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## THE IMPORTANCE OF PURPOSE AS A MOTIVATIONAL FACTOR IN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

### ABSTRACT

This article shows a possible solution for employee motivational issues in the nonprofit sector. The research was conducted in a Hungarian nonprofit organization, a social service institution for people with disabilities. The authors show how purpose can be transformed into a concrete performance-enhancement tool. The purpose-driven direction can be most compatible with a nonprofit organization's own goals to increase performance and employee satisfaction. Change in the attitude of managers is necessary. First, the social goals must be determined, and then the opportunity to identify with the goals must be created. Job crafting is a suitable process for this. The added value of purpose-driven work, which could also include economic value, is beginning to be recognized in the for-profit sector. For this reason, it may be essential to use the experience of the nonprofit sector, too.

**Keywords:** *Purpose, Nonprofit sector, Motivation, Job crafting*

**JEL:** *D23, J08, J28*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Many authors have recognized that nonprofit organizations operate based on distinct motivating and operational principles compared to for-profit organizations. The differences between nonprofit and for-profit organizations manifest varying goals and methods (Leete, 2000). Nonprofit, including goals and competition, are increasingly similar to their for-profit counterparts. Still, scholars have maintained that nonprofit organizations are sufficiently unique and merit bespoke solutions and management technologies (Beck et al., 2008). In the nonprofit sector, there is no profit in the economic sense. In the case of public entities, such as municipalities and their own nonprofit-oriented companies and civil organizations, the emphasis is on creating public good and maximizing added value. The factors encouraging employment in the nonprofit sector vary from those of for-profit organizations. This is due to the different ideologies, including job requirements, job resources, personal resources, and ideological resources (Selander, 2014).

The forecasters of work engagement in nonprofit organizations differ from those of profit-driven enterprises. This is because, compared to workers in profit-driven enterprises, employees within nonprofit organizations prioritize serving the community (Werker & Ahmed, 2008). Employees in nonprofit organizations exhibit several perspectives and approaches to work compared to those in for-profit counterparts (Park & Kim, 2016). Engaged employees are less likely to leave, mainly if they feel satisfied and connected to the nonprofit organization's mission. This translates into long-term employment. The other reason is that if they can identify with the values of their organization's mission, they want to stay (Ravalier, 2018). Within nonprofit organizations, human service agencies face an environment in which demands for impact, effectiveness, and performance rise faster than our knowledge about best achieving those goals. Organizations are increasingly pressured to do "more" to the well-being of stakeholders (Mosley & Smith, 2018). For nonprofit organizations primarily aiming to help and serve society, exploring individual motivational factors and maximizing personal and organizational usefulness is even more critical. By finding the right motivational factors, HR serves not only the good of the individual and the organization but also the good of the public. The pay is far from the only motivator. People want acknowledgment and growth opportunities and to feel valued, trusted, and empowered. Employees increasingly want to bring their authentic selves to work (Turner, 2023). According to Sridhar and Nagabhushanam (2008), the ability to deliver value to society, self-motivation, dedication to a mission, willingness to volunteer, and a clear internal vision empower social workers to drive social change.

Nonprofit leaders have begun to explore and examine factors that challenge employees' commitment as they plan to fulfill the needs of stakeholders. Employee motivation, employee engagement, and job satisfaction as influential to an employee's commitment (Wang, 2021). Consequently, to increase efficiency, it

is essential to probe the factors that influence the results of work involvement in nonprofit organizations. For example, job design is critical to an organization's effectiveness and individuals' well-being. Its impact can be measured at individual and organizational levels, such as employee satisfaction with work or quality of work (Oldham & Hackman, 2010).

Although job design is a critical area of Human Resource Management, job crafting is one of the suitable processes whereby individuals shape their jobs according to their own needs, which enhances their positive work experience (Kiss & Szóts-Kovács, 2023), contributing to increasing efficiency.

## 2. EVALUATION OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM

Based on the activities carried out in the Tordas, Hungary branch of the Chestnut Unified Social Institution of Fejér County, this paper examines the central evaluation process applied by its mental health team. The institution's primary activity is caring for people with severe intellectual disabilities and employable intellectual disabilities.

