling employee experiences. The insights and findings in this report are based on practitioner design workshops, executive interviews, and a unique survey of 2,100 part- and full-time workers targeting demographics representative of the US population and cross sector organizations. Executive interviews included senior leaders from publicly traded and privately owned companies and nonprofits, ranging in size from ten to 250,000 employees. CECP, Imperative, PwC's *Fulfillment at Work* Survey, fielded by Ipsos, was designed to measure US worker attitudes about personal fulfillment in the workplace.

# How we got here

## The history of work: an evolution of the employee value proposition

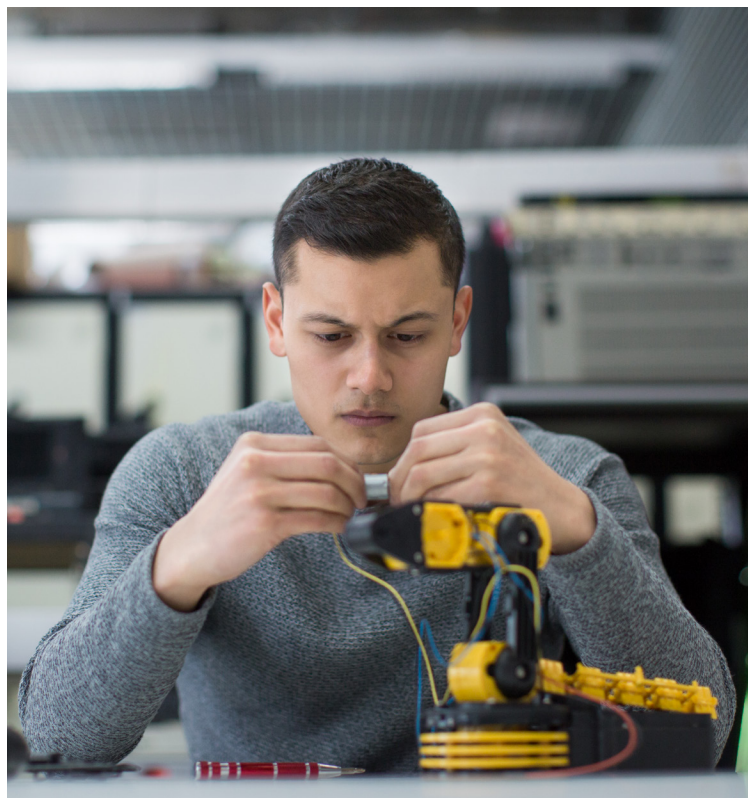
Creating a fulfilling and meaningful employee experience is part of a broader change in the workplace with a focus on purpose-driven corporate cultures. It's helpful to look at how we got here to appreciate the important changes that have taken place as we evolve from one era to the next.

Thousands of years ago, there was no such thing as an employee or employer. People were nomadic and worked as families and small tribes to survive. With the rise of the **agrarian economy**, we saw the emergence of the workplace and the idea of a job. With that came the start of a conversation about the relationship between employees and employers, as well as the “ideal” employer and employee. For most, work was about survival and employers valued people based on their strength, stamina, and compliance.

**“In the digital age, the modern workplace is no longer a place, it is a mindset in which both people and organizations support and celebrate purpose, creativity, and growth.”**

*— Joe Whittinghill, Corporate Vice President, Talent, Learning, and Insights at Microsoft*

As we moved into the **industrial economy**, the conversation about work changed again with the rise of factories and cities. Toward the end of this era, assembly lines and efficient operations emerged as the focus of innovation. Companies sought to remove all inefficiencies from the workforce, including friction between employee personalities and the impact of



