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Hope and Work

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Abstract and Keywords

The world has an employee engagement crisis. Low employee engagement has a detrimental impact not only on employee performance and well-being but also on organizational outcomes, including revenue and profitability. This chapter sets out the argument that a key predictor of employee engagement (and therefore performance and well-being) is hope. The relationship between these variables is unpacked from a theoretical and empirical perspective. While the literature has tended to focus on the agency and pathways components of hope theory, this chapter argues that much more attention should given to the fact that hope rests on the pursuit of positively valenced, personally valued, meaningful goals. The chapter offers suggestions on how organizations and employees might amplify hope, engagement, and positive outcomes in the workplace by focusing on goals that matter not only to the organization but to employees also.

Keywords: engagement, goals, hope, positive outcomes, work, employee engagement

Today's workplace is dynamic and subject to a number of challenges, including the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008, downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, new trade agreements, cyber terrorism, hypercompetitive business practices, and unrelenting advances in technology, to name a few. The related disciplines of positive organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002), positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), positive organizational psychology (Bakker, 2013; Ko & Donaldson, 2011), and positive leadership (Cameron, 2008) have taken a lead in suggesting how to harness the best in employees, and mitigate the effects of these challenges. However, there is a worldwide employee engagement crisis (Gallup, 2016). As of January 2016, 68% of US employees were actively or passively disengaged at work, a statistic that has remained stable for 15 years. The situation is even worse when we

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consider the global picture, where a staggering 87% of employees worldwide are actively or passively disengaged (Gallup, 2016).

Engagement has been variously defined in the psychology literature (see Mills, Fleck, & Kozikowski [2013] for a review), including as the “harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles” (Kahn 1990, p. 694), and when “individuals are emotionally connected and cognitively vigilant” (Harter & Schmidt, 2008, p. 37). Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) defined engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74). In this definition “vigor” refers to high levels of energy, persistence, and resilience. “Dedication” involves deep psychological identification with work in which one takes pride and which provides a sense of significance, inspiration, and challenge. “Absorption” refers to being fully focused and engrossed in one’s work and is related but not identical to the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Gallup operationalizes “engagement” as an employee’s enthusiasm for and emotional commitment to his or her work, which promotes discretionary effort (i.e., being (p. 328) willing to go the extra mile for the organization; Gallup, 2013). Whichever definition we choose to adopt, Gallup’s engagement statistics are a concern. A large body of evidence has linked employee engagement with favorable workplace outcomes, including employee performance, productivity, discretionary effort, creativity, organizational commitment, and well-being, as well as customer satisfaction, profitability, and financial return (Gallup, 2016; Mills et al., 2013). Gallup (2013) reports that companies with highly engaged workforces perform better than their competitors, with 147% more in earnings per share, 41% fewer quality defects, 48% fewer safety incidents, 65% less turnover in low turnover organizations, 25% less turnover in high turn-over organizations, and 37% less absenteeism. Similar differences are evident between high and low engagement work units (Harter, Schmidt, Agrawal, & Plowman, 2013). It is estimated that active disengagement costs the United States $450 billion to $550 billion, Germany $151 billion to $186 billion, and the UK $83 billion to $112 billion each year (Gallup, 2013).

Many researchers and practitioners have offered suggestions for increasing workplace engagement. Gallup (2013), for example, suggests that employees need to understand what is expected of them, have the support and resources to do their work, have an opportunity to use their strengths each day, receive recognition and appreciation, have a sense of purpose, have close relationships at work, obtain feedback regarding progress, believe that their opinions count, and have opportunities to learn and grow. This chapter sets out the argument that a key predictor of engagement, performance, and well-being at work is hope (Snyder, 1994). The relationship between these variables is unpacked from a theoretical and empirical perspective, concluding with suggestions for amplifying hope, engagement, and positive outcomes in the workplace.

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Hope in the Workplace

Hope Theory

In colloquial terms, “hope” is usually described as a belief or expectation that the future will be better than the present (Reichard, Avey, Lopez, & Dollwet, 2013; Synder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). Various constructs of hope have been suggested in the scientific literature (see Reichard et al. [2013] and Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti [2011] for reviews). The most widely accepted (and investigated) theory of hope in the psychology literature is Snyder’s hope theory (Snyder, 1994; Snyder et al., 1991). Snyder defined hope as goal-directed thinking, coupled with agency (or motivation) to begin and continue striving towards a goal (willpower), and the ability to create multiple pathways to reach that goal by identifying potential obstacles and engaging in contingency thinking (waypower). Both agency and pathways thinking are required for hope to be present, and these components are additive and reciprocal, such that when one increases so does the other (Reichard et al., 2013; Snyder et al., 2011).

