

Work Meaningfulness through Goal Setting & Work Design in Emerging Work Environments

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The fundamental transformations in work, workplace and workforce as a consequence of socio-economic and technological changes have impacted businesses and the IT sector can be assumed to be at the fore-front of these transformations. This study explores how work can be made more meaningful through goal setting and work design by examining the interaction of goal setting, work design, and work meaningfulness. The study collected quantitative data using validated scales, from six companies (n=972) across three roles (Client service, technology and support), to identify employees who experience high work meaningfulness. Results indicate a significant and positive link between work design (Autonomy, Feedback and knowledge characteristics), goal setting (Goal clarity and Goal conflict) and work meaningfulness.

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Introduction

The business scenario today is witnessing major changes in the form of disruptive innovations, radical thinking, scarcity of resources, heavy insurgence of technology, automation and artificial intelligence (Pettigrew et al., 2001; Lee & Warner, 2001; Zhu & Warner, 2005; Poon & Rowley, 2010; Brownstein et al, 2016; Forbes, 2016; PWC, 2018; Deloitte, 2017) that have reshaped work, making it dynamic, disruptive and somewhat overwhelming. 'Work' is undergoing changes towards boundaryless organizations (Wajcman, 2008). Technological breakthroughs have redefined work and workforce, shifting the nature of work from routine to a fast growing, diverse and complex work environment (Deloitte, 2016). A lot of work is happening in the virtual work-spaces, powered by increased digitization. This may improve the speed at which work is carried out, but may impact the quality of work-life of the employees. Reduced social interactions

with one's colleagues, limited and restricted interactions with managers and management and a sense of isolation may result in employees questioning the meaningfulness of the job being performed by them.

Over the years, workforce has also become more diverse with respect to age, race, gender, religion, socio-economic background. Individuals differ in their traits, cognitive opinion and life experiences owing to demographic shifts. Individuals are seeking experience and wellbeing, meaning, work/life balance, greater flexibility and autonomy (Deloitte Report, 2018). Traditional jobs and work schedules are becoming archaic, replaced by fluid work roles and flexitime which contribute to the hazy line between work and non-work (Allan, Loudoun, & Peetz, 2007).

The changes in the nature of work and the composition of workforce, along with the changing attitudes and expectations of the workforce, has made it important to re-visit the concept of work meaningfulness and its determinants. Work meaningfulness is higher for an individual if feels that he is able to attain valuable and worthwhile goals, congruent with his existential values (Allan et al., 2019). It is important to see how organizations can create an atmosphere where employees attach greater meaning to their work, without having to just go through the daily grind.

Work meaningfulness is associated with a higher sense of purpose and is associated with a congruence between per-

sonal and organizational goals. Employees want challenging jobs through which they can experience personal growth (Holbeche & Springet, 2004). According to the researchers, employees experiencing meaning at work, have greater engagement and show high performance, and lack of meaning leads to cynicism. Due to the many benefits of work meaningfulness, organizations try to foster work meaningfulness amongst individuals. Work meaningfulness has also been shown to relate to numerous positive organizational outcomes such as engagement, job satisfaction, employee wellbeing, performance, and retention (Grant, 2007; May et al., 2004; Steger & Dik, 2009).

Traditionally, research has examined work meaningfulness from a work-centric perspective, focusing on how meaningfulness can be managed by manipulating the external work environment (e.g., through job design; Hackman & Oldham, 1975). More recently, however, this managerial approach has been critiqued for disregarding humans' intrinsic need for meaningfulness (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Consequently, researchers have begun to explore what makes work meaningful from the perspective of the worker (Bailey & Madden, 2016). In the worker-centric literature, emphasis is placed on the importance of the self-concept, and in particular on the identity-related mechanisms that underlie employees' meaning-making at work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010).