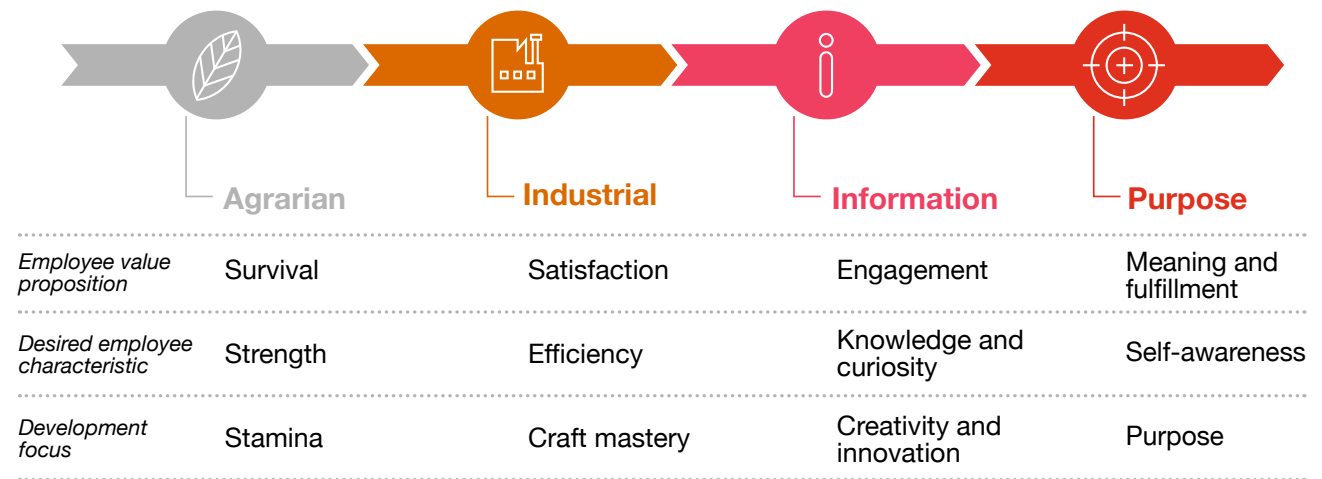
unsatisfied workers who were affecting the productivity of the workforce. This gave rise to talent assessments and employee surveys.

The **information economy** that followed changed things yet again. For the first time, people were the source of wealth creation. Innovation now came from knowledge, and the priority was to tap the talents of employees and keep them engaged to maximize their output. This is where the needs of employees began to be paramount, and social media provided a megaphone to broadcast their expectations, support and discontent.

Today, we are in the early days of **a new era**—called by many names, from the Purpose Economy (Aaron Hurst) to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Klaus Schwab)—

where a higher sense of meaning and purpose in work are sources of innovation and the core narrative of the workplace. This movement is marked by an influx of research and focus on “humanizing” work in the digital age, psychological safety in the workplace, corporate well-being programs, the concept of bringing one’s “whole self” to work, and diversity and inclusion, to name a few. It’s not only about the business needs of organizations, it’s also about how individuals can flourish through their work. The development of neuroscience and positive psychology have advanced this change, and artificial intelligence and automation promise to accelerate it. In this new world of work, it is fulfillment—the ability to feel a personal sense of purpose and meaning—that is the new standard for employee engagement.

## History of work



# What we mean by fulfillment

Over the past two decades, engagement as a human capital concept has elevated employees as stakeholders in their own right. They have individual needs that an organization must meet if it's to succeed in the competition for talent and drive innovation. This more personal relationship with employees has paved the way for a work experience that goes beyond commitment, satisfaction, and discretionary effort. Employees of all generations are asking for this evolved workplace by demanding more holistic well-being programs, channels for impact storytelling, and opportunities for deeper connections at work. So, how does fulfilling and meaningful work fit this bill, and why does it matter?

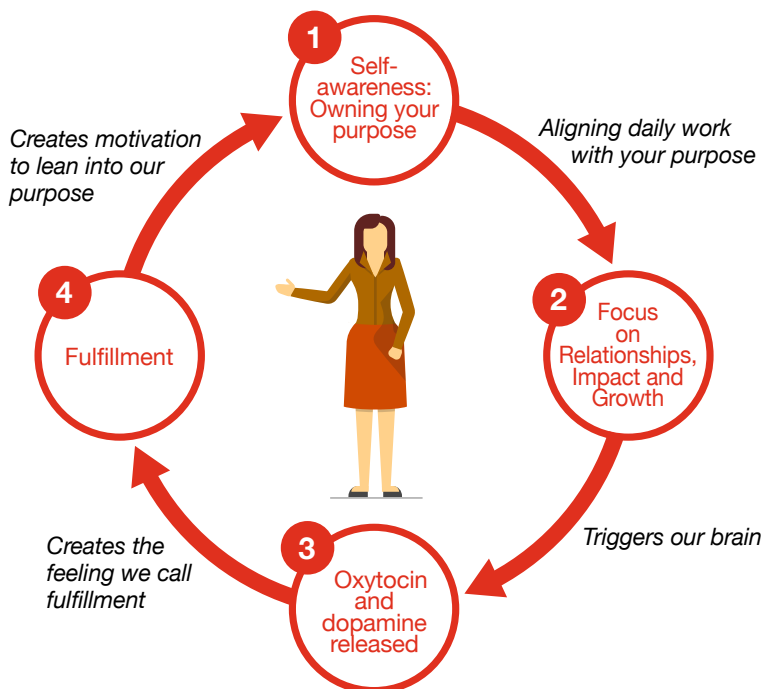
**“Fulfillment goes beyond engagement and productivity to maximize human energy, spirit, and potential.”**

