

# How Automation Plays a Key Role in Meaningful Work

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# The New World of Working: Making It Meaningful

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Meaningful work is a trending topic in today's business environment. With significant disruption and changes impacting the idea of work, companies have an opportunity to promote higher levels of efficiency, productivity, and satisfaction in workers with a new approach.

The challenge for any organization is implementing strategies and tactics to achieve meaningful work with advantages for the worker and the business. In the end, meaningful work can be a powerful competitive advantage, especially in employee recruitment and retention.

Meaningful work is about individual fulfillment, but it also has to do with a company's ability to be agile and fuel its growth and innovation with critical thinkers, not taskmasters.

Automation is one essential element in pursuing meaningful work and digital transformation. Though most organizations can benefit from automation, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to doing so—every sector and company will need to employ it thoughtfully to achieve goals and boost employee performance.

We'll be drilling down into the definitions and drivers of meaningful work in the digital and remote era and what an organization can do to support it.







## WHAT YOU'LL LEARN:

- ✓ The definition of meaningful work
- ✓ The state of work and impact of current trends
- ✓ What makes meaningful work a competitive advantage
- ✓ Common challenges with meaningful work and the risk of not adopting it
- ✓ The advantages and benefits of having employees engaged in meaningful work
- ✓ How automation plays a leading role in meaningful work
- ✓ What meaningful work looks like in practice: the results of automation transformation





## What Is Meaningful Work?

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There are two dimensions of meaningful work: employee fulfillment and the ability to unburden them from mundane tasks so they can focus on higher-value work.

Fulfillment at the worker level includes finding the right equilibrium between work and life. A perfect balance is hard to maintain, but meaningful work reduces the fluctuations in prioritization that most people encounter.

Achieving fulfillment also means the work itself is more interesting and that workers have freedom and flexibility around when and how they work. When employees spend most of their time on meaningful work, they are much less likely to feel indifferent about their jobs. And when someone feels empowered, they work more efficiently and creatively.

The second principle of meaningful work is removing robotic activities from human experiences. We live in an era in which thoughtless work is expected to be automated. We want less friction in our interaction with technology and data. Modernization of workflows creates work that's more involved than just entering or manipulating data. Your staff can innovate and put critical thinking to use—which is what makes us human, after all.





In this new era of work, people have high expectations around jobs and will likely reject any that include too many mundane tasks like copying and pasting. For example, [21 percent of Gen Zers](#) said they wouldn't tolerate outdated workplace technology. Another 26 percent said poor tech would impact their performance.

Digital natives and other generations see the power and convenience of technology in their lives as consumers, such as when they click to purchase and receive items on the same day. They know things can be more seamless and will find manual and repetitive work obsolete. In fact, many younger generations won't even be wired to tackle these manual and repetitive tasks.





# Work Reimagined: Pandemic and Other Factors Change the Landscape

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In the discussion of meaningful work, it's important to look at how the pandemic and other factors like the Great Resignation have changed the landscape.

The Great Resignation, coined by [Texas A&M professor Anthony Klotz](#), describes the decision of millions of workers to leave their jobs. In 2021, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, over 47 million Americans voluntarily [quit their jobs](#). This mass exit disrupted the job market unlike any other movement.

## BUT WHY ARE EMPLOYEES QUITTING?

Many reasons prompted this exodus. According to [a survey by the Pew Research Center](#), the leading causes were:

- ✓ Low pay
- ✓ No opportunities for advancement
- ✓ Feeling disrespected
- ✓ Boring work







All these things detract from meaningful work. Workers cannot connect to their employer and be effective and fulfilled if their basic needs are unmet. Putting workers in roles that treat them more like numbers than humans will lead to high churn.

Although low pay was a leading reason for resignations, it's not the only thing that matters. Compensation is critical to employee satisfaction and performance, but they care less about the number of zeroes if the work is stimulating. In fact, 90 percent of people are willing to earn less in exchange for doing meaningful work.