An important component of work meaningfulness has been the work design- specifically, the *Job Character-*

istic Theory (JCT) by Hackman and Oldham (1976). Work design is an integral part of work and has been studied since past 100 years, where earlier the focus was on how division of labor could increase worker efficiency and productivity and later on how specialization and simplification can maximize worker efficiency (Taylor, 1911). Work has changed tremendously, making organizations realize that they need to rely on workers to decide on how work can be accomplished efficiently and this requires more employee autonomy, flexibility, empowerment, continuous learning, risk taking and creativity (Thomas, 2000). Yet, in the current dynamic work environment, numerous factors impinge upon work design (Parker, Van den Broeck & Holman, 2017). Individuals working on multiple roles and frequently changing team, with varying work characteristics and changing work context, can shape work design (Dierdroff & Morgeson, 2007), making it an important concept worth investigating. Thus, extant literature suggests that making changes in work design in the context of changing nature of work is vital, yet no direct investigation of impact of these changes has been studied in the past (Humphrey Nahargang & Morgeson, 2007).

In enhancing work meaningfulness, another area where organizations can direct their focus is the performance management system and goal setting specifically. Goal setting is an important component of performance management system as goals are performance directed, resulting in elevated performance (Locke

& Latham, 2002). Goals and goal-related processes motivate, organize, and direct behavior at all ages. Commitment to specific challenging goals, adequate feedback, high self-efficacy (and ability), and suitable task strategies lead to high performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). When employees pursue cherished goals, they find work more meaningful (Ryff, 2000). While work is changing, it is imperative for organizations to use the lever of goal setting to set practices that manage, measure and monitor work. Research suggests that four most intrinsic rewards are sense of meaning and purpose, sense of choice, sense of competence and sense of progress and goal setting plays an important role in helping employees achieve these rewards (Thomas, 2000).

Effective work design can contribute significantly to making work more meaningful by providing the necessary variety, autonomy and feedback that an employee expects from his job.

Thus, in the context of changing nature of work, workplace and workforce, from organization view point, goals impact performance outcome (Locke Latham, 2002) and from individual view point, work meaningfulness impacts performance (Steger, 2010). If work is perceived as meaningful, it motivates the employees intrinsically (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). Effective work design can contribute significantly to making work more meaningful by providing the necessary variety, autonomy and feed-

back that an employee expects from his job. The present study aims at understanding goal setting and work design as predictors of work meaningfulness, in a dynamic and changing work environment.

Theoretical Background

Meaningful work is defined as job and other workplace characteristics that facilitate the attainment or maintenance of one or more dimensions of meaning (Fairlie, 2010). ‘Meaning’ refers to a cognitive process whereby people construe, interpret, and understand their experiences as positive, negative, or neutral valence (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). ‘Meaningfulness’ on the other hand refers to the significance or value of work, which by definition has positive valence (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016). Having meaningful work does not reflect a continuous psychological state (Bailey & Madden, 2017), rather, people have many episodic experiences at work that are meaningful or meaningless which they integrate into a belief system about the significance of their work. Experiences are meaningful when people conduct actions that fulfil values that are relevant to their existence and explain why their work is worth doing (Allan et al., 2017; May et al., 2004).

Most types of work are thought to suffer from a scarcity of meaningfulness, with negative consequences for motivation, commitment, and wellbeing (Michaelson et al., 2014; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003), engagement (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004), and job perfor-

mance (Rodell, 2013). Research has thus been mainly interested in how and when individuals experience meaningfulness (Chalofsky, 2003; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2017; Rosso et al., 2010) and how organizations can help to create this experience (Michaelson et al., 2014). Meaningful work has received continued attention because “the restoration of meaning in work is seen as a method to foster an employee’s motivation and attachment to work” (May et al., 2004). Meaningful work characteristics were positively correlated with total engagement, job satisfaction and organizational commitment and negatively correlated with disengagement, exhaustion, and turnover cognitions (Fairlie, 2011). As work meaningfulness is closely tied to one’s own identity, it has emerged as a significant work characteristic (more important than other work characteristics) (Debats et al., 1995).

There have been recent calls for more comprehensive models of work meaningfulness (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010). Although work is necessary to secure a pay check at the end of the month for most of the working population, people generally also report a strong desire for work that is intrinsically interesting and satisfying (MOW – Meaning of Work International Research Team, 1987). In this respect, it is important to distinguish between the possible meanings attached to work – i.e., the type of meaning individuals ascribe to work (e.g., work as a pay check versus a higher calling) – and work meaningfulness – i.e., the amount of significance work holds for individuals (Rosso et al., 2010).