*– Susan Podlogar, Executive VP and CHRO at MetLife*

Fulfillment is a feeling we have when we are working in alignment with our intrinsic motivations and gain a sense of purpose. The feeling is biologically generated by two neurochemicals, oxytocin and dopamine, which the brain releases to help reward behaviors that are valued for our survival.

An extensive body of research shows that our brain chemistry motivates us in a number of positive ways. “We are wired to connect...and our feelings of belonging and connectedness are correlated with oxytocin levels in the brain,” says Dr. Britt Andreatta, author of *Wired to Grow* and *Wired to Connect*. “We are also hard-wired to grow and improve. Dopamine supplies the motivation” When these chemicals are present during the workday, employees will be far more than satisfied—they will thrive. In fact, fulfilled employees plan to stay at their current employer nearly three years longer in total than their less fulfilled counterparts.

## The Virtuous Cycle of Fulfillment





“Our well-being is directly connected to our fulfillment—the quality of our relationships, our sense of significance from making an impact, and the challenge of growth.”

— Dr. Britt Andreatta

## Relationships, Impact, and Growth

Three hallmarks of a fulfilling experience at work:

1. **Relationships** – A sense of belonging and connection to others
2. **Impact** – Progress towards a goal we believe in
3. **Growth** – Personal challenge that we overcome

As work-life boundaries continue to blur, employees are seeking opportunities to explore and pursue what gives them purpose. In an earlier PwC survey, 83% of employees identified “finding meaning in day-to-day work” as a top priority (Source: *Putting Purpose to Work*, PwC 2016). And, if employees can’t find purpose and fulfillment in their current job, they may look elsewhere. Seven of ten employees surveyed said they’d consider leaving their current role for a new, more fulfilling opportunity, with one out of three willing to consider lower pay for it (CECP, Imperative, PwC’s Fulfillment at Work survey, 2018).

**7 of 10**  
workers would  
consider an offer for  
a more fulfilling job

**1 in 3**  
willing to consider  
lower pay

Base: 2,100 part- and full-time employed workers. Q: If you were offered a more fulfilling job would you consider a pay cut? Source: CECP, Imperative, PwC’s Fulfillment at Work survey, November 2018.



Fulfilled employees plan to stay nearly **three years** longer in total at their current company than their unfulfilled counterparts.

Base: 2,100 part- and full-time employed workers. Q: How long have you been at your current organization?; How long do you plan to stay at your current employer? Source: CECP, Imperative, PwC’s Fulfillment at Work survey, November 2018.

Employees may not have been empowered enough in the past to ask for it, but today they don’t hesitate to talk about these issues on social media, at company town hall meetings and in job interviews. Leah Pitzenberger, Head of People at sports technology company Hudl, knows that when individuals’ needs, passions, and strengths are incorporated into a business’s strategy, the organization and its people can flourish. “When we tap into fulfillment in our teams, we unleash them to do their very best work,” says Pitzenberger. “Not only is that the right thing to do for our people, but it’s also great for business.” Now it’s up to business *and* employees to work together to harness this valuable knowledge and help enable people to realize their full potential.

# What you can do

If a fulfilling employee experience is the new standard, how do we create it?