Positive Outcomes of Hope at Work

Hope, like engagement, is associated with a host of positive workplace outcomes, from the perspective of both the organization and the employee. A recent meta-analysis explored the impact of hope at work, examining 133 effect sizes in 45 studies comprising 11,139 employees. The meta-analysis found a statistically significant, moderate, positive aggregate correlation between hope and employee performance based on self-report measures, third-party assessments, and objective measures such as financial performance and commission earned. Hopeful employees were 28% more likely than low-hope employees to achieve high performance at work, a stronger result than findings reported in meta-analyses exploring the effect of goal-setting, feedback, and behavior modification on work performance (Reichard et al., 2013). Hopeful employees have been shown to be high in conscientiousness, helping attitudes, and courteousness, and they set clear goals, find multiple paths to their goals, and are able to stay motivated even during trying circumstances (see Snyder et al. [2011] for a review). Hopeful leaders have been shown to have positive impacts on profitability as well as their direct reports (Norman, Luthans, & Luthans, 2005; Peterson & Luthans, 2003). High-hope organizations have been shown to exhibit a number of positive characteristics, including high profitability, a respectful and supportive working environment, open communication between employees and managers, delegation of responsibility to employees, inclusion of employees in setting company goals, and enduring relationships with customers (Peterson & Byron, 2008; see Snyder et al. [2011] for a review).

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Hope has also been examined as a component of psychological capital (PsyCap), a higher order construct comprised of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007). PsyCap has been positively associated with a number of desirable outcomes in the workplace, including performance, organizational (p. 329) commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011; Luthans et al., 2007). Finally, in terms of desirable outcomes from the employee's perspective, statistically significant, moderate, positive relationships have been reported between hope and job satisfaction, health, and well-being, along with statistically significant, moderate, negative relationships between hope, burnout, and stress (Reichard et al., 2013).

How and Why Does Hope Predict Positive Outcomes at Work?

A number of explanations for how and why hope promotes positive outcome at work are offered in the literature. First, it has been suggested that hopeful employees show higher levels of performance and well-being because they are motivated to pursue goals with energy, and they create multiple pathways to these goals. When encountering difficulties or impediments, hopeful employees are creative problem-solvers, using if-then contingency thinking to find ways around obstacles, persisting with their goals rather than giving up (Lopez & Calderon, 2011; Peterson & Byron, 2008; Reichard et al., 2013). In other words, it has been argued that hope promotes positive work outcomes primarily because of the interaction of agency and pathways thinking.

Second, it has been suggested that hope elicits positive emotions, which in turn promote optimal outcomes at the organizational as well as the individual level (Fredrickson, 2001, 2009; Reichard et al., 2013). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions suggests that positive emotions broaden one's thought-action repertoire by freeing up attention, encouraging approach behaviors, and promoting creativity. Furthermore, positive emotions undo the negative physical and psychological impacts of negative emotions and bolster our resilience by building personal and social resources (Fredrickson, 2001, 2009). These theoretical suggestions are supported by a growing body of empirical evidence (see Fredrickson [2009] for a review). Positive emotions have been linked to performance (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), effective problem-solving (Erez & Isen, 2002), job satisfaction, affective commitment, health, and psychological well-being (Fredrickson, 2009; Reichard et al., 2013).

Third, hope is related to engagement (Malinowski & Lim, 2015; Ouweneel, Le Blanc, Schaufeli, & van Wijhe, 2012), which is related to positive workplace outcomes as discussed previously. A recent study examined hope (as per Snyder et al., 1991) and engagement (as per Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) in frontline hotel employees (Karatepe, 2014). The data revealed a positive and significant relationship between hope and work engagement, which in turn was positively related to various third-party measures of performance, including extra-mile discretionary behaviors. In fact, the results indicated that the relationship between hope and performance was fully mediated

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by work engagement. This study suggests that engagement is the pivotal motivational construct that links hope with performance at work. Similarly, a recent study of nurses found that both hope (as defined by Snyder) and personal growth initiative predicted engagement (as defined by Schaufeli and colleagues), with hope being the stronger predictor of the two (Vaksalla & Hashimah, 2015). The authors noted that engagement is crucial in nursing since it impacts patient care outcomes.