Goal-setting theory refers to the effects of setting goals on subsequent performance and Locke and Latham (1990) found that individuals who set specific, difficult goals, performed better than those who set general, easy goals. Locke and Latham (1990) proposed five basic principles of goal-setting: clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and task complexity. They presented a summary of 25 years of research on goal setting and task performance theory and found that both are valued and useful. While goals affect action, they drive desired behavior, productivity and effectiveness in work organizations.

Good goals are consistent, precise, challenging, measurable, achievable, agreed, time-related and team-work oriented (Armstrong & Baron, 2000). Locke and Latham (1990) suggested that in order to establish effective goals, they must clearly define the output to be achieved, should have a direct link to organizational success factors and objectives, should be challenging yet attainable and should be defined well. Latham and Locke (2007) summarized that if goals are motivational, people work harder for more challenging goals, variations in ability impact goal-related performance gains, self-efficacy and related belief systems influence goal achievement, feedback interacts with goal success, goal commitment moderates the impact of goal setting and goals direct attention and affect activity selection.

Commitment to specific challenging goals, adequate feedback, high self-efficacy (and ability), and suitable task strat-

egies lead to high performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). Locke & Latham (1990) suggested goal setting theory, emphasizing practical implications to motivate employees in organizational setting, describing self-regulatory effects of goal setting and highlighting ways that people can use goals as a self-management technique. Goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1984; 1990) is based on the simplest of introspective observations wherein conscious human behavior is purposeful and is regulated by the individual's goals. Occupations which are regarded as meaningful such as medicine, art are associated with noble goals and individuals who feel that their work promotes these goals derive satisfaction (Ariely, Kamenica & Prelec, 2008).

Work meaningfulness, a concept seeded in employee engagement, has been studied in the context of many variables, but not in relation to Goal setting. Goal setting will help employee focus on the objectives, align to larger purpose of organization, heightened pride dialogue on goals provides greater clarity, thereby possible positive influence on increasing meaningfulness. Thus, it becomes imperative to study if work meaningfulness will be positively influenced by goal setting. As there are no studies exploring interaction between goal setting and work meaningfulness, the focus of this research is to study interaction goal setting and work meaningfulness.

Work has changed dramatically over the last couple of years (PWC Report, 2017). There is greater collaboration and technology is used to integrate people to

facilitate knowledge-based work, leadership prevails at all levels in the organization and goals carry increased value for multiple stakeholders (Kochan, Orlikowski & Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 2002). Various organizational factors are getting impacted due to changing nature of work and it is imperative for organizations to redefine Work design while getting work done from employees (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Parker & Wall, 2001). The focus is on Work design rather than “job design,” because work encompasses job attributes and link between job and work environment (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Organizations should prepare to redesign work and jobs to capitalize on growing technological capabilities and retrain and redeploy people to higher-value and more productive and engaging jobs (Deloitte, 2016).

According to Hackman and Oldham (1976), five work characteristics make jobs more satisfying for workers: autonomy (the freedom an individual has in carrying out work), skill variety (the extent to which an individual must use different skills to perform his or her job), task identity (the extent to which an individual can complete a whole piece of work), task significance (the extent to which a job impacts others' lives), and feedback from the job (the extent to which a job imparts information about an individual's performance) leading to increased positive behavioral (e.g., job performance) and attitudinal (e.g., job satisfaction) outcomes, decreasing negative behavioral outcomes (e.g., absenteeism) (Humphrey, Nahargang & Morgeson, 2007).