## Make space for employees to create meaning

While the organization provides the right environment for a fulfilling employee experience, it's the employees who shape how to make work more meaningful for themselves. Indeed, an astounding 82% of employees agree that it is primarily their own responsibility, and 42% say that they are their own greatest barrier to finding fulfillment at work (Source: CECP, Imperative, PwC's Fulfillment at Work survey, November 2018). Ultimately, workers themselves hold the key to understanding their motivations, and organizations can support them in unlocking this insight through tools such as digital assessments and personal exploration

**"I spend a lot of time thinking about the environment—both physical and cultural—that enables all kinds of people the potential to be fulfilled."**

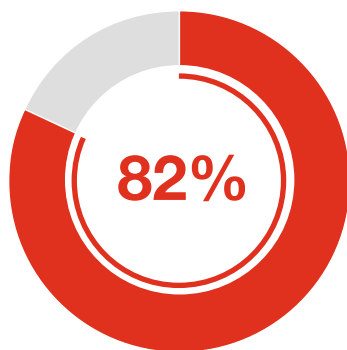
— *Betsy Sutter, Chief People Officer at VMware*

exercises that facilitate needed reflection. This up-front work to identify employees' personal sources of fulfillment informs the opportunities they seek out and create for themselves in the name of meaningful work.

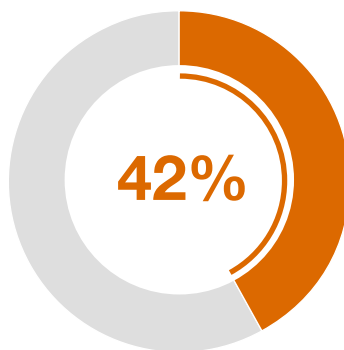
As Comcast's Alex Dailerian, Senior Director of Community Impact, says, "It's an inside job. It's about being true to yourself and being self-motivated."

In 2017, healthcare company AmerisourceBergen developed its organizational purpose: "We are united in our responsibility to create healthier futures." Soon, the organization created an innovative pathway for people to connect with this purpose by launching an initiative focused on the opioid epidemic, an issue impacting their industry and customer base. The initiative included the opportunity for employees to take a "purpose assessment" that provides customized suggestions to take action to combat the public health crisis. While AmerisourceBergen is providing the opportunity, it is up to the individual employee to take action. At the time of publication, 70% of those invited to participate have opted in, reinforcing that workers are ready to take responsibility for finding meaning at work.

## Employees take ownership of their fulfillment at work



of employees agree that their level of fulfillment at work is their own responsibility



of employees agree that they are their own greatest barrier to finding fulfillment

Base: 2,100 part- and full-time employed workers. Q: Rate the degree you agree or disagree... My level of fulfillment at work is primarily my responsibility; The greatest barrier to my fulfillment at work is...me / my manager / my teammates / my organization's senior leadership. Source: CECP, Imperative, PwC's Fulfillment at Work survey, November 2018.

## Provide structure—but not too much

Finding meaning is a personal endeavor, and personalization is hard to scale. With some structure—but not too much—employees can make work more meaningful for themselves while still supporting the collective goals of their team and organization.

Formal employee programs or initiatives—such as rotational opportunities, innovation labs, stretch assignments, reverse mentorship, and milestone experiences—help employees build deeper and more diverse relationships while also promoting growth. For employees to make an impact that is meaningful to them, there needs to be room for them to interpret the impact they can make. Some employees do their best work when they see how their work is impacting another individual; others may need to ladder up their impact to a grander scale. When teeing up new opportunities, be clear on the desired outcomes and leave room for people to internalize the kind of impact that is most meaningful to them. For personalization to scale, there needs to be just enough of a framework within which employees can craft work that is meaningful to them.

Salesforce developed Opportunity Open Market, a site that makes it easy for anyone to move among more than 200 teams working on different technologies and products. “Salesforce can only succeed when people are doing the best work of their careers,” said Talent Manager Grace Brelje. “That only happens when they come in to work every day excited and challenged. Giving people the opportunity to move within the company means that everyone can grow and thrive.”

eBay created Experience Market, a talent “marketplace” that connects employees with projects, comparable to how the eBay marketplace connects buyers and sellers. The system uses an algorithm to match the profile to the opportunity, and if it is a good match, the employee meets with their manager to discuss the opportunity.

For more, check out this article from [strategy+business: 10 Principles of Organizational Culture.](#)

# 80%

of executives believe that their culture must evolve in the next five years to succeed, grow, and retain the best people.