Finally, hope involves creating an optimistic vision of the future and then acting in accordance with this vision (Lopez, 2013a, 2013b; Snyder et al., 2011). It has recently been suggested that human beings are not solely driven by the past but are also drawn by future possibilities, as we engage in conditional thinking, evaluations of possible outcomes, and Bayesian updating and then act in accordance with these evaluations and expectations (Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, & Sripada, 2013). This concept of prospection can be applied to the process of hope. Arguably, hope is a prospective process whereby a hopeful person is drawn by a positively envisioned future. More specifically, hope involves the freedom to create a positive vision of the future unfettered by the past, generating and weighing multiple paths to that desired future, engaging in conditional thinking and evaluating possible outcomes, adjusting these evaluations when new information becomes available via Bayesian updating, and acting in accordance with these evaluations by pursuing the best available options for obtaining the desired goal (Mouton, 2015).

All of these explanations for how and why hope predicts positive work outcomes are insightful. However, we suggest that there is another crucial reason that hope predicts desirable outcomes, a reason that has received relatively little emphasis in the literature to date.

(p. 330) The Importance of Positively Valenced, Personally Valued, Meaningful Goals

Much of the literature on hope and work has tended to focus on the importance of agency and pathways thinking (e.g., Luthans & Jensen, 2002; Peterson & Byron, 2008; Reichard et al., 2013). Previous researchers have suggested that hope can be increased by encouraging employees to set stretch goals, use positive self-talk and mental imagery, and engage in contingency planning, strategies that primarily focus on optimizing the “willpower” and “waypower” components of hope (Avey, Avolio, & Luthans, 2011; Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, & Combs, 2006). However, focusing on agency and pathways thinking alone fails to adequately address actively and passively disengaged employees—that is, those who show little interest in pursuing work goals, let alone with enthusiasm via multiple pathways. Why are some employees willing to work on their willpower and waypower while many others are not?

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We suggest that the answer lies in the quality of goals being set and pursued in the workplace. Although agency and pathways thinking have received more attention in the literature, hope theory is underpinned by goal pursuit. Indeed, “goal thoughts are the foundation on which hope theory is built” (Rand & Cheavens, 2009, p. 324). We suggest that hope at work depends on employees pursuing positively valenced, personally valued, meaningful goals.

Positively Valenced Goals

Snyder’s (2002) early articulation of hope theory referred to the pursuit of “positive” goals (p. 249; see also Snyder et al., 1991). Snyder emphasized that hope is both cognitive (in that it is based on goal-oriented thinking) and affective. Hope theory suggests that those who have succeeded in attaining their goals in the past tend to attach positive emotion sets to similar goal pursuits, and these positive emotion sets positively reinforce the continued pursuit of goals. Those who have failed to achieve their goals in the past experience passive and negative emotions when pursuing similar goals, emotions that undermine continued goal pursuit (Rand & Cheavens, 2009; Snyder et al., 2011). The theory of emerging goals, a cornerstone of flow theory, is also illustrative here (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1999). Emerging goal theory suggests that when we experience an event, we become aware of the experience and its emotional valence, which we compare to previous experiences. If the comparison is favorable, our goal is to maintain the present state. If the comparison is not favorable, our goal is to change our experience. This feedback loop brings about a dynamic emergence of goals. Positive emotions reinforce the pursuit of goals that bring about these positive emotions, negative emotions promote the search for new goals, and an individual may experience positive emotions from avoiding so-called anti-goals. As such, emotions determine goals, and achieving our goals promotes positive emotions (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1999).

It is noted that some authors have criticized the hope scales for failing to tap the affective aspects of hope adequately. For example, Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2012) examined hope, calling, and commitment in exemplary teachers. Surprisingly, they found no relationship between hope and calling, notwithstanding that their qualitative interviews suggested strong connections between hope, calling, and teacher commitment. The authors argue that rather than reduce hope to cognitive components of willpower and waypower, hope should include the mix of emotions that typically accompany it. The authors state, “It is, we believe, this broader conception of hope, as an emotion and as a virtue, that best captures what is at stake in teaching and with our ‘hopeful’ teachers” (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012, p. 20).

