



Meaningful Work

Training's role in creating a
purpose-driven employee experience



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Today's business environment is marked by persistent challenges, including attracting and retaining top talent, upskilling and reskilling employees, supporting remote and hybrid working arrangements and implementing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts that drive change.

To overcome these challenges (and those that lie ahead), organizations worldwide are doubling down on the employee experience – which Gallup defines as “the journey an employee takes with your organization,” and includes “every interaction that happens along the employee life cycle, plus the experiences that involve an employee’s role, workspace, manager and wellbeing.” The high value that companies are putting on the employee experience is well placed. After all, a positive employee experience plays a key role in elevating employees’ sense of meaning and purpose at work, while a negative employee experience can ultimately result in low performance, disengagement and turnover.

With today's employees increasingly valuing work that provides a sense of meaning and fulfillment, it's important to consider how meaning at work and training – a key component of the employee experience – overlap. To do so, we need to ask questions such as: How can companies increase employee engagement and employees’ sense of meaning at work? And more importantly, to what degree does a meaningful work experience really matter to the business?

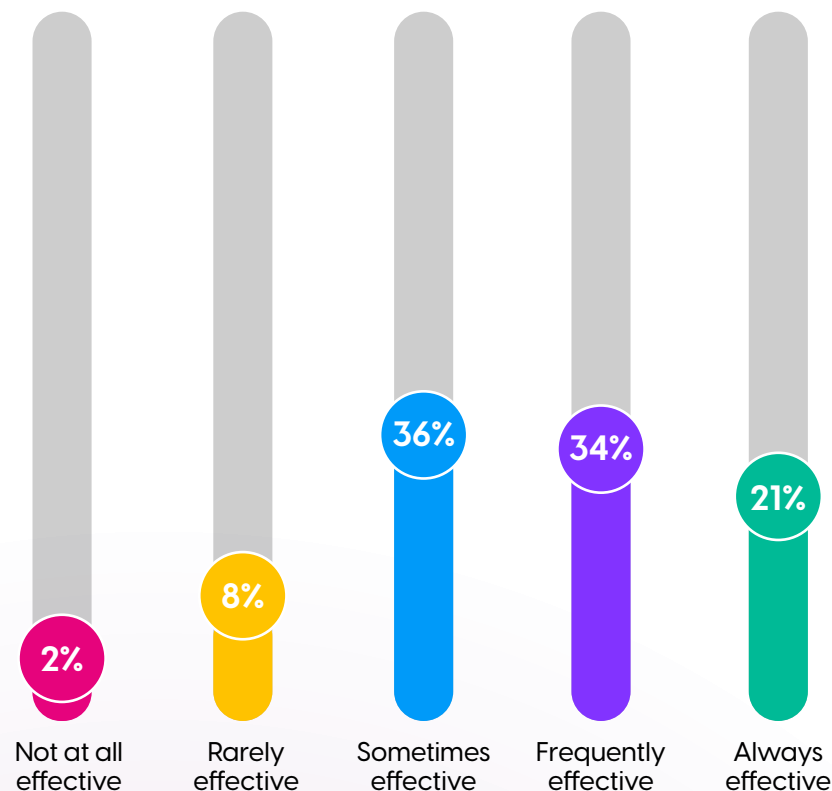
To find out the answers to these questions and more, Litmos and Training Industry, Inc. partnered to conduct a study of 432 learners from a variety of organizations and industries. Here, we'll explore where and how training and meaning overlap, and how organizations can use training to help fulfill employees’ quest for meaningful work.

Training Effectiveness



Organizations look to training and development for solutions that can help them navigate challenges and drive better business outcomes as a result. But how effective is training, really, in solving the challenges of the modern workforce? (Figure 1)

Figure 1. Ratings of Training Effectiveness



“

Our research revealed that only about **one-half** of learners see training as effective.

We also found that fewer than one-half of learners see training as useful (Figure 2). Without buy-in for training initiatives, learners are less likely to participate and fully engage in learning experiences. From a business perspective, this is especially problematic, as it means that learners are less likely to retain and apply necessary training to their job role.