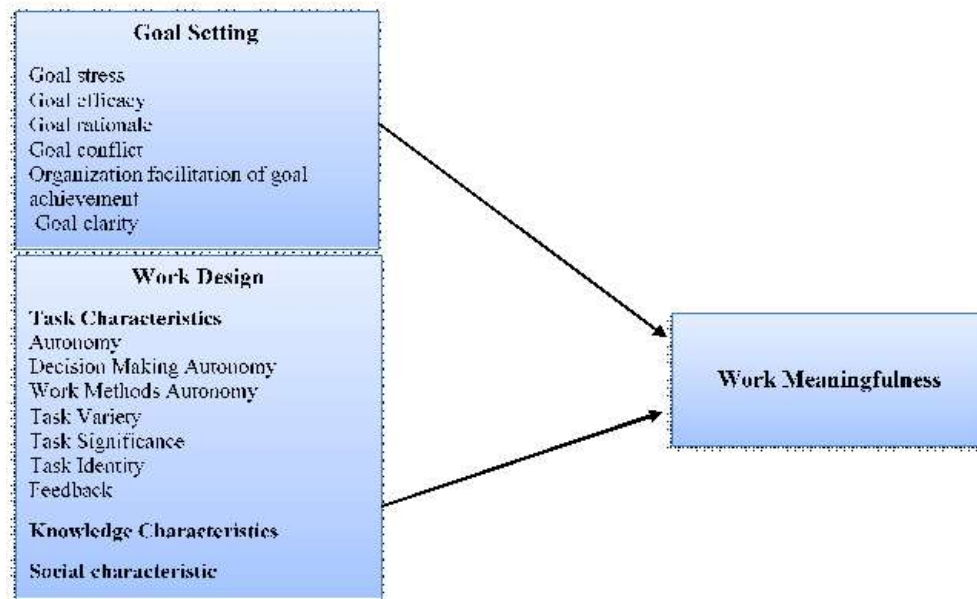
Work has become more complex therefore there is a need to redesign work.

Work has become more complex (Parker & Wall, 2001) therefore there is a need to redesign work. Work has become increasingly interdependent which emphasizes the need to actively investigate how changes in work and differences across industries impact the relationships between work characteristics and outcomes thereby warranting more research in the area of work design especially from the occupational identity perspective. Work design has been studied in the context of work meaningfulness (Hackman & Oldham, 1970) 40 years back but not in recent times. In a technology led company, exploring the work design and work meaningfulness aspect is likely to open the path to repurpose work design to create work meaningfulness. Based on the above review of literature, the larger question of the study is ‘in the context of changing nature of work, how can work be made meaningful through goal setting and work design?’

The Study

Meaningful work has come to the fore front as there have been massive changes brought by industrial revolution to the role of work in people's lives. As a concept, work meaningfulness lies at the heart of engagement literature (Kahn, 1990). Job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) highlighted a set

Model for the study



of important job qualities leading to valued personal and work outcomes, where meaningful work was considered an important psychological state that mediates between the job characteristics and the outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Terkel (1974) once famously wrote that work ‘is a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life, rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying’. Research has indeed found that most people attach great importance to the meaningfulness of work – the feeling that work activities are worthwhile, useful, and valuable, judged in relation to personal ideals or standards (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004).

In understanding what makes work meaningful for people, the constructs of work design (which includes task char-

acteristics, knowledge characteristics and social characteristics) and goal setting (which includes various dimensions of goals like clarity, efficacy etc.) were chosen. As workplaces and work itself is undergoing massive changes in today’s fast-paced world, it becomes important to see what aspects of work design still hold significance for the employees and contribute positively towards work meaningfulness. Goal setting is important for people as it provides a sense of direction and achievement to them. The influence of goal setting on work meaningfulness has not been explored by researchers. The present study aims at understanding if goal setting contributes to making work more meaningful for the respondents.

In selecting the sample for the study, it was considered important to select organizations that experience changes in a dynamic work environment, as well as

have performance management practices in the form of goal setting in place. The financial services technology sector in India has been witnessing disruptions and large-scale changes recently and hence this sector was selected for the study. Organizations in the financial services technology sector in India were short-listed based on convenience sampling. Of the organizations that were contacted, six agreed to participate in the study. The need and purpose of the study was discussed with the HR managers and they facilitated sharing the survey with the employees in their respective organizations. Employees with at least one complete year of work experience in their current role were included in the study.

Employees working in this sector performed three major roles- client service, support service and technology management. The employees were explained the aim of the study in an email. Completed responses from 972 participants were received and included in the study.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire survey was administered to the participants electronically and were guided in filling up the questionnaire. For each of the three constructs, tested scales were used, with responses ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The scales used for each of the constructs are as in Table 1.

Table 1 Measurement Scales Used

Research Construct	Measurement Scale
Goal Setting	Locke and Latham (1984)
Work Design	Morgeson & Humphrey (2006)
Work Meaningfulness	WAMI scale, Steger (2012)

Goal Setting Scales: Locke & Latham (1991) was examined for factorability. Several well recognized criteria for the factorability of a correlation were used. Finally, it was observed that 16 of the 28 items correlated a minimum of 0.3 with at least 1 other item, suggesting reasonable factorability. KMO (Kaizer – Mayer – Olkyn) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.917 (above the commonly recommended value of 0.6) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(120) = 6095, .00$).