Source: PwC's Strategy&, Global Katzenbach Culture Survey, November 2018

## Don't ignore the role of culture

It's no secret that culture plays a critical role in supporting an organization's strategy and purpose as well as shaping the employee experience. Evolving an organization's culture—defined as “the way we do things around here”—can provide ongoing reinforcement and support for employees seeking greater meaning in their work. While culture is much more a matter of doing rather than saying, organizations that want to evolve their culture to be more purpose-led need to focus on a vital few elements:

- Target specific behaviors that promote relationships, impact, and growth
- Embolden leaders to model and signal these behaviors to others across the organization
- Identify influencers—or authentic informal leaders—who can energize those around them and create momentum around a purpose-driven culture

**“Culture is a source of positive emotional energy that you can't get anywhere else. When an organization is at its best, the culture will energize people, and they will feel good about what they are doing to advance the strategic and operating goals of the company.”**

— Jon Katzenbach, founder of The Katzenbach Center at Strategy&, PwC's strategy consulting business

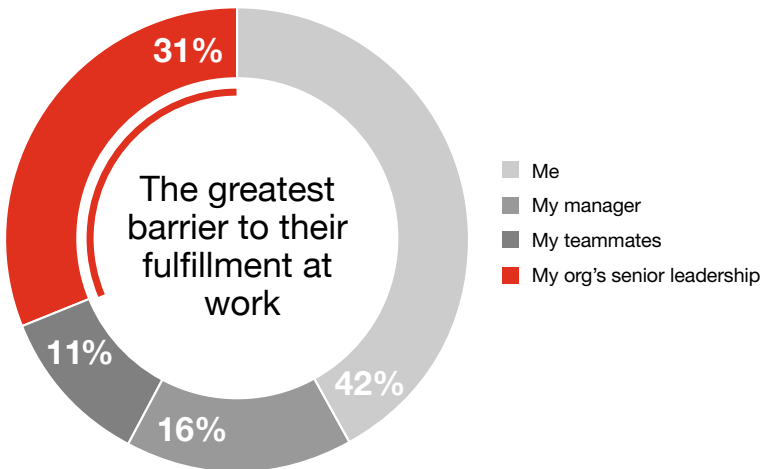
We know that a staggering number of employees—96% of survey respondents—believe fulfillment at work is possible, and they need to see and feel what it looks like in practice (Source: CECP, Imperative, PwC’s Fulfillment at Work survey, November 2018). Recognizing that

fulfillment is deeply rooted in relationships and a sense of belonging, making an impact, and growing/developing, we can articulate critical behaviors that will foster and sustain a purpose-driven culture:

### Examples of behaviors supporting fulfillment

Relationships/belonging	Impact	Growth/development
Invest time to get to know your team and colleagues on a personal level	Share an end-to-end view of how everyone’s piece fits into the bigger picture and understand interdependencies	Tolerate and celebrate mistakes and create safe space for your people to learn from them
Promote open communication about others’ priorities, timeline and objectives	Define crystal-clear objectives for solving the problem at hand	Give and ask for feedback to improve yourself and others
Recognize individuals for a job well done	Reward delivery of results, not only activity	Dare your team to challenge the status quo and try new things

### Senior leadership is often a barrier to employee fulfillment



Leaders are critical in signaling and modeling the behaviors that enable a fulfilling employee experience. Senior leaders and authentic, informal leaders alike can be powerful allies in influencing these behaviors and providing concrete examples of what fulfillment looks like. While each organization will need to determine the right mix of top-down, cross-organization, and peer-to-peer efforts to elevate meaningful experiences, our research emphasized the need for role modeling at the executive leadership level, with nearly one third of respondents naming senior leaders as a barrier to finding fulfillment at work.

Base: 2,100 part- and full-time employed workers. Q: The greatest barrier to my fulfillment at work is...me / my manager / my teammates / my organization’s senior leadership. Source: CECP, Imperative, PwC’s Fulfillment at Work survey, November 2018.



**“Leadership style matters...it’s critical to the kind of culture we want. If we want a culture that’s inclusive—that wants you to bring your whole self to work—we want leaders who aren’t afraid to be themselves, and even to acknowledge their weaknesses.”**

*— Cecily Joseph, VP, Corporate Responsibility at Symantec*

We’ve seen organizations work with senior leaders to safeguard and champion an environment rooted in a fulfilling employee experience. In 2018, apparel and footwear company VF Corporation launched an executive team effort to share with employees how they personally connected to the organization’s newly created purpose statement. This executive storytelling started to destigmatize the notion of individual meaning in the workplace. Beyond that, it signaled to the entire global leadership team VF’s commitment to creating a safe space for people to share their stories, placing purpose at the center of the new VF employee value proposition.