The pandemic also changed how people view work and its importance in their life. Employees began prioritizing mental health and well-being, and finding that balance is more attainable when they're doing meaningful work. "Meaningful" means different things to each worker, but at the center is the desire to feel proud of what they do and have more flexibility.

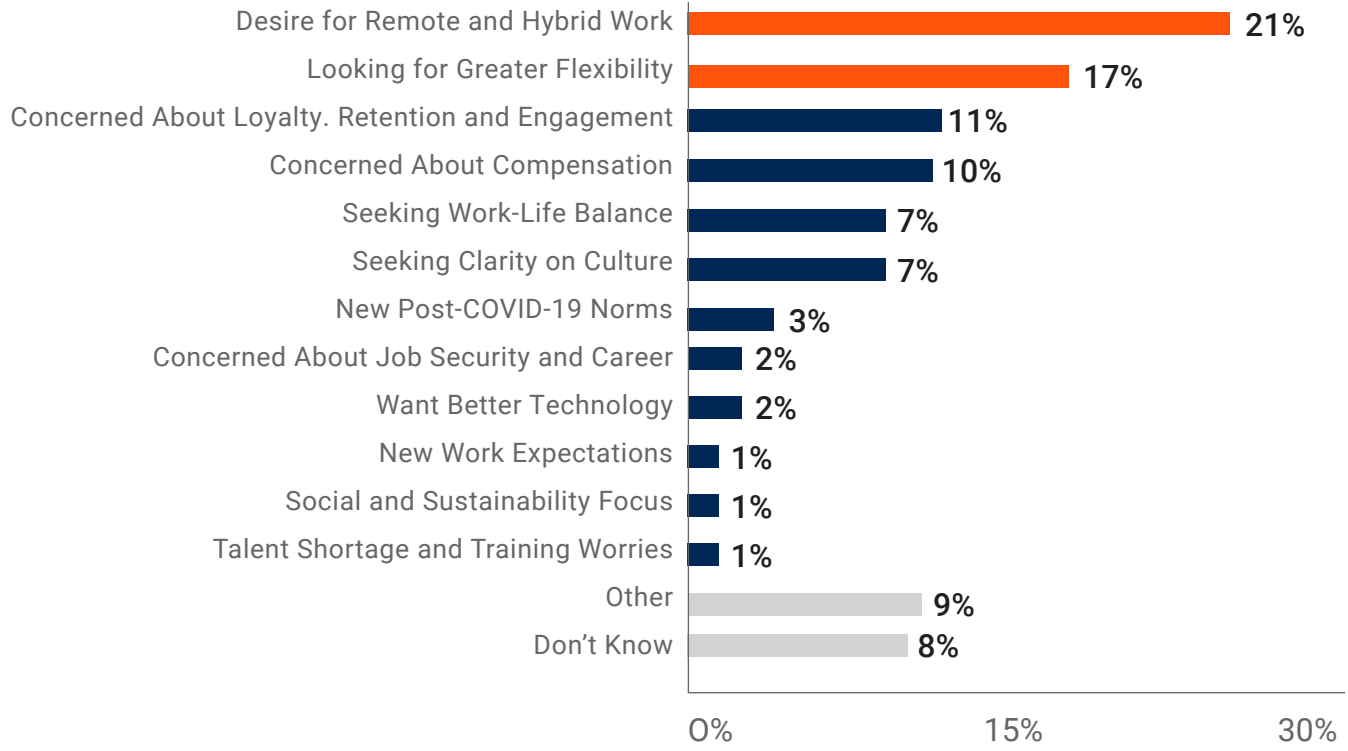






Flexibility typically involves the option of remote or hybrid work. According to a [Gartner survey](#), this desire was the leading shift in employee behavior.

### Biggest Shift of Employee and Prospective Employee Behavior Coded Responses



n = 410, all respondents

Q in a few words, what is the biggest shift of employees and prospective employee behavior that you will be dealing with in 2022-2023?