Work Design Questionnaire: Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) was examined for factorability. Several

well recognized criteria for the factorability of a correlation were used. Finally, it was observed that 19 of the 62 items correlated a minimum of 0.3 with at least 1 other item, suggesting reasonable factorability. KMO (Kaizer – Mayer – Olkyn) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.921 (above the commonly recommended value of 0.6) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(211) = 12251, .000$).

The Work Meaning Inventory (WAMI Scale) (Steger, 2010) was examined for factorability. Several well recognized criteria for the factorability of a

correlation were used. Finally, it was observed that 9 of the 10 items correlated a minimum of 0.3 with at least 1 other item, suggesting reasonable factorability. KMO (Kaizer – Mayer – Olkyn) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.917 (above the commonly recommended value of 0.6) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(36) = 4942, .00$)

Before starting with analyzing the data obtained, the demographic profile of the respondents was checked. 74.2% of the respondents were males and 25.7% were females. In terms of work profile, 77.3 % were 'below managers' and 22.63% were 'managers and above'. The respondents belonged to 3 major roles: client service (65.22 %), specialist support (23.97%), technology roles (10.8 %).

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation	Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation
Goal Stress	2.16	0.63	Task Identity	3.87	0.57
Goal Efficacy	4.07	0.52	Feedback	3.86	0.64
Goal Rationale	3.9	0.65	Knowledge Characteristics	3.91	0.48
Goal Conflict	2.25	0.56	Social Characteristics	3.39	0.46
Org facilitation	3.64	0.55	Positive meaning	3.95	0.52
Goal clarity	4.05	0.49	Greater Good Motivation	3.72	0.57
Autonomy	3.8	0.56	Meaning through work	3.9	0.58
Task variety	3.97	0.61	Work meaningfulness	3.86	0.49
Task Significance	3.57	0.69	Valid N (listwise)	972	

Findings suggest that respondents feel their goals have high efficacy (4.07) and high goal rationale (3.9). Similarly, respondents feel organization facilitates goal achievement (3.64) and their goals have clarity (4.05). In terms of Work Design, respondents feel they have autonomy (3.8), task variety (3.97), get feedback (3.86) and are found to be high on knowledge characteristics (3.91). Respondents also reported high positive meaning (average score of 3.95), greater good motivation (average score of 3.72) and meaning making at work autonomy (average score of 3.84).

Goal clarity (.566) and organization facilitation (.499) are highly correlated to work meaningfulness which

highlights the importance of providing clear goals and organization facilitation to employees. Autonomy (.525) and feedback (.612) are highly correlated work meaningfulness which highlights the importance of providing freedom to schedule work an also work should be able to provide feedback.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Analysis of variance was conducted in order to understand the likely difference between the perceptions of work meaningfulness based on categorical variables like roles, groups (Manager and not Managers), age groups and gender.

Table 3 Pearson's Correlation

	Goal Stress	Goal Efficacy	Goal Ratio-nale	Goal Con-flict	Org facili-tation	Goal clarity	Auto-nomy	Task variety	Task Signifi-cance	Task Iden-tity	Feed-back	Know. Charac	Soc Charac.	Work mean-ingful-ness
Goal Stress	1													
Goal Efficacy	-.371**	1												
Goal Rationale	-.309**	.594**	1											
Goal Conflict	.558**	-.469**	-.481**	1										
Org facilitation	-.310**	.474**	.580**	-.473**	1									
Goal clarity	-.347**	.535**	.622**	-.495**	.598**	1								
Autonomy	-.295**	.467**	.492**	-.455**	.467**	.565**	1							
Task variety	-.171**	.309**	.354**	-.287**	.313**	.426**	.453**	1						
Task Significance	-.095**	.137**	.190**	-.116**	.182**	.258**	.269**	.314**	1					
Task Identity	-.276**	.404**	.430**	-.362**	.469**	.525**	.476**	.447**	.370**	1				
Feedback	-.245**	.416**	.488**	-.378**	.510**	.579**	.527**	.418**	.273**	.579**	1			
Know. Charac	-.136**	.322**	.333**	-.230**	.218**	.418**	.443**	.553**	.343**	.432**	.458**	1		
Soc Charac.	-.100**	.235**	.295**	-.156**	.261**	.285**	.355**	.301**	.388**	.387**	.332**	.429**	1	
Work meaningfulness	-.312**	.401**	.432**	-.416**	.499**	.566**	.525**	.435**	.360**	.487**	.612**	.472**	.334**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Regression

To test the research hypotheses, multiple regression analysis is used. As there are multiple items of each construct, the average of multiple items is used in the multiple regressions.