### **Get intentional with team building**

While our research reflected that individuals recognized their responsibility for finding fulfilling experiences at work, getting employees to come together for ongoing, shared experiences can accelerate this process while building stronger teams. Shared experiences can be formative and fulfilling when they bring employees together in a way that builds meaningful connections, makes a collective impact, and offers opportunities to learn something new.

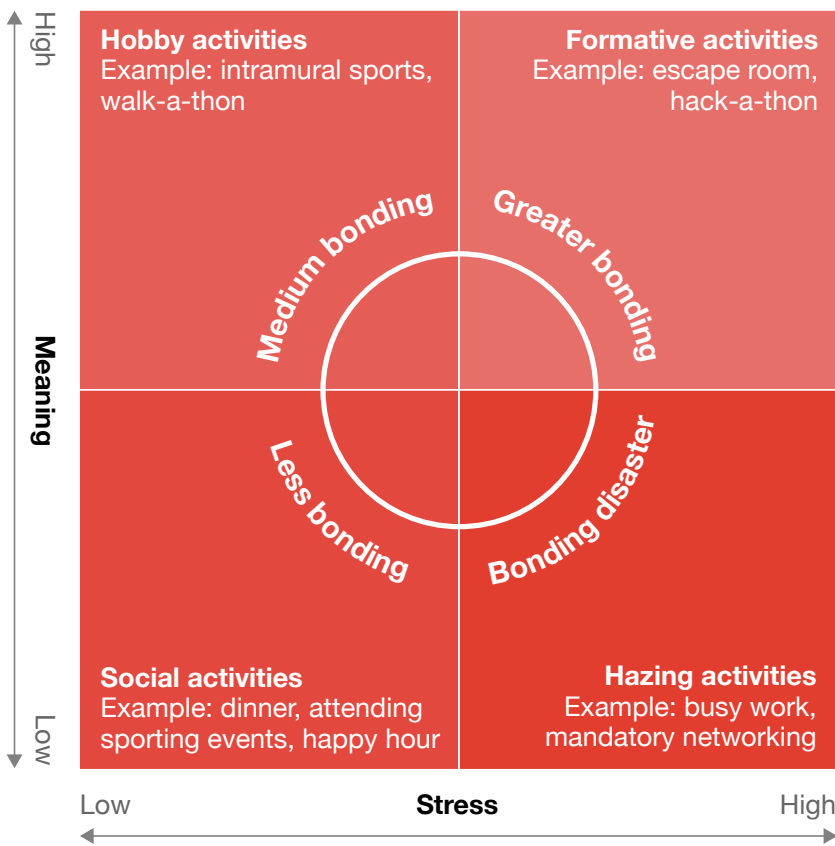
Experiences that are new or challenging can encourage employees to show bursts of vulnerability that build trust and develop an emotional commitment to those around them. For example, part of PwC’s experience consulting team, The Difference, uses play and improvisational exercises that are engineered to create meaning, such as challenging a team that is tackling a post-merger integration to design a restaurant and perform a skit on their vision in a very condensed amount of time. Parallels between the design of the restaurant and the post-merger challenges become evident, and by taking off their professional hats through a playful activity, participants reveal a more personal, vulnerable side of themselves. This increases emotional intelligence and individuals learn more from one another. This closeness creates and deepens relationships, a key source of fulfillment.

New and challenging experiences also create opportunities for employees to grow—whether it’s building self-awareness or learning a new skill. Stress can play a positive role when such experiences are meaningful and reflect a clear purpose. An element of stress might include a time constraint or little guidance provided, but with a defined goal. The combination of growing and making a collective impact in such an environment can become a formative experience for those participating.

**“When designing experiences for our clients, we keep in mind that humans are meaning making machines—real creativity is unleashed when the collective purpose is made evident.”**

— *Kenneth Roberts, Partner, The Difference at PwC Leader*

### Four types of shared experiences



Campbell Soup recently launched “Community Gigs,” a new skills-based volunteer program for employees. The goal, says Amanda Bauman, Senior Manager, Community Affairs, is to “make it easy for employees to activate their purpose while promoting connections and shared experiences in their local community.” In other words, it’s designed to enable people to make a personally meaningful impact while helping them grow professionally and personally.