Source: 2022 Gartner CEO and Senior Business Executive Survey

Image: [Gartner](#)

**Given these changes in employee expectations and behaviors, organizations can find a competitive edge when they promote meaningful work.**





# A Focus on Meaningful Work Is a Competitive Advantage

Work doesn't equal fulfillment, but it is a big part of most people's lives. The ability to do something meaningful at work is what employers should communicate to have an edge in attracting and retaining talent.

The [Japanese concept ikigai](#) represents this aspect of fulfillment. It means "your reason for being" or "your purpose." It's what brings someone joy and inspires them. It can be an influence in your company culture as you pursue meaningful work opportunities for all employees.

**When this is part of your culture, it will show in the recruitment process. When candidates can connect to a sense of meaning in their careers, they are more likely to be engaged and remain with the company.**

In an employment ecosystem that's candidate-driven with serious shortages in various critical jobs, companies should rethink the type of work they offer to meet the needs of the current workforce.

The type of work that's fulfilling and engaging isn't the stuff that's repetitive and mundane. Some employees do appreciate the familiarity of such tasks, but it's not what's energizing younger generations, who are digital natives.





Millennials are now the largest generation in the workforce, and they are very aware of how technology can make life easier. They have higher expectations and won't settle for experiences that have them spending most of their time on manual tasks such as inputting data. These inefficiencies and swivel-chair exercises are not of interest to them, and they'll leave workplaces that only have this to offer.

Negative feelings about mundane and monotonous work lead to boredom. A new term in the employment space is "boreout," which can have damaging effects on motivation and mental health. A sense of boredom was the top reason people looked for another job in 2018.

**How does a company evolve to a place that provides meaningful work that will make employees feel engaged? Thoughtful automation is key to getting there incrementally.**







# Common Challenges with Meaningful Work and the Risks of Not Adapting

The road to meaningful work isn't always a smooth ride. Here are a few things organizations can do to make the journey easier.



## SETTING THE VISION AND PLAN FOR CHANGE

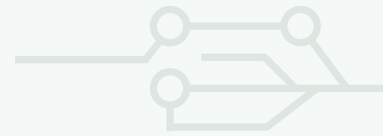
Change management is crucial when shifting the type of work and value an individual can provide an organization. It is critical to have a clear vision and bring in change agents where necessary.



## PROVIDING ACCOUNTABILITY WITH CLEAR GOALS

People want a clear definition of their role and its contribution to the company's work. They desire clarity in purpose for their role, team, and company. Achieving this requires transparency around goals and a definition of success, so employees are held accountable fairly.





## CREATING MEANINGFUL WORK AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL AND SCALING IT

Different people have different motivators, so you can't necessarily apply one strategy to everyone. However, driving toward meaningful work must be a directive from the top down.

If leadership doesn't provide a clear vision, others won't be able to execute it or identify necessary new people, processes, and technology. It requires a fresh perspective that's part of the company's culture. By re-engineering the process for better experiences for workers, organizations create more value for the business and customers.

Embedding these changes into the cultural fabric will create natural momentum, providing your organization with proactive feedback from your people on what they want out of their work.





Not thinking through and prioritizing meaningful work could lead to:

- ✔ Increased employee indifference and disengagement
- ✔ Higher churn
- ✔ Less productive teams
- ✔ Innovation and ideation stall
- ✔ Impacts to value delivery to customers

The reverse is also true: Meaningful work delivers benefits for employees and organizations.







# The Advantages and Benefits of Highly Engaged Employees Performing Meaningful Work

Employees engaged in meaningful work deliver greater performance, productivity, and engagement. In fact, workers who believe their work to be meaningful spend [an additional hour a week](#) working.

Additionally, meaningful work changes employee activity. A survey revealed that [45 percent of workers](#) said they'd be more efficient, 40 percent said they'd be happier, and 21 percent said they'd stay in their job longer if the work was more meaningful.

More employee satisfaction leads to greater retention, which eliminates the costs of backfilling roles. You'll be able to attract younger generations and retain them longer. Overall, high engagement, productivity, and happiness at work translate into better value for your customers, which can directly contribute to revenue.