Whether or not the hope scales could be improved, it is clear that hope theory was intended to refer to the pursuit of positively valenced goals.

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Valued Goals

Hope also rests firmly on the pursuit of valued goals. In the early days of hope theory, Snyder (2002) described hope in terms of the pursuit of “desired” goals “of sufficient value to warrant sustained conscious thought about them” (p. 250; see also Lopez, Snyder, & Pedrotti, 2003). Snyder et al. (2011) emphasized that “[o]nly those goals with considerable value to the individual are considered applicable to hope . . . sufficient value must be attached to a goal pursuit before the individual will continue the hoping process” (p. 185). In fact, hope theory was borne out of Snyder’s desire to understand the process by which people move toward the things that they want (Rand & Cheavens, 2009; Snyder, 2002).

Valued goals are also implicit in the Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991). While the instrument primarily taps the agency and pathways components of hope, some scale items refer to goals that are personally valued (e.g. “I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me”; “I meet (p. 331) the goals that I set for myself”). The same is true of the shorter State Hope Scale (Snyder, Sympson, Ybasco, Borders, Babyak, & Higgins, 1996).

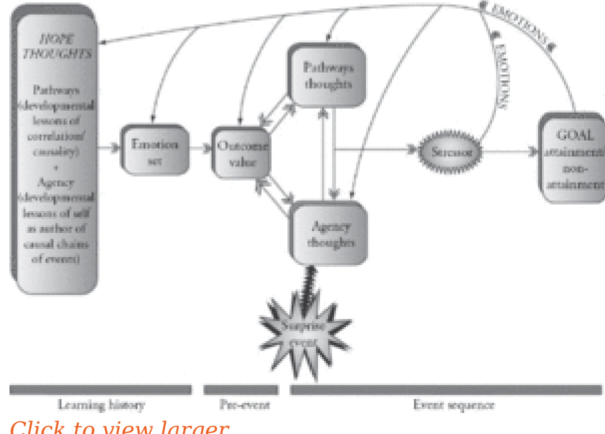

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Fig. 25.1. Schematic of feed-forward and feed-back functions involving agency and pathways goal-directed thoughts and emotions in hope theory.

Values have been described as an enduring belief that some goals are preferable to others (Rokeach, 1973). It has, therefore, been suggested that our values or value assessments precede our goals (Feldman & Snyder, 2005; Grant, 2012). As indicated in Figure 25.1, hope theory suggests that individuals assess potential goals in terms of their outcome value (Lopez et al., 2003; Rand & Cheavens, 2009). Sufficiently valued goals will elicit continued attention and goal pursuit. It is at this point that agency and pathways thinking kicks in. Individuals continuously assess the outcome value of their goals, in the context of the pathways that they identify, and their motivation to adopt these pathways. If the outcome value is assessed as “not being important enough to merit continued effort,” then the individual is likely to abort goal pursuit (Rand & Cheavens, 2009, p. 325).

Feldman, Rand, and Kahle-Wrobleski (2009) have reported a positive relationship between goal importance and the agency component of hope, which in turn is positively related to goal attainment.

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Hope's Relationship to Flow and Passion

Related to the subject of valued goals is the positive relationships between hope, flow, and passion (Mouton, 2015). Flow is an intrinsically motivated psychological state of complete absorption in a task, predicated upon clear and proximate goals, immediate feedback, and a perceived balance of challenge and skill (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Passion has been defined as "a strong inclination towards a self-defining activity that people love, that they consider important, and in which they devote significant amounts of time and energy" (Vallerand, Salvy, Mageau, Elliot, Denis, Grouzet, & Blanchard, 2007, p. 124). Harmonious (as opposed to obsessive) passion involves flexible engagement in the passion activity, leaving room for other important aspects of life (Vallerand, Blanchard, Mageau, Koestner, Ratelle, Léonard, Gagné, & Marsolais, 2003). Both flow and harmonious passion have been associated with positive outcomes at work, including performance, engagement, and well-being (see Engeser [2012] and Landhaüßer & Keller [2012] for reviews on the relationship between flow and positive outcomes; see Vallerand [2015] for a recent review on the relationship between passion and positive outcomes).