Source: Strategy&

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## Make employee surveys more meaningful

Peter Drucker, founder of modern management, famously said, “what gets measured, gets managed.” As we progress in this new economy and focus on tapping into employees’ sense of purpose, a set of new metrics for measuring employee sentiment are sure to emerge. While methods for capturing a fulfilling employee experience will vary by organization, they should aim to evaluate how well employees feel their work provides the three foundational elements of fulfillment: a sense of belonging, creating value beyond oneself, and personal growth. Considering how well your current survey addresses these items is the first crucial step to capturing data that will enable your organization to take action toward a more meaningful experience for employees.

As engagement surveys have, for many, evolved from an annual questionnaire to more frequent pulse surveys, check-ins on employee fulfillment will be most effective if they recur often to capture and manage the natural fluctuation of these sentiments. Fortunately, technology makes this easier than ever, enabling short and intuitive surveys that are even mobile-accessible.



**“I think about what would really enable people to have fulfilling experiences at work, and it’s being asked about it. It’s having the space in your development conversations, in performance, in the way we reward people . . . embedding it into the people systems and HR processes that you have in place.”**

**— Bill Beaver, vp, Partner Development and Inclusion, Starbucks Coffee Company**

The standard battery of engagement questions does address certain elements of meaning and fulfillment—either directly or indirectly—so you may be capturing some useful information already. Recognizing that an overhaul of enterprise-wide engagement surveys is not likely in the short-term, consider starting your organization’s journey to a culture of purpose by including three simple questions—or doubling down on existing similar ones—on your next employee survey:

1. Do you have meaningful relationships at work?
2. Are you growing personally and professionally at work?
3. Is your work making an impact that is meaningful to you?

Zillow Group has taken a first step toward aligning people analytics with their culture. “We are a purpose-driven company,” says Corina Kolbe, Senior Director of Learning and Development. “But that’s not enough. We also want purpose-driven individuals. So we’ve added a question to our employee survey about whether people are doing work that’s meaningful to them.”

Gauging employee fulfillment is a strong first step, and finding ways to formally incorporate goals for these metrics into broader organizational objectives will ensure accountability for managing toward a more purpose-driven workforce.



# Closing thoughts

As with products, services and customer experience, organizations should be continuing to innovate a better employee experience. Understanding how to create meaning in the workplace and providing a culture where these opportunities are abundant not only helps to attract and keep top talent, but it will also bring out the best in your people.

Of course, culture can't be built or changed overnight, but one that is both attractive and inspiring to employees is critical to any strong talent and development strategy. There is more than one way to achieve this, but building an organization that is sincerely inclusive will promote the sense of community and authenticity needed for real collaboration; making the workplace safe for experimentation will encourage the growth people crave; and focusing on end results

will illuminate the impact of everyday work, motivating employees. By setting the stage for more meaningful work and providing your people with the space and tools to uncover what that means for them, you empower your people to make every role a dream job.

This tone must come from the top. It's paramount that leaders share their own experiences of finding purpose in their career—and it has to be genuine. Revealing the vulnerability of leaders appeals to employees who want to see the human side of the organization and normalizes the need for purpose at work.

Are you prioritizing a meaningful work experience for your people? This movement is only beginning, but the time to take action is now. Your employees—and customers—will reward you.



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### **CECP: The CEO Force for Good**

CECP is a CEO-led coalition that believes that a company's social strategy—how it engages with key stakeholders including employees, communities, investors, and customers—determines company success. Founded in 1999 by Paul Newman to create a better world through business, CECP has grown to a movement of more than 200 of the world's largest companies that represent \$11.3 trillion in revenues, \$23.8 billion in societal investment, 17.4 million employees, and \$15 trillion in assets under management. CECP helps companies transform their social strategy by providing customized connections and networking, counsel and support, benchmarking and trends, and awareness building and recognition. Find out more at <http://cecp.co>.



### **Imperative**

Imperative is a B Corporation founded in 2015 to connect people to their purpose on a massive scale. We created the first online talent assessment platform for individual and team purpose that is used for career and leadership development at organizations with 50 people to 100,000+ people. Find out more about how we can help your people discover and act on their purpose at [www.imperative.com](http://www.imperative.com).



### **PwC**

At PwC, our purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems. We're a network of firms in 158 countries with over 250,000 people who are committed to delivering quality in assurance, advisory and tax services. Find out more and tell us what matters to you by visiting us at [www.pwc.com](http://www.pwc.com).