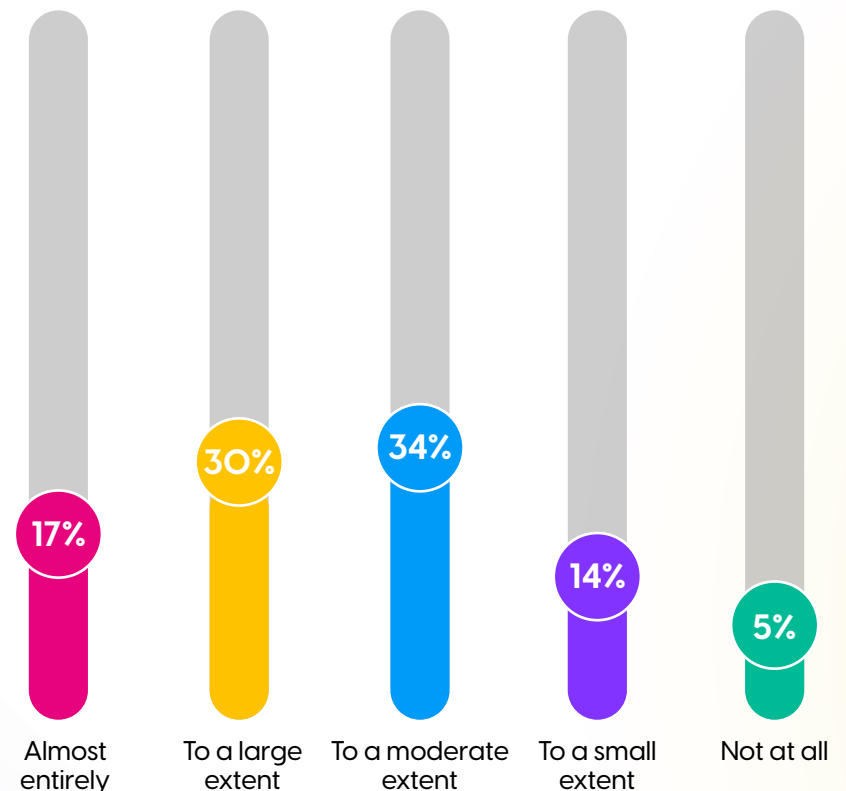
With just 30% of learners reporting that they use what they've learned "to a large extent," it's clear that training isn't achieving its intended return on investment (ROI) for many organizations. In fact, many programs are likely wasting valuable time and resources.

For maximum effectiveness, training needs to be strategically aligned to business goals and applicable to learners' daily job roles. By conducting a robust [needs analysis](#) to identify skills gaps, organizations can adjust their existing programs to address them, or develop new ones if necessary. In doing so, they will boost training effectiveness and, with it, employees' sense of meaning at work, a correlation that we'll discuss later on in this e-book.

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It's clear that training isn't achieving its intended return on investment (ROI) for many organizations

Figure 2. Ratings of Training Utility



A man in a blue polo shirt is shown in profile, wearing a headset and holding a phone receiver to his ear. He is looking towards the left. In the background, another person is visible but out of focus. The image has a blue and purple abstract shape on the left side.

The meaning
of the meaning
of work

The concept of meaningful work has been around for some time now. In his 1974 landmark oral history of work, "[Working](#)," author Studs Terkel claims that meaning is an equal counterpart to financial compensation in motivating U.S. workers. Today, employees' desire for meaningful work remains high, with recent research revealing that [nine out of 10 employees](#) are willing to earn less money to do meaningful work.

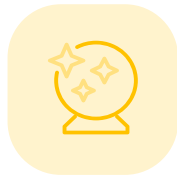
It's clear that employees value meaningful work ... but what exactly does meaning, mean?

Meaningful work can be defined as "the sense of purpose of work... how one's work links with personal meaning and benefits, and how one's work benefits others," (Steger et al., 2012). To break it down further, consider the three primary characteristics of meaningful work, outlined below:



Greater Good Motivations

The degree to which people see that their efforts at work makes a positive contribution and benefits others and/or society at large.




Meaning-making Through Work

The degree to which work provides a broader sense of meaning to people's lives, helping them to understand their lived experience as it relates to the world around them.



Positive Meaning

The degree to which people find their work to hold personal meaning, significance or purpose.



Evaluating the meaning of work

Our survey collected data on meaning based on the above definition. We also took broader employee experience factors (i.e., work-life balance, job satisfaction, loyalty and more) into consideration to help us determine whether training stood out in the context of the greater employee experience.

Ultimately, our objective was to take a deeper look at how training might impact employees' experience of meaning of work, as well as to assess more general engagement factors that shape the work experience as a whole.