The first author recently explored which positive psychology constructs predict performance, including in an employee sample comprised of 40 managers of a publicly held North American entertainment and dining company. As indicated in (p. 332) Figure 25.2, the results indicated that harmonious passion, flow, and hope were significant predictors of employee performance against a balanced scorecard (as rated by their managers). After controlling for self-reported level of expertise, harmonious passion, flow, and hope explained an additional 32.3% of the variance in performance against the balanced scorecard. In addition, the three variables were moderately to strongly related to each other.

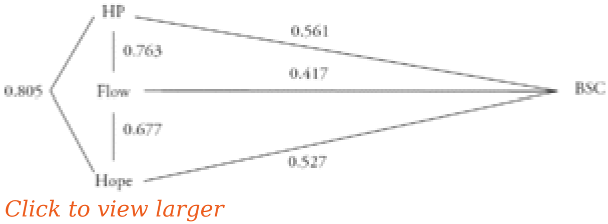

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Fig. 25.2. Correlations between harmonious passion (HP), flow, hope, and employee performance against a balanced scorecard (BSC) as rated by their managers (Mouton, 2015).

As far as the first author is aware, this is the first study to report a positive and significant relationship between hope and harmonious passion and between hope and flow. Leading researchers on hope, passion, and flow recently confirmed that they too are not aware of these relationships having been reported elsewhere (Drs. Reichard, Vallerand, and Csikszentmihalyi, personal communications, March 12, 2015). The first author offered three potential explanations for the positive relationships between hope, flow, and passion, and between these variables and performance in the previous study, namely that all three constructs require investment of attention, time, and

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energy; all three are action-oriented; and all three require a degree of flexibility in pursuit of goals (see Mouton [2015] for details).

Another possible link between hope, flow, and passion is the pursuit of valued goals. As we have seen, hope rests on the pursuit of goals that are valued by the individual. Similarly, flow is predicated (in part) on clear and proximate goals and is an intrinsically motivated experience of complete absorption in a task for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Passion, by definition, involves a self-defining activity that a person likes or even loves, and in which he or she invests heavily (Vallerand et al., 2007). We therefore suggest that a common underlying feature of hope, flow, and passion is the pursuit of goals that are valued by the individual. Hope theory, therefore, requires the pursuit of valued goals, which may be aligned with one's passions and flow activities (although they are not required to be).

Meaningful Goals

It has also been suggested that hope depends on the pursuit of personally meaningful goals (Feldman & Snyder, 2005; Lopez, 2013a; 2013b). Feldman and Snyder demonstrated that hope and meaning in life are related, since both are predicated upon meaningful goal pursuit. They argue that

> [i]n . . . theories of life meaning, then, goals become repositories of meaning whereby their achievement brings purpose to one's life. This goal-dependent nature of meaning places Snyder's (1994) hope construct at the very heart of [life meaning] theories. (Feldman & Snyder, 2005, p. 406)

The authors suggested that when people are both hopeful and focused on goals that they find meaningful, they perceive that they can achieve their meaningful goals and, therefore, that they can construct a meaningful life. Further, if they take immediate steps toward their meaningful goals, they are able to create a sense of meaning in the present. Other studies have supported the relationship between hope and meaning in life (e.g., Vela, Lerma, Lenz, Hinojosa, Hernandez-Duque, & Gonzalez, 2014; Yalçın & Malkoç, 2015).

Pursuing Positively Valenced, Personally Valued, Meaningful Goals At Work

Based on this analysis, hope theory rests on agency and pathways thinking but in the context of pursuing positively valenced, personally valued goals (that may be aligned with one's passions and flow activities) that the person considers to be meaningful. This raises two important questions for the workplace. First, what proportion of employees feel that they are pursuing these types of goals at work? Second, how can organizations and

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employees increase the opportunities for pursuing these types of goals at work? Gallup's (2016) finding that 87% of employees worldwide are actively or passively disengaged suggests that very few employees feel that (p. 333) they are pursuing positively valenced, personally valued, meaningful goals at work. Some may feel that their work goals are unrelated to their personal goals. Others may feel that their work goals are misaligned with their personal goals. In the worst cases, employees may feel that work goals are in direct conflict with their personal goals and values (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001). This brings us to the second question: How can opportunities be increased for employees to pursue positive, personally valued, meaningful goals at work?