The organization has recently appointed a new manager who is keen to explore the its operational processes, is open to change, and is committed to an objective approach. The new manager aims to ensure that performance is transparent and measurable and that the importance and usefulness of the group's work are visible. The current performance evaluation system consists of a general performance evaluation questionnaire completed twice a year, in the spring and at the end of the year. Each subordinate fills out this form about themselves and the line manager. The form is entirely general and contains no specific items for the mental health team. At the end of the evaluation period, the institution gives a cash bonus to the staff.

**Table 1.** The strengths and areas for improvement of the current performance evaluation process

| Strengths of Current Situation  | Areas for Improvement   |
|---|---|
| There is a basic performance evaluation template in the institution.                      | There are no specific evaluation criteria for each working group. |
| A monetary reward follows the evaluation.   | Performance targets are not measurable.                           |
| The manager is motivated to develop a performance appraisal system specific to the group. | The group has little or no motivation to set measurable targets.  |
| People are familiar with quality assurance evaluation.                                    | Evidence of resistance due to tighter work schedule.              |
| The manager uses quasi-objective criteria to define performance categories.               | Performance is not transparent enough, even within the group.     |
| The new manager wants to reposition the group in the organization based on performance.   | Employees are not motivated to change their usual processes.      |

Source: *Own research*

Table 1. shows a reasonable basis for building, but introducing new performance evaluation criteria is worth further consideration.

### **3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED EVALUATION SYSTEM**

Transparency and high quality of staff performance, as reflected in the satisfaction of care recipients and their families, are vital for the organization. And because the organization has won several awards that put it in a prominent position among social service institutions, expectations of its staff are high. A change in the performance appraisal of the mental health team and, thus, in how it organizes its work is more in line with the organization's strategic objectives than the working practices and performance levels of recent years.

The new manager intends to introduce a new evaluation system, in addition to the existing performance evaluation system, which is more specific, better able to measure performance, and to hold subordinates accountable and verifiable. Most of the staff in the development sessions have little motivation to rethink many years of routine activities, prepare for new lessons, and set more concrete goals. Therefore, the most helpful evaluation system for the manager is to adopt and incrementally refine the new performance management system, which would be beneficial to increase the motivational readiness of employees. In this way, the active and motivated contribution of employees working together can increase the prestige and weight of mental health work.

As an initial step, the new manager has launched a new initiative in the mental health team in the work organization. The ten staff members are divided into two groups: developmental teachers (5 with higher degrees, higher salaries) and therapy staff (5 without BA/BSc degrees, lower wages). The manager initially piloted a timetable for two volunteer developmental teachers to follow to teach their favorite topic to several groups. This timetable will soon be compulsory for all developmental teachers. According to the new manager, the timetabled development sessions will be accountable, verifiable, and likely to make the work more effective, thus producing spectacular results that can be used within the institution to legitimize and make more transparent the work of the group more transparent.

The team leader, based on the preparation and first experience of the new system, has created four categories of performance and rewards for the end-of-year evaluation: for part-time colleagues, for those who do their job; for those, who, in addition to basic tasks, take on extra work in the organization of events; for those, who, in addition to basic tasks, also take part in events and are the first to start teaching. Those who have already got into the new lesson management system have had their lesson attended and evaluated by the leader. The leader will also visit and check those who will start later. The leader will make the timetable and the rotation plan, which will be rewritten monthly.

#### 4. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS IN THE LIGHT OF MOTIVATION

Workers in this area are at increased risk of burnout because success and performance are challenging to measure. Another problem is that it is easy to hide behind elusive performance and work with low intensity, as it is challenging to hold results to account. From an HR perspective, there are three ways to break the current deadlock in such a situation.

##### 4.1. TRANSPARENCY

When a manager wants to introduce a new evaluation system in addition to an existing general evaluation system, the new system must be a transparent performance management system. The process of implementation consists of the evaluation of the current system, the definition of new objectives and indicators, communication of expectations and objectives, regular feedback, identification of problems and gaps, evaluation, and improvement of the system (LinkedIn, AI, 2023). Table 2. shows how a manager can work for transparency while considering employees' perspectives.