Goal Setting & Work Meaningfulness: Linear regression runs were performed for each construct of goal setting with overall work meaningfulness.

As shown, the p value for Goal conflict ($p=0.01$), organization facilitation of goal achievement ($p=0.00$) and goal clarity ($p=0.00$) is significant in relation to work meaningfulness. The regression model is significant (p value = 0.000 and has an R -Square of 0.37 (adjusted R -Square = 0.373). That is, 37% of the variation in employee work meaningfulness can be explained by variation in Goal conflict, Goal clarity and Organization facilitation constructs of

Table 4 ANOVA Analysis

Category	Sig	Levene's test	Comments
Roles	NO	F (2, 969) = .108, p=.427	No difference between Roles
Between Groups (manager & above/ below manager)	YES	F (1, 971) = .013 (p<.05), p=.060	Managers & above experience higher Work meaningfulness
Between age groups	YES	F (5, 966) = .000, p=.323.	Employees in higher age bracket experi- ence higher Work meaningfulness.
Gender	NO	F (1, 971) = .103, p=.944	No difference between Male/ female

Table 5 Goal Setting to Work Meaningfulness

Constructs	Beta-coefficient	Sig
Goal Stress	-0.057	0.065
Goal Efficacy	0.051	0.13
Goal Rationale	0.006	0.862
Goal Conflict	-0.088	0.011
Org facilitation	0.202	0
Goal clarity	0.35	0
r value	0.614	
r-squared	0.377	
adjusted r-squared	0.373	

goal setting. The *R*-Square level is moderate as the objective of the model is to assess the direction and strength of the association between goal setting and work meaningfulness, and not to predict work meaningfulness.

Work Design and Work Meaningfulness: Linear regression runs were performed for each construct of Work Design with overall work meaningfulness.

As shown in Table 6, the p value for Autonomy (p=0.00), Task variety (p=0.026), task significance (p=0.00), Feedback (p=0.00) and Knowledge characteristics (p=0.00) is significant in relation to work meaningfulness. The regression model is significant (p value =

Table 6 Work Design & Work Meaningfulness

Constructs	Beta-coefficient	Sig
Autonomy	0.19	0
Task variety	0.066	0.026
Task Significance	0.126	0
Task Identity	0.06	0.053
Feedback	0.361	0
Knowledge Characteristics	0.114	0
Social Characteristics	0.005	0.857
r value	0.693	
r-squared	0.48	
adjusted r-squared	0.476	

0.0000) and has an *R*-Square of 0.48 (adjusted *R*-Square = 0.476). That is, 48% of the variation in employee work meaningfulness can be explained by variation in Autonomy, Task variety, Task significance, Feedback and Knowledge characteristics. The *R*-Square level is moderate as the objective of the model is to assess the direction and strength of the association between work design and work meaningfulness, and not to predict work meaningfulness.

Measurement Model Using SEM – AMOS

Confirmatory factor analysis indicated a good fit ($\chi^2/df = 3.48$, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.975, CFI = 0.988, IFI = 0.988

RMSEA = 0.043) and all had factor loading greater than 0.5. The main effects the model of predictors of work meaningfulness was tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Table 7). As can be seen, SEM result indicates that Goal clarity, Autonomy, Feedback and

Knowledge characteristics appear significant ($p < 0.01$) and Goal Conflict ($p < 0.05$) in predicting work meaningfulness. The direction of influence is consistent with predicted direction of influence. Further, Feedback appears to be strongest predictor.

