

Chapter 3

Future of Work: Designing Meaningful Work Under the New Era of COVID-19

Zeynep Merve Ünal

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4927-3117>

Yeditepe University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The aim of the chapter is to advance the framework of meaningful work under the new normal of COVID-19. The conceptualization of meaningful work is defined by the extensive literature review and current research findings. Future of work and its meaning are shaped by the crucial internal and external triggers as human resource practices, job-demand resources model, leadership, job crafting, playful work design, strengths used by individuals, and self-leadership. The meaning at distance work is reinforced by the fulfillment of individual needs. Within this context, new conceptualization of needs for meaning-based person job fit has emerged. The understanding of the relationship between variables and new meaningful work were enlightened by the theoretical framework of self-determination theory, social exchange theory, job-demand resources theory, work identity theory, social learning theory, social cognitive theory, and self-leadership theory. The chapter explores the possible outcomes of COVID-19 and its possible opportunities for employees, organizations, and education sectors.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of SARS CoV 2 virus which leads to COVID-19 disease has been spreading all over the world. Even though people try to survive, many lives are lost. On the basis of economic term, high uncertainty and economic recession caused higher rates of unemployment and business bankruptcy.

Under these circumstances, individual's working purpose and meaning of work have also changed. Meaningfulness at work was defined by Hackman and Oldham (1976: 256) as "the degree to which the employee experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable and worthwhile". In the center of meaningful work, there are greater work purpose that it serves and the work that contributes

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for the well-being of others. Because meaningful work can be best achieved when individuals give more importance to find a purpose in life through work rather than earning money (Ünal, 2017). In addition to those, employees can also strength their meaning perception by interaction with others at work (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013). However, flu-based viral infection made business owners and employees prudent about social interaction and the way the business is done globally changed (Darwish et al., 2020). Literature confirmed that sources of motivation for people are the work itself (Deci & Ryan, 1985), expression of values (Kristof, 1996) and expression of personal beliefs (Wrzesniewski, Dekas, & Rosso, 2009). In order to fulfill those needs, a workplace creates a high-quality interpersonal interaction (Dutton & Ragins, 2007) leads to emergence of psychological support and sense of meaning (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

In the center of COVID-19, people experience new terms such as “social distance (i.e., avoiding close contact with people and also staying at home to prevent spreading of COVID-19)” or “quarantine (i.e., a period of time that infected people isolate themselves in order not to infect others)”. Under these conditions, the way of working has changed as work from home and hybrid working. Since, the mindset toward working and career has changed the purposes of life and work have changed as well.

The pandemic enforced individuals to strengthen their learning curve related to online working and digital world. On the one side, full time working at home has created challenges for individuals to create a balance between their tasks and private life. On the other side, working from home pushed individuals to be more adaptable, be open to change and be efficacious to design their jobs.

Task and relationship responsibilities of the job that are prescribed by a job description are components of a job design (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991). Redefining the tasks and changing relationships at work reflect “job crafting” and it has an impact on meaningful work. Because, job crafters who are in the driver’s seat are able to redesign the limits of their jobs while concentrating on three dimensions: task, relational and cognitive crafting (Berg, Dutton, Wrzesniewski, 2013). Task crafting emphasize the necessary skills that employees have in order to shape their tasks on the basis of the energy, time and attention spent to accomplish a task. Relational crafting refers to altering the interaction way or style among individuals that are predetermined in job description. Cognitive crafting means altering the perception of employees toward their tasks and required relationship based on task complexity.

Consequently, job crafting can be evaluated as a strategic advantage in the times of crises. In the study of Rajoo (2021) participants were asked whether they feel their job crafting activities during pandemic can reduce their work-related stress or burnout.

Some of the respondents replied as: “*job crafting guides individuals to consider the required energy to spend on it*”, “*job crafting with flexible enough superiors to enhance the scope of the job can be beneficial in making more meaningful by decreasing stress and burnout*”. Higher demands in job that can be resulted in role conflict (i.e., conflicts in role requirements), role ambiguity (i.e., lack of information related to employee’s requirements of job and task) or digitalized work-loads (i.e., high demands in digital working area that exceeds employee’s capacity and energy). In this situation, job resources such as social support, autonomy or positive organizational culture are considered as vital resources to alter the demands of the jobs. Guenette and Smith (2018) argued that an employee whose job’s demands exceeds job’s resources is likely to experience emotional exhaustion or burnout.

In order to shape our environment, we might embrace cognitive (i.e., remodifying our cognitive frames) or behavioral (i.e., modifying the environment to alter the behavior) approaches. The aim of this study is to highlight the determinants of meaningful work on the basis of individual and organizational contexts in future. Self-determination strategies as self-leadership, job crafting, playful work design

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