**Table 2.** The manager's actions and tasks and the employee's perspective

| The manager's tasks  | The employee's perspective   |
|--|--|
| <b>1. Assessment of the current system</b>   |  |
| The performance appraisal is templated, and group-specific criteria are needed.  | Employees should be subjectively assessed on the proportionality of their efforts and pay, possibly looking at other positions.  |
| <b>2. Setting new targets and indicators</b>   |  |
| The aim is to set new targets for SMART because they already include performance indicators.   | They involve employees, allowing each to set their own goals within a given framework, in cooperation with the manager, so that individual and organizational goals align.           |
| <b>3. Communicating expectations and goals</b>   |  |
| Managers should also communicate the new system's goals, elements, and strategic plans to superiors and subordinates, be open to feedback, and shape the performance management system accordingly.                      |  |
| <b>4. Providing regular feedback</b>   |  |
| The manager should find regular, organized forms or informal channels for constructive feedback beyond classroom visits and weekly meetings.   | In developing a reward system, employees must express their needs, learn to accept constructive feedback, and, in the long term, even learn to give each other performance feedback. |
| <b>5. Identification of problems and gaps</b>  |  |
| The lack of motivation for more significant effort is the biggest problem, which can be partly overcome by consciously taking the above steps (see situation analysis, larger organizational goal, shared goal setting). | Communication with employees is essential and can prevent many information conflicts, as this new system better separates familiar job roles.  |

Source: Own research

## 4.2 JOB CRAFTING

Job crafting refers to activities where employees redesign their jobs to be more satisfied. In this way, they can experience a sense of participation, resilience, and growth. In job crafting, employees can better personalize classic manager-designed jobs and tasks to match their motivations, strengths, and desires. This process identifies ways of actively changing tasks and job roles. There are three main methods. First, they can reshape the framework of their work and tasks; second, they can change their interpersonal relationships. Third, they can change what they think frames their work. The more autonomous and discretionary the tasks are, the easier it is to implement this process (Berg et al., 2007).

In the current situation, the manager has designed the new work process, so it is worth considering how to better involve employees in this process. From the manager's point of view, the first method would be to redefine the framework so that this performance definition, based primarily on employee intentions, can be translated into the new performance management system. Defining what, how, and with whom employees work during their working hours will significantly enhance employee performance - but it is the manager, and the employees' communication that will determine whether this will be a positive (desirable outcome) or negative (undesirable outcome) redesign process.

It is important to emphasize that this is a process that the manager also has to accept. Research suggests that it is likely to change the meaning of work and the work identity of individuals in that they will have more positive experiences at work, be more resilient, and feel more competent - and in this case, these are precisely the goals that the manager wants to achieve in the long term with the new performance management system.

In practice, this will mean that the manager will have to leave room for the individual crafting processes of the employees, in addition to the guidelines. There are already open opportunities in the cognitive area and a good direction in the relational area, but there is still little freedom for employees in the framework area. However, this is the most challenging sub-area, as individual goals and aspirations also need to be in harmony with institutional performance goals, which the current picture suggests is more of a conflict than a one-way street. As a first step, the manager can share their job crafting process, illustrating the commitment to the workload and its alignment with organizational expectations and modeling the ideal methodology and framework (Berg et al., 2007). It is also an option to tailor the format to the individual, for example, taking the best tasks for the day in advance and the less liked tasks later or starting with the disliked tasks depending on temperament and ending the day with the best tasks - as a form of self-motivation.

Finding meaning and individual sources of joy in work benefits the individual and the organization. It is a powerful way to combat burnout, and it is shared in social institutions. An easy-to-apply practice a manager could try with employees (Berg et al., 2013) is to raise awareness of needs and resources, to bring the approach closer to employees, and to gain deeper insights for the manager:

**Step 1:** Create a “Before” sketch to help understand how people allocate their time between the different tasks (energy spent, overall resources, and needs).

**Step 2:** The grouping of each task into three types of task blocks: There should be a largest block for the tasks that consume the most effort, attention, and time; a smallest block for the least energy-, attention- and time-consuming tasks; and a medium-sized block for functions not yet classified. It is also possible to frame tasks in such a system in different sizes.