The Role of the Organization

We agree with early suggestions by Snyder and colleagues (2003) that organizations should foster hope in their employees by focusing on the *development* of valued goals (alongside agency and pathways thinking; see also Snyder, Feldman, Shorey, & Rand, 2002). We also suggest that much more attention needs to be paid to *alignment* of organizational goals with the goals that employees regard as positive, valued, and meaningful. Hope, engagement, and positive outcomes at work can be amplified when work goals are aligned with an employee's interests, strengths, and values and are balanced with non-work-related goals (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003). This requires managers to know their employees, to ascertain and understand what they are good at, and to inquire as to what their interests and aspirations are.

Without alignment of work-related and personal goals, employees may find it difficult to remain engaged, build a sense of meaning at work, excel, and thrive. More than 15 years ago, Howard Gardner and colleagues (2001) discussed the difficulty of doing good work (defined as work high in excellence, ethics, and engagement) when organizational and personal (or societal) goals and values are misaligned. These authors pointed to the profession of journalism as a case in point at the time. We suggest that many examples of misalignment might be found today across a variety of professions, given that worldwide engagement levels have remained low (and in some countries stagnant) for more than a decade (Gallup, 2016). Some have suggested that organizations should proactively engage employees in the establishment of organizational and personal goals, as well as in the generation of pathways to these goals (Luthans & Jensen, 2002). As Peterson and Byron (2008) note, “For hope to affect job performance, employees likely need to have some autonomy in determining what their goals are and how they might accomplish them . . . employees must want to achieve the goals that constitute job performance (pp. 798–799). This suggests that organizations must provide employees with a degree of autonomy to set and pursue goals that matter not only to the organization but to the employee as well.

The Role of the Employee

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We also suggest that employees should take responsibility for setting, requesting, and pursuing goals at work that they find positive, valuable, and meaningful (and here we prefer to frame “responsibility” as the ability to respond). As Tims, Derks, and Bakker (2016) recently noted:

> Changes in the way work is structured and performed nowadays call for workers who take agency in influencing their work characteristics. . . . Generally speaking, proactive person–environment fit behaviors . . . may be key for individual workers to match their needs and abilities with the opportunities and demands of the work environment. (p. 44)

We agree that good jobs are made, not found (Lopez, 2013b). While only 13% of people worldwide are actively engaged in their work, the fact is that engaged employees are located in a wide variety of industries. In their recent meta-analysis, Reichard and colleagues (2013) found no moderating effect of industry on the relationships between hope and workplace outcomes. Employees can amplify their engagement by understanding their own interests, strengths, passions, values, and what they find meaningful, and shaping their jobs to align their work-related and personal goals to the extent possible. It is not the organization or industry that matters per se but rather whether employees are able to set and pursue goals that matter to them as well as the organization.

Job crafting is a process whereby an employee shapes, molds, redefines, and crafts his or her job in a personally meaningful way (Wrzesniewski, LoBuglio, Dutton, & Berg, 2013). The process might involve changes to what employees do, how they do it, how they interact with their colleagues, how much challenge they have, the number of obstacles they encounter, or the resources that are available to them (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012; Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Job crafting has been linked to a number of positive work outcomes, including employee satisfaction, engagement, and performance (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012; Lyons, 2008; Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, & (p. 334) Hetland, 2012), meaningful work experiences (Tims et al., 2016; Wrzesniewski, 2003), and the creation of a sense of identity (see Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski [2013] and Wrzesniewski et al. [2013] for reviews). While a search of the peer-reviewed literature failed to uncover any studies linking hope and job crafting directly, Shane Lopez (2013b) has referred to the work of Wrzesniewski and colleagues in suggesting how employees can mold their jobs into ones that they love. We agree that employees who wish to amplify their work experiences should take the initiative in redesigning their working lives, rather than relying on organizations or bosses to do it for them. Indeed, hopeful employees are likely to be proactive as they envision the working life they desire, generate multiple pathways to their goal, and energetically pursue these pathways.

That said, we acknowledge the possibility that some professions or working environments may provide more opportunities for job crafting and/or goal alignment than others. In a recent qualitative study, we explored love, passion, and peak experience in 22 countries on six continents (Mouton & Montijo, 2017). We found that substantially more

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participants who were working in helping professions reported being passionate about their work than did participants in other professions (45% compared to 14%). In that study, helping professions included medicine, nursing, teaching, and community work. As such, it may be that individuals in helping professions, for example, have greater opportunities to job craft or to align their work and personal goals. Further research is needed to test this possibility, However, we suggest that, except in the most dire of working environments, most employees have some opportunity to create an engaging, meaningful, hopeful working life by reshaping their jobs and aligning their work goals with what they value.