Table 7 SEM Analysis

		(χ^2/df)	AGFI	PNFI	RMSEA
SEM model fit summary		3.48	0.975	0.988	0.043
		Estimate		p value	
Work Meaningfulness	Goal Rationale	0.029		0.248	
Work Meaningfulness	Goal Conflict	- 0.061		0.017	
Work Meaningfulness	Goal Clarity	0.146		0.000	
Work Meaningfulness	Autonomy	0.120		0.000	
Work Meaningfulness	Feedback	0.334		0.000	
Work Meaningfulness	Knowledge Characteristics	0.162		0.000	

Discussion

Various constructs of goal setting (goal stress, goal efficacy, goal rationale, goal conflict, organization facilitation of goal achievement, goal clarity) and of work design (autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity, feedback, knowledge characteristics and social characteristics) were explored in terms of their impact on work meaningfulness. Regression analysis and further structural equation modeling yielded that five of these constructs: goal conflict, goal clarity, autonomy, feedback and knowledge characteristics, were most significant in terms of their impact on work meaningfulness.

Goals are extremely important in making work meaningful and in attaching a sense of accomplishment to the job performed by the employees. It is for this reason that goal setting is extremely im-

portant in motivating employees and directing them towards optimal performance. Of the various constructs of goal setting, goal conflict and goal clarity emerged as important predictors of work meaningfulness. Goal conflict is the degree to which individuals feel their multiple goals are incompatible (Locke et al, 1994). Goal conflict can arise in different ways. Externally imposed goals may not be compatible with one's personal goals- they may be significantly higher than one's personal goals and an individual may find them unattainable. Goal conflict may also arise when one is asked to attain multiple goals simultaneously and these multiple goals may be incompatible. The problem may also arise if there

The various constructs of goal setting, goal conflict and goal clarity emerged as important predictors of work meaningfulness.

are multiple performance outcomes over which an employee performance is measured like high productivity and zero wastage or high sales and minimal cost. Such situations lead to a sense of goal conflict for the employees, where they may not be able to predict the performance dimension that they should focus more on. The present study shows that goal conflict can have significant bearing on work meaningfulness- that is, work can appear less meaningful for an employee if s/he faces higher goal conflict. It is therefore, important that goals are clearly defined, measurable as far as possible and there is minimum scope for multiple and mutually incompatible goals.

Along-side minimizing any form of goal conflict, it is also important to have as much goal clarity as possible. Employees working towards the attainment of their individual/team goals, should be able to place their goals in perspective of the overall goals of the organization. Locke and Latham (1990) suggested that in order to establish effective goals, they must clearly define the output to be achieved, should have a direct link to organizational success factors and objectives, should be challenging yet attainable to motivate performance and not too many. Specific, measurable goals, which can be broken down into smaller tasks can be significantly motivating for employees. Need for goal clarity is similar to reducing goal conflict (too many, conflicting, unclear goals) for greater work meaningfulness. When people work in organizations where the nature of work is complex and goal setting is primarily a complex task, clarity of goals can greatly benefit the em-

ployees- they will feel a sense of pride and achievement associated with contribution to overall organizational goals and in furthering important organizational objectives.

Clarity of objectives results in higher connectedness to work. Mone and London (2009) suggest that communication about organization strategy and direction and helping employees understand how their efforts align to the company's efforts can create better goal clarity. Employees perform more energetically, creatively and enthusiastically when they believe they are contributing to a purpose that is bigger than themselves. Purpose can excite and mobilize members of an organization to work in greater alignment with each other (Holbeche & Springet, 2004). It is therefore, important that organizations work on setting clear, non-conflicting goals for the employees- it will not only help in reducing goal related ambiguities, but also contribute towards making work more meaningful for employees.

Among the work design constructs, feedback, autonomy and knowledge characteristics emerged as significant predictors of work meaningfulness. Working in an IT-BPO company, getting regular feedbacks from client companies add to the meaningfulness of one's work. According to Armstrong and Baron (2000), direct feedback is one of the job characteristics that can make job interesting and challenging and has the potential to motivate employees. Feedback regarding performance helps employees evaluate whether the job has been per-

formed as per expected standards and this, according to Albercht (2012), satisfies the psychological need for meaningfulness at work. If we link it to goal setting, then setting goals is just one part of the performance expected from the employees. The other part is evaluation of this performance and giving regular feedbacks to the employees, which can instill greater confidence in them and can help them improve their performance over time. Lack of feedback may make one's job meaningless.