Time savings, greater efficiency, and higher productivity are all great consequences. But how can it actually produce financial benefits? Those who find their work meaningful generate an additional \$5,437 per worker per year.

To achieve these results, the next step is building automation that supports meaningful work. This process includes robotic process automation (RPA) and intelligent process automation (IPA). RPA is the base level that depends on software robots to emulate simple human tasks. IPA is the combination of RPA and artificial intelligence (AI) as well as process discovery techniques of process mining and user experience (UX) technologies like low-code platforms.







# How Automation Plays a Leading Role in Meaningful Work

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Automation can contribute to creating a culture of meaningful work. It may seem counterintuitive that automation and the fear-mongering stigma associated with it can lead to meaningful work. However, automation frees people from the drudgery and allows them to play to their strength. This is associated with a feeling of enhanced purpose and contribution.

An often-shared stat about automation is that [half of all activities people do at work have the potential to be automated](#). Currently, the workforce is at about 10 percent automation, so there is opportunity for automation in every industry and business.

Automation doesn't magically create meaningful work. It does, however, rid workflows of repetition. It's also part of the pursuit of digital transformation—using technology, people, and processes to accelerate work, enhance experiences, and deliver outcomes. Digital upskilling is also a critical part of digital transformation initiatives.

Some verticals have been more aggressive adopters of automation than others. For example, finance and insurance, which include lots of documents and repetitive tasks, have prioritized it. Other industries—healthcare, manufacturing, and energy, for example—have lagged behind.





Automation is table stakes for any company in this digital era. The biggest opportunity across all sectors may be in leveraging automation within businesses that were founded before the digital-native era and have legacy systems and processes. These organizations have the most to gain by modernizing operations with meaningful applications of automation.

The introduction of automation shouldn't just be about stripping down a process. It needs to be part of your roadmap, and you must communicate the benefits to your team. Without these elements, there could be more resistance to change, and the push for automation can have an adverse effect instead of a positive one.



**Here are some examples of automation that eliminate the mundane and improve employees' workflows and everyday lives.**



### **CONTACT CENTER AGENTS GET RELIEF**

By applying RPA to contact centers, agents have cleaner workflows without lots of admin work. As a result, they can resolve customer queries quickly with less searching because they have integrated multiple systems that contain data (e.g., CRMs and ticketing systems). Further, intelligent automation can produce better self-service experiences with AI-powered chatbots. If customers get answers here, they don't clog up queues, which reduces stress on agents.





## IT DEPARTMENTS USE AUTOMATION TO DRIVE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

IT professionals work in constantly changing environments with strict timelines and parameters. They can leverage RPA to streamline many activities, including access requests, help desk requests, patches and upgrades, and more. At the next level, with intelligent automation, they'll experience more benefits, such as moving workloads from legacy systems, aggregating data, analyzing workloads to optimize them, and processing unstructured data to more formats.



## FINANCE FUNCTIONS ADOPT AUTOMATION TO REIMAGINE WORKFLOWS

Those working in finance are aware of its document- and task-heavy requirements. These requirements make automation a great fit. It supports invoice and payment processing, contract management, reconciliation, and platform integration.

**These are just a few examples of what automation can do to remove antiquated processes in an enterprise. Next, we'll look at how this contributes to meaningful work in the real world.**