Paying Attention to Universal and Widely Valued Goals

Is it not impractical to suggest that every employee can pursue goals that he or she perceives as positive, personally valued, and meaningful while still ensuring that organizations meet their goals? Perhaps not, if organizations and employees focus their attention on goals that are universal or widely valued.

There is, of course, evidence that goals and values vary amongst people and by culture. For example, values may vary along spectra relating to traditional/secular rational values and survival/self-expression values (World Values Survey, n.d.) or conservation/openness to change and self-enhancement/self-transcedence (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz, Cieciuch, Vecchione, Davidov, Fischer, Beierlein, & … Konty, 2012). It has also been argued that so-called Western cultures tend to be more individualistic, privileging the individual over the group and valuing competition, personal freedom, achievement, and autonomy. By contrast, it is argued that so-called Eastern cultures are more collectivist, privileging the group over the individual and valuing cooperation, harmony, duty, sharing, and interdependence (see Snyder et al. [2011] in the context of positive psychology). Westerners might tend to seek out external rewards and adopt a linear path to their goals, while Easterners might tend to seek transcendence and "move with the cycle of life" (Snyder et al., 2011, p. 20).

However, there is also evidence that some goals and values are universal or at the very least widely held. Maslow (1943, 1954) suggested that all human beings are motivated to fulfill a hierarchy of needs beginning with basic biological needs, progressing to safety, belongingness, and esteem, and culminating in self-actualization, the realization of one's full potential. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggests that all human beings are driven to achieve psychological complexity, "the ability to develop and use the full range of potentialities open to human beings," achieved through the complimentary processes of integration with and differentiation from one's environment (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1998, p. 677). Psychological complexity is related to the flow state and is associated with optimal functioning, eudaimonic well-being, and cultural evolution (Delle

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Fave, Massimini, & Bassi, 2011; Inghilleri & Bartoli, 1999). Similarly, Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest that human beings have three universal needs required for flourishing, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which together comprise self-determination (see also Deci, Ryan, & Guay, 2013). Although Maslow's self-actualization concept does not form part of self-determination theory per se, Deci and Ryan (2013) acknowledge that their theory is consistent with Maslow's idea of self-actualization.

All of these theories relate to the need to connect to others, learn and grow, and fulfill one's potential, and the literature typically supports the universality of these goals. For example, Tay and Diener (2011) explored universal needs in 123 countries. Based on previous work by Maslow (1954), Ryff and Keyes (1995), Ryan and Deci (2000), Csikszentmihalyi (p. 335) (1988), and the Gallup World Survey, the authors focused on the following universal needs: basic needs for food and shelter, social support and love, feeling respected and pride in activities, mastery, self-direction, and autonomy. The authors coded responses to the Gallup World Survey between 2005 and 2010, which included 60,865 people representing 66% of the world's population, with an average of 494 respondents in each country, for the universal needs mentioned, as well as levels of subjective well-being. The authors compared results across eight regions, namely Africa, East and South Asia, former Soviet Union nations (including Eastern Europe), Latin America, the Middle East, Northern Europe and Anglo nations, Southeast Asia, and Southern Europe. The results supported the notion that some needs are more universal than others, particularly those associated with autonomy, competence, and relatedness (i.e., self-determination: Ryan & Deci, 2000). In addition, the results indicated that, as suggested by Maslow (1954), people tend to satisfy basic needs (e.g., biological and safety needs) before higher order needs (e.g., belonging, esteem, and self-actualization) but that a person can achieve subjective well-being via fulfillment of higher order needs even if lower order needs have not been met. Finally, the data indicated that the society in which a person lives has a strong influence on satisfaction of lower order needs but only a modest impact on whether higher order needs are met.