Autonomy at work refers to having some degree of freedom in planning and executing the task in hand- freedom to take decision based on logic and, control of planning and scheduling with stakeholders. Autonomy adds to making work more meaningful as autonomy is associated with trusting the integrity of employees, treating them fairly by allowing them to make choices and it also shows the organization's ability to value and trust its own employees (Holbeche & Springet, 2004). Hackman and Oldham (1975), who proposed the Job Characteristic model found that job autonomy makes employees responsible and accountable for work outcomes and has been linked to intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction and employee retention.

Job Characteristic model found that job autonomy makes employees responsible and accountable for work outcomes.

According to Humphrey & Nahargang (2007), work meaningfulness

is developed through the process of setting and pursuing important goals, giving adequate job autonomy and having an efficient feedback system. Autonomy in job enables employees to explore newer ideas, engage in divergent thinking, be more creative and these factors can contribute to making work more meaningful. Having autonomy at work is important not just for the work-life of a person but can also have spill-over effect on the non-work life too. As Yeoman (2014) states, lack of autonomy whilst at work affects a person's ability to lead an autonomous life as a whole, because diminished autonomy at work cannot be made up for by full autonomy elsewhere. In today's competitive environment, people end up devoting long hours to work and it is therefore, important that they have a fulfilling work life. If employees have autonomy in the decision-making process leading to goal completion, they will have higher levels of experienced meaning (Maddi, 1970).

Knowledge characteristics, which include job complexity, information processing, skill variety, problem solving and job specialization, emerged as an important component of work design, having significant impact on work meaningfulness. The study was based on a sample of employees working in the fintech sector- requiring specialized knowledge and skills for the tasks to be performed. A job which is high on knowledge job characteristics, offers variety and tests the problem-solving skills of employees, can be considered to contribute positively towards enhancing work meaningfulness. Enriched jobs, requiring information pro-

cessing and specialized skills, make the task more challenging and add to work meaningfulness. The same was observed for the sample in the current study. When work is designed in a way that various knowledge characteristic variables are accounted for, it provides an opportunity to those engaged in such jobs, to constantly upgrade and improve their knowledge and skill sets, thereby developing themselves (Hernaus & Mikulic, 2014). The present study found a strong and significant relationship of such knowledge characteristics to work meaningfulness.

Conclusion

The study has resulted in validating some of the factors from the goal setting and work design domains which are still relevant in the case of new age economy companies. The study investigated the link between measures of goal setting and work design on work meaningfulness perceived by employees in a new age IT MNC working in various client and technology related roles. Results obtained indicate a significant and positive link between goal clarity, autonomy, feedback and knowledge characteristics with work meaningfulness and the importance of continued research in this area. More importantly, organizations need to concentrate on work design - indicating employees should be provided complete piece of work and feedback directly from the job itself or knowledge of one's own work activities, as opposed to feedback from others to enhance work meaningfulness.

The results obtained from the study can help organizations understand "what"

creates meaningful experiences for employees. The study can help organizations to devise mechanisms and processes that help create meaningful experiences. The study not only contributes to existing theory on work meaningfulness, it also helps organizations take a fresh look at the problem in performance management and goal setting. Organizations can also take up work redesign to cater to the changing nature of work.

The results of the study can be of immense use to the managers. Managers can help in creating organization level factors like; opportunity for direct feedback, supportive environment and relationship building that help individuals to achieve role/ goal clarity and expertise. Managers can create supportive environment for improving expertise and learning. They can also cultivate teamwork and relationship building and embed feedback in the job as part of design.

Individuals' search for higher Goal and Role clarity should be helped by the managers by creating mechanisms / processes. The CARMA (Clarity, Authenticity, Respect, Mattering, and Autonomy) model was developed to light-heartedly remind managers, leaders, and their organizations that, as with properly spelled *karma*, we reap what we sow (Steger, 2017). If leaders can invest in making it easier for their followers to experience meaningful work, then they may reap the benefits.

The research adds to the current literature on work meaningfulness by exploring the consequences of goal setting

and work redesign. Research in work meaningfulness was largely concentrated in western, non-profit, non-commercial organizations. Researchers can, in future explore various forms of mixed-method research to study work meaningfulness and related variables and this can greatly contribute to the existing pool of knowledge in this field. As a number of studies have been conducted in the West in non-profit setting, a study of this nature adds to understanding the concept in commercial organizations.

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