**Step 3:** Create an “After” diagram of what the ideal role will look like. Of course, people cannot exclude themselves from what they usually have to do, but they can use their strengths, desires, and motives to create something more meaningful. Here, they use the same task block idea with different-sized frames, but this time with different priorities.

**Step 4:** The task blocks subsequently reframed in the diagram can be developed here to label tasks and task blocks with a different point of view.

**Step 5:** Create an action plan that sets short, and long-term goals for how people will move from the “Before” diagram (current state) to the “After” diagram (ideal work).

#### 4.3 PURPOSE-DRIVEN WORK

One of the keys to this approach is that because people can have different values, the definition of purpose can vary from person to person. For people to be motivated to perform, they need to see themselves as valuable in the organization and, more broadly, to know that they are impacting social utility through their work. If this is the starting point, organizational goal-setting becomes critical. Good goal setting requires understanding what makes employees feel fulfilled, how to achieve absolute satisfaction, and how the organization can provide feedback on employee efforts as value.

A standard definition of value is given in this organization, where respect for human dignity is paramount. However, precisely, the mental health team can make a significant contribution even to maintaining and raising the quality of life of the

disabled people living in the building. This could be included in the organization's strategic directions to make the staff feel more valued. The more satisfied the employees are, the more they think about their role as a whole, and the more this is communicated by the management. The key is robust and sustainable value foundations and employee flexibility to personalize activities and performance targets.

Research shows that most employees want to contribute more to the definition and achievement of organizational purpose, even if this requires greater individual responsibility and more flexible tailoring of job roles to each individual's expertise. The more work has social meaning, the easier it is to move towards such a transformation (Van Hees, 2023).

As this is the nonprofit sector, the organization is primarily mission-driven, aiming not to make money but to positively impact the world. In this concrete case, to achieve the extra motivational impact of purpose, management must communicate the mission to improve employee motivation and performance more consciously. Suppose the mental health department sets its mission not only to maintain but also to improve the cognitive-mental well-being of residents. In that case, this is part of the direction for setting short- and long-term goals that align with the whole institution's strategy. Secondly, a shared purpose increases trust in all kinds of relationships (with each other, with residents, with family members, with other departments, and with external partners). Thirdly, most notably from our point of view, a good purpose is inspiring because a sense of purpose and meaning makes people more enthusiastic to do an outstanding job. Mission can be made a priority that can even boost performance by following these five steps (de Boer, 2023):

**Step 1:** An interactive goal-setting and mission-setting process: The whole group can sit down with the leader to develop a joint solution, and all understand and accept the challenging, socially beneficial, positive goal-mission they will work towards. In this process, the leader at most inspires and liaises with external groups and senior management but participates as an equal in their group in defining the mission.

**Step 2:** Align how to work with the mission: Identify the critical competencies needed to achieve the goal, translate these into meaningful activities, and assign responsibility for their delivery. In other words, everyone should identify which competencies they can best use to achieve the mission and make inspiring commitments to this end, which they can deliver.



**Step 3:** Proactively identify and remove barriers: It is worth reviewing and preparing for obstacles to achieving the shared vision in advance so they do not take away from the motivational momentum. In the present case, the structural framework of the organization, the relationships with other groups, and the availability of resources may be risk factors to be considered, and thoughts should be given to their resolution.

**Step 4:** Fostering high performance: An innovative, collaborative, continuous learning organizational culture is ideal for continuously improving performance. In this case, this requires empowerment of employees, which in turn requires a change of mindset on the part of the team leader. Employee engagement is high and can be built on here, but developing and facilitating them indirectly is essential.

**Step 5:** Measuring and communicating results: Measuring performance regularly and frequently, using objective and mission-focused tools, and communicating results transparently are essential.

It can be said that social responsibility, i.e., the belief that we do good in the world through our work, acts as a self-disciplining and self-motivating effect on employees, thus increasing their work intensity. At the same time, especially in the social sector, where work done with heart can lead to financial conflicts or can blur the boundaries between work and private life, it is crucial how workers can manage themselves. Suppose the group is moving in this direction. In that case, it is necessary to pay attention not only to the external mission but also to the internal group sustainability so that the well-being of the employees is not compromised - this may be another point that, as a risk factor, should be carefully explored in advance and solutions proposed (Dupret & Pultz, 2021).