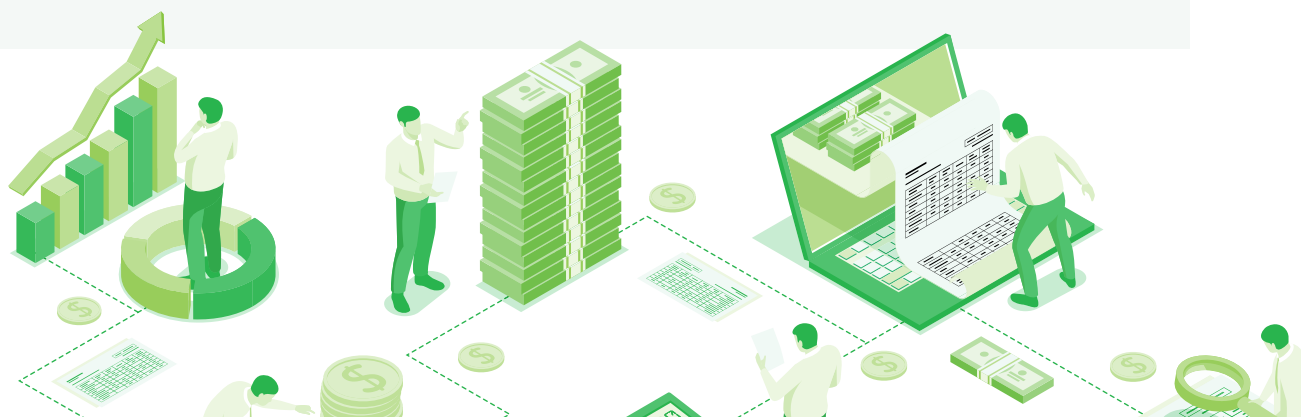


# Meaningful Work in Practice: The Results of Automation Transformation

Meaningful work in practice with automation requires an agile mindset to experiment, test, and learn before enforcing widespread adoption.

Your evaluation should look at:

- ✓ Chasing outcomes that connect to corporate objectives
- ✓ Defining a vision that you can communicate often with key performance indicators (KPIs)
- ✓ Focusing on outcomes centered around cost savings, impact on differentiated business processes, and client and employee experiences
- ✓ Eliminating repetitive tasks that block productivity
- ✓ Finding the balance between automation and its impact on workers and business value
- ✓ Having a continuous improvement mindset to add upstream or downstream automations
- ✓ Identifying what your people believe to be meaningful







When you consider all these factors, you can be on your way to embracing automation to deliver meaningful work. Here are some key examples of this in practice.



## FIELD SERVICE COMPANY NEEDS TO PIVOT TO COMPETE WITH DIGITAL NATIVES

A field service company encountered new competitors who are digital natives, disrupting their model of offline work production. To level up and ensure their workers had more meaning in their day-to-day lives, they took an interactive approach to speed up installation processes and improve them with automation. The deployment streamlines things and lets them reposition for what's next while delivering more meaningful work for employees.





## HEALTHCARE WORKERS SPEND MORE TIME WITH PATIENTS

Automation enables optimized end-to-end experiences for care management. When automation eliminates the data entry and admin tasks from clinicians' plates, they can focus more on care and avoid burnout. Incidentally, [a report](#) discovered that challenges with EHRs and their usability were a leading cause of burnout and stress.

## INSURANCE COMPANIES LET AUTOMATION DO THE PROCESSING

Insurance is another document-heavy industry ripe for innovation. Automating claims processing creates a better experience for members and leads to more efficient and accurate process cycles.







## MEDICAL DISTRIBUTION ACCELERATION TO KEEP PACE WITH DEMAND

At the beginning of the pandemic, the race for medical supplies was a challenge that impacted care. To keep pace with demand, hospitals sped up the fulfillment of ventilators.

The results of these initiatives delivered true business transformation. Initially, these were deployed around quantifiable results like efficiency and cost savings. Now data is reflecting other long-term improvements in employee engagement and experiences.







## Meaningful Work Sets the Stage for Growth and Success

Employees' shifting perspectives and their ongoing expectations to do work that matters are not factors companies can ignore. But the push for meaningful work and new advanced technology adoption isn't something to be feared; the change will benefit both employees and customers at companies that take it seriously, and doing so will enable those businesses to thrive in today's market while those that resist will crumble.

We're helping companies in every industry chart a course toward meaningful work and digital transformation with strategic and well-designed automation and continuous improvement.

**Learn more about our solutions and how we can support your efforts.**

**Schedule a Consultation**

[www.ashlingpartners.com](http://www.ashlingpartners.com)