For the purpose of this research, we ran two predictive models. The first looked at which aspects of training are the most significant drivers of meaning at work. This model included measurements of:



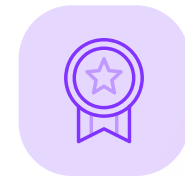
Learner control



**Number of learning
methods used**



**On-demand
learning satisfaction**



Training benefits



**Training
effectiveness**



**Training program
satisfaction**



**Training
motivation**

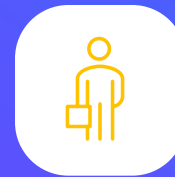
The second, broader predictive model we ran included all of the measurements listed above, in addition to the following:



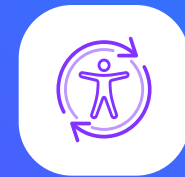
Job satisfaction



Organizational size



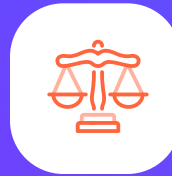
Supervisor support



Turnover intentions



Work centrality




Work-life balance



**Organizational
commitment**

By contrasting the two models, our analysis was able to isolate training's impact on meaning at work from the myriad factors that make up the employee experience.



The role of
training in
the meaning
of work

How can training increase employees' sense of meaning at work? Our first predictive model identified several significant influences that learning has on cultivating a meaningful work experience, including¹:



Training Benefits

There are numerous training-related “personal benefits [which] reflect psychological, political and social outcomes that may or may not be directly related to the work setting but enhance their intrinsic motivation,” (Bulut & Culha, 2010). In other words, the more perceived benefits that learners yield from training, the more likely they are to experience meaningful work.

For instance, if a manager completes a course on inclusive leadership and is better able to develop and coach employees from minority groups as a result, they may experience an increased sense of meaning and fulfillment from their job role.



Training Program Satisfaction

Learner satisfaction also plays a role in supporting meaningful work. This makes sense, as a poor training experience can lead to disengaged and even frustrated learners.

Learner satisfaction is dependent on various factors, including (but not limited to): trainer competence, tracking completion, training's alignment to learners' job roles and goals, the opportunity to use newly gained skills and knowledge on the job, actionable feedback and access to updated, refreshed content and training materials.




Training Effectiveness

Impactful training is both engaging and easily accessible to learners in the flow of work. However, our research found that engagement and accessibility alone won't increase meaningfulness.

Training needs to be effective – meaning that it equips learners with the skills and tools they need to improve their job performance – to support a meaningful work experience. However, as we saw in Figures 1 and 2, current ratings of both training effectiveness and usefulness are relatively low.

To achieve training effectiveness and the increased sense of meaning that comes with it, training needs to be not only engaging and accessible, but also directly related to learners' job roles so that they can immediately apply what they've learned.



The meaning
of work: The
big picture

Non-training-related Influences on Meaning at Work

Because the concept of meaning itself is broad, it can be assumed that there's multiple factors at play when it comes to what drives meaning at work. Our research confirmed this assumption, and found the following as important influences on meaningful work:



Job satisfaction



Work centrality

(Fisher et al., 2016)



Organizational commitment

(Meyer et al., 1993)

By examining these non-training-related influences, we were better able to determine the true role that training has on supporting meaningful work. In other words, by zooming out and considering the holistic employee experience, we were able to zoom in on training's contribution to "the big picture."

Training-related Influences

We've already discussed one set of training related predictors of meaningfulness (i.e., training benefits, training programs satisfaction and training effectiveness). Now, let's consider another set of training-related influences that proved to be significant:

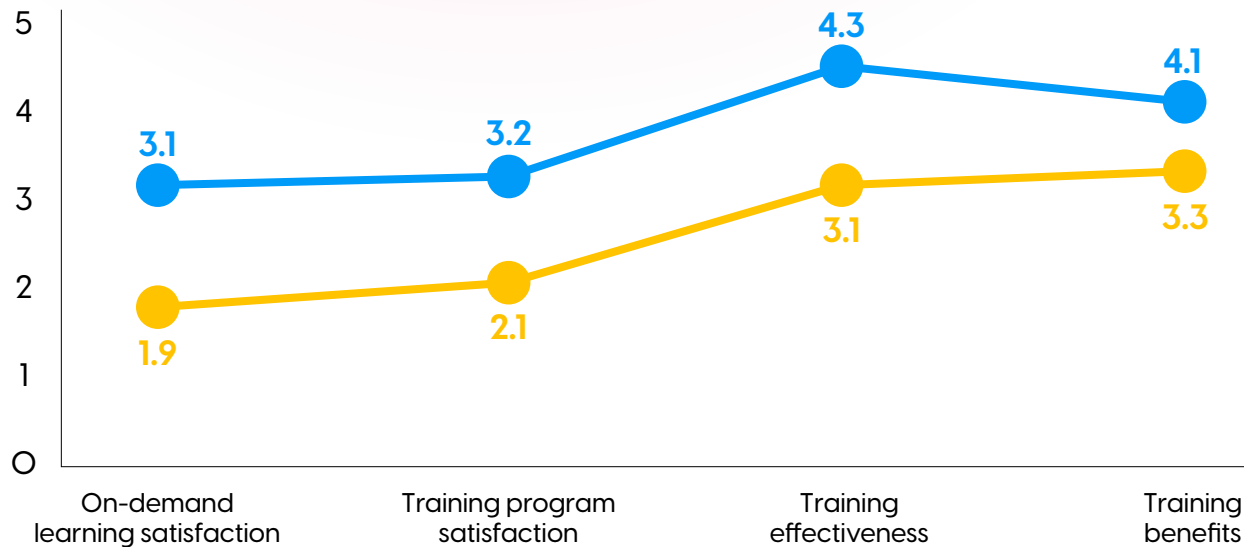


On-demand learning satisfaction

While the more general training program satisfaction ratings were found to be important, in our sample, learners' specific satisfaction with on-demand training mattered most. This validates our belief that training needs be readily available so that employees can access the information and knowledge they need, when they need it.



Figure 3. High- vs. Low-Meaning Employees and the Learning Experience



Overall training effectiveness

Overall training effectiveness refers to the net impact that all of the training function's efforts yield. In other words, overall training effectiveness includes the impact of all training initiatives throughout an employee's lifecycle, from a smooth onboarding experience to professional development and career advancement opportunities. We found that as overall training effectiveness improves, so does employees' sense of meaning at work. Figure 3 shows the difference in averages across the training-related influences that proved significant across both models. It clearly shows that employees who report feeling a higher sense of meaning at work also report a more positive training experience.

A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, and a woman with long brown hair, wearing a white pinstriped blazer over a black top, are both smiling and looking at a black smartphone held by the woman. The man is pointing at the screen with his right index finger. They are standing in front of a modern building with large glass windows. A large, semi-circular purple graphic element is on the left side of the image, partially overlapping the text.

Conclusions

As organizations of all types pay greater attention to the employee experience, training will inevitably play a part in the exchange of value between the employer and the employee.

Learning is an investment in the individual, but it's one that ultimately benefits both the employee and the business. A positive learning experience shapes both short-term outcomes (e.g., the transfer of new skills on the job) and long-term goals (e.g., more engaged and committed employees). This is where the true barometer of great training is found.

Our research clearly shows the relationship between effective training and meaningful work. So, how can organizations begin leveraging training for a more meaningful work experience? Here are three ways to get started:

01

Focus on on-demand offerings

Hybrid and remote work have brought with it many challenges for organizations. On-demand learning that supports employees in their day-to-day workflow can transform these challenges into opportunities for development and growth – for both the learner and the bottom line.

Focusing on on-demand training offerings is one tangible path you can take to deliver effective training that, as our research has shown, elevates the employee experience.

02

Focus on the quality of the training experience

Every organization has criteria for “effective training,” whether that training is formalized (e.g., a course, workshop or certification program) or not (e.g., social and peer-to-peer learning). Whatever it may be, a company’s definition of “effective training” is a subjective measure that likely doesn’t take the learner experience into consideration.

For training to be effective, learners are the stakeholders that actually matter most, as they’re ultimately the ones who have to engage with content and then transfer the skills they’ve learned back on the job. Just as marketers consider their audience when launching new campaigns, learning leaders must consider the needs and preferences of their learners to ensure that the content is effective in meeting their current – and future – needs.

03

Focus on what matters most

Our research showed that meaningfulness was largely independent of the size of the organization, work-life balance and turnover intentions. While these may be important to other discussions, our research suggests they don’t move the needle on improving employees’ experiences of meaning.

In other words, effective training isn’t achieved by simply offering learners more control over their choices, or more modalities, or by focusing on their motivation. Rather, effective training is achieved through on-demand solutions that impart skills that can be immediately applied on the job.

As more companies recognize that the employee experience can make or break their ability to compete in the modern market, we expect a greater focus on the learner experience. Moving forward, companies that are able to deliver a meaningful work experience will be at a competitive advantage, harnessing the full potential of their most critical asset: Their people.

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