The easiest way to turn this into a change in motivating team members is first to aim to increase their engagement by understanding their motivational background. To align work expectations and individual needs, mission-driven work can provide a context in which people see the meaning and significance of work and create opportunities for self-determination, i.e., the ability to appropriately fulfill competence, autonomy, and attachment needs. If the self-determination criteria are met, a more productive life can be lived (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It seems that the sense of meaning provided by the mission goal and the satisfaction of self-determination needs are good predictors of people's involvement, so in addition to the mission, the group needs to create the framework in which workers can experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness to the extent that is ideal for them (Wiedemann, 2019).

## 5. CONCLUSION

For nonprofit organizations, whose primary focus is to help and serve society, exploring individual motivational factors and maximizing personal and organizational usefulness is even more critical. The main goal of the examined organization is to ensure the highest possible standard of living for the beneficiaries while respecting human dignity. As Mosley and Smith (2018) say, organizations are increasingly pressured to do “more” to ensure stakeholders’ well-being. According to the authors, all three strategies presented in the study contribute to this goal, although the most powerful are the changes that strengthen job crafting and purpose-driven direction. Suppose HR does not want to establish a sequence. In that case, purpose-driven work and job crafting can be nicely combined into a process where the result can be openly communicated and aligned with the organization’s goals. The presented techniques are already related to the new facet of HR, which can be better described by focusing on people management to take or facilitate measures that develop the entire organization and increase performance.

The study suggests that the nonprofit organization needs to change its position to increase efficiency and added value. The leader must eliminate the “we always do it this way” attitude and introduce innovative ideas and approaches. For example, according to Oldham & Hackman (2010), job design can be crucial for the effectiveness of the organization and the well-being of the individuals within it. Its impact can be measured at the individual and organizational levels, for example, employees’ job satisfaction or the quality of work. According to Kiss and Szóts-Kovács (2023), modern work organization solutions, self-managing groups, rotation, and teamwork can all create favorable conditions for increasing the number of employees belonging to desirable job profiles.

The study demonstrated that in nonprofit organizations, purpose is not merely an idealistic notion but a key motivational factor that enhances employee engagement, improves organizational culture, and ultimately increases operational effectiveness. The findings indicate that a purpose-driven approach contributes to the organizational model’s development and positively impacts internal communication and strategic decision-making by moving away from traditional HR. These approaches contribute significantly to increasing the social impact of nonprofit organizations while opening avenues for further research.

While our research uncovered several essential relationships, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, due to the limited and geographically specific sample used in our study, the generalizability of the findings may be restricted. Additionally, the inherent subjectivity of qualitative methods and the time constraints imposed on data collection may affect the precision of our results. Future research would benefit from incorporating quantitative approaches and examining a broader range of nonprofit organizations to comprehensively understand the mechanisms underlying purpose-driven impact.

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## VAŽNOST SVRHE KAO MOTIVACIONOG FAKTORA U NEPROFITNIM ORGANIZACIJAMA

### SAŽETAK

Ovaj članak pokazuje moguće rješenje za probleme motivacije zaposlenih u neprofitnom sektoru. Istraživanje je sprovedeno u mađarskoj neprofitnoj organizaciji, ustanovi socijalne službe za osobe sa invaliditetom. Autori pokazuju kako se svrha može transformisati u konkretan alat za poboljšanje performansi. Pravac vođen namjenom može biti najkompatibilniji sa sopstvenim ciljevima neprofitne organizacije da se poveća učinak i zadovoljstvo zaposlenih. Promjena stava menadžera je neophodna. Prvo se moraju utvrditi društveni ciljevi, a zatim stvoriti mogućnost da se ciljevi identifikuju. Kreacija posla je prikladan proces za dato. Dodatna vrijednost namjenskog rada, koja bi mogla da uključi i ekonomsku vrijednost, počinje da se prepoznaje u profitnom sektoru. Iz tog razloga, možda će biti od suštinskog značaja da se koristi i iskustvo neprofitnog sektora.

**Ključne riječi:** *svrha, neprofitni sektor, motivacija, kreiranje posla*

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