

# Meaning and Purpose in the Workplace: A Spiritual Approach to Management

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## Understanding the Concept:

In the context of management, “meaning and purpose” refers to the deeper, intrinsic motivations that drive individuals to engage with their work beyond just earning a paycheck. Meaning in work is about finding significance, fulfillment, and a sense of contribution in what one does. Purpose, on the other hand, is about having a clear direction and knowing that one’s work contributes to a larger, often more altruistic goal. When managers embrace spirituality in the workplace, they focus on helping employees discover and connect with this deeper sense of meaning and purpose in their roles.

## The Role of Managers in Fostering Meaning and Purpose

1. Aligning Organizational Goals with Personal Values:

- Managers who understand the spiritual dimension of work recognize that employees are more likely to feel fulfilled and motivated when their work aligns with their personal values and life goals. This alignment creates a sense of coherence between what employees believe in and what they do daily, leading to higher job satisfaction and engagement.

- For example, an organization focused on sustainability can help employees find purpose by highlighting how their roles contribute to environmental preservation. If an employee values environmental stewardship, working in such an organization provides not just a job but a mission that resonates with their personal beliefs.

## 2. Creating a Vision and Mission That Resonates:

- A key aspect of spiritual management is creating a compelling vision and mission for the organization that resonates with employees on a deeper level. This vision should articulate not only what the organization aims to achieve but also why it matters. When employees understand and connect with the “why” of the organization, they are more likely to see their work as meaningful.

- For instance, a healthcare company with a mission to “improve patient outcomes through innovative solutions” provides a clear purpose for its employees. Workers in such an organization can see how their efforts directly contribute to the well-being of others, making their daily tasks more meaningful.

## 3. Empowering Employees to Find Personal Meaning:

- Managers can also foster an environment where employees are encouraged to find and pursue their own meaning and purpose within their roles. This could involve providing opportunities for professional development, encouraging creativity and innovation, or supporting work that aligns with employees’ personal passions.

- Companies like Google, for example, have famously allowed employees to spend a portion of their work time on projects of their choosing. This autonomy enables employees to explore areas that are meaningful to them, leading to innovations like Gmail and Google News, which originated from such initiatives.

## 4. Recognition and Appreciation:

- Recognizing and appreciating employees’ contributions is another way to help them find meaning in their work. When managers acknowledge the value of an employee’s work and its impact on the organization or society, it reinforces the significance of their role.

- This recognition doesn’t have to be grand or public; even small gestures like a personal thank-you note or highlighting an

employee's contribution in a team meeting can reinforce that their work matters.

#### 5. Ethical and Purpose-Driven Leadership:

- Leaders who model ethical behavior and demonstrate a commitment to a purpose beyond profit inspire their teams to do the same. When employees see their leaders making decisions based on ethical considerations and a clear sense of purpose, it reinforces the importance of those values within the organization.

- An example of this can be seen in companies like Patagonia, which integrates its mission of environmental activism into its business model. Employees at Patagonia know that the company's actions align with a broader purpose, giving their work additional meaning.

### Benefits of Fostering Meaning and Purpose

#### 1. Increased Engagement and Productivity:

- When employees find meaning and purpose in their work, they are more engaged, motivated, and productive. They are likely to go above and beyond in their roles, driven by a sense of fulfillment and alignment with their values.

- Research has shown that employees who feel their work is meaningful are more committed to their organizations and are willing to put in extra effort to achieve organizational goals (Bailey et al., 2017).

#### 2. Lower Turnover and Higher Retention:

- Meaningful work is a significant factor in employee retention. When employees feel that their work aligns with their personal values and that they are contributing to something greater, they are less likely to leave the organization. This reduces turnover and the associated costs of recruiting and training new employees.

- A study by Deloitte found that purpose-driven companies had 40% higher levels of employee retention (Deloitte, 2016).

#### 3. Enhanced Well-being and Job Satisfaction:

- Employees who find meaning in their work report higher levels of job satisfaction and overall well-being. This is because meaningful work contributes to a sense of identity, self-worth, and personal fulfillment, which are critical components of well-being.

- Victor Frankl, in his seminal work "Man's Search for Meaning," emphasized that finding purpose in life, including work, is essential for psychological well-being and resilience.

#### 4. Innovation and Creativity:

- A sense of purpose can also drive innovation and creativity. When employees are passionate about what they do and believe in the purpose behind their work, they are more likely to think creatively and come up with innovative solutions to challenges.
- Organizations like Tesla and SpaceX, driven by missions to revolutionize energy and space travel, have seen significant innovations resulting from employees' commitment to these ambitious purposes.

## References

1. Bailey, C., Yeoman, R., Madden, A., Thompson, M., & Kerridge, G. (2017). "A Review of the Literature on the Meaning and Purpose of Work and its Relationship to Well-Being." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 90(2), 289-306.
  - This article reviews the relationship between meaningful work and employee well-being, highlighting how meaning and purpose contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction and engagement.
2. Deloitte. (2016). "Global Human Capital Trends 2016 – The New Organization: Different by Design."
  - This report discusses the importance of purpose-driven leadership and its impact on employee retention and organizational performance. It provides evidence that companies with a clear purpose have higher levels of employee retention.
3. Frankl, V. E. (1946). "Man's Search for Meaning." Beacon Press.
  - Viktor Frankl's book is a foundational text on the importance of finding meaning in life and work. It explores how a sense of purpose can lead to greater resilience and psychological well-being.
4. Wrzesniewski, A., Dutton, J. E., & Debebe, G. (2003). "Interpersonal Sensemaking and the Meaning of Work." *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 25, 93-135.
  - This study explores how employees create meaning in their work through interpersonal interactions and how managers can facilitate this process by aligning organizational goals with personal values.
5. Lips-Wiersma, M., & Morris, L. (2009). "Discriminating Between 'Meaningful Work' and the 'Management of Meaning'." *Journal of Business Ethics*, 88(3), 491-511.
  - This article distinguishes between creating genuinely meaningful work and merely managing the perception of meaning. It emphasizes the role of authentic leadership in fostering true purpose in the workplace.

These references provide a strong foundation for understanding the concept of meaning and purpose in the workplace, especially from a spiritual management perspective. They highlight the importance of aligning organizational goals with employees' personal values to create a more fulfilling and productive work environment.