Schwartz and colleagues (2012) have developed an impressive body of literature on human values and how they are (and are not) influenced by culture. Fischer and Schwartz (2011) used three data sets comprised of 41,968 participants from 67 countries, 42,359 participants from 19 countries, and 84,887 participants from 62 countries, respectively, to explore the influence of culture on value priorities. The authors found more similarities than differences in value priorities across countries and evidence that values associated with autonomy, relatedness, and competence tend to be universally valued (Fischer & Schwartz, 2011). Similarly, Church and colleagues (2013) investigated the universality of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as well as self-actualization and pleasure stimulation, in the United States, Australia, Mexico, Venezuela, the Philippines, Malaysia, China, and Japan (Church, Katigbak, Locke, Zhang, Shen, de Jesús Vargas-Flores, & … Ching, 2013). In line with much (but not all) previous research, the results supported the universality of the three self-determination needs:

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> Consistent with SDT, we found that perceived satisfaction of SDT needs—as well as needs for self-actualization and pleasure-stimulation—was moderately related to most aspects of well-being in all cultures. Indeed . . . satisfaction of each need predicted overall well-being equally well in each culture. Thus, although some researchers have questioned whether SDT needs are cultural universals . . . [o]ur findings are consistent with the proposition that SDT needs represent “part of the common architecture of human nature” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 252) (p. 527).

Finally, we recently undertook a qualitative study, asking 150 diverse people in 22 countries on six continents, “What do you love?”, “What is a great passion in your life?”, and “What has been a peak experience in your life?” (Mouton & Montijo, 2017). The data revealed that the top two themes for all three questions were *other people* (including but not limited to family and friends) and *learning and growing* (including learning a new subject or craft, traveling, and leaving home). In addition, more similarities than differences were found between continents, suggesting a degree of ubiquity if not universality in participants’ responses. We suggested that the top themes of *other people* and *learning and growing* may reflect the universal human motivation to achieve psychological complexity by balancing integration with and differention from one’s environment. We noted that psychological complexity echoes self-determination theory, which depends on achieving relatedness (integration), autonomy, and competence (differentiation). While further research is required to ascertain whether the findings in this qualitative study are generalizable to wider populations, the findings and suggestions made are in line with the findings of previous researchers.

In summary, there is a strong body of evidence that some goals are universal, or at the very least widely valued, particularly goals related to autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In other words, all or most people are driven to learn and grow but also to connect to other people. A balance of these needs allows an individual to self-determine, self-actualize, become more complex, and flourish. We suggest that organizations and employees should focus on the pursuit of work-related goals that are aligned with these universal needs. For example, goals aligned with the need for competency might include learning a new skill, focusing on strengths, or being recognized as an industry expert. Goals aligned with the need for autonomy might include working from home, working in virtual and/or self-managing teams, or (p. 336) increasing delegated authority. Goals aligned with the need for relatedness might include coaching and mentoring others, deepening client relationships, or undertaking company outreach or pro bono programs. The specifics will vary by work unit, organization, and industry. However, it is suggested that organizations and employees have much to gain in terms of engagement, performance, and well-being by considering how work responsibilities can be aligned with positively valenced, personally valued goals that employees perceive to be meaningful.

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Conclusion

The world is facing an employee engagement crisis, with a slew of detrimental outcomes and opportunity costs. This chapter has argued that, by elevating employee hope, employee engagement, performance, and well-being can be increased also. However, little is known about how hope operates to bring about positive work outcomes. There has been a call for researchers to "determine which changes in workplace conditions, training, or management lead to increases in hope and corresponding improvement in outcomes" and to undertake further research on "contextual and employee moderating and mediating factors" that may be at play (Reichard et al., 2013, p. 302). Previous research has tended to focus on the agency and pathways components of hope. This chapter has argued that much more attention needs to paid to the fact that hope theory rests on the pursuit of positively valenced, personally valued goals that hold meaning for the individual. As such, in order to optimize employee hope, engagement, and positive work outcomes, an alignment of organizational and personal goals is crucial. The fact that some human needs and values are universal, or at least widely valued, is of great practical importance. In particular, the literature points to the universality of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, which together comprise self-determination. In other words, human beings, including employees, appear to universally value the opportunity to learn and grow as individuals and to connect with other people. If organizations and employees are able to structure work so that employees are able pursue goals that are related to these universal needs, we will stand a far better chance of optimizing hope, engagement, and positive outcomes in the workplace.

Future Directions

- How can organizations create conditions that allow employees to set and pursue positively valenced, personally valued, meaningful goals at work?
- What can employees do to set and pursue positive valenced, personally valued, meaningful goals at work?
- What obstacles do you see for aligning personal and work-related goals, and how might these obstacles be overcome?
- Which other values do you think might be universally valued by employees? How can these be accommodated?
- What new, innovative interventions could be designed to increase employee hope, engagement, performance, and well-being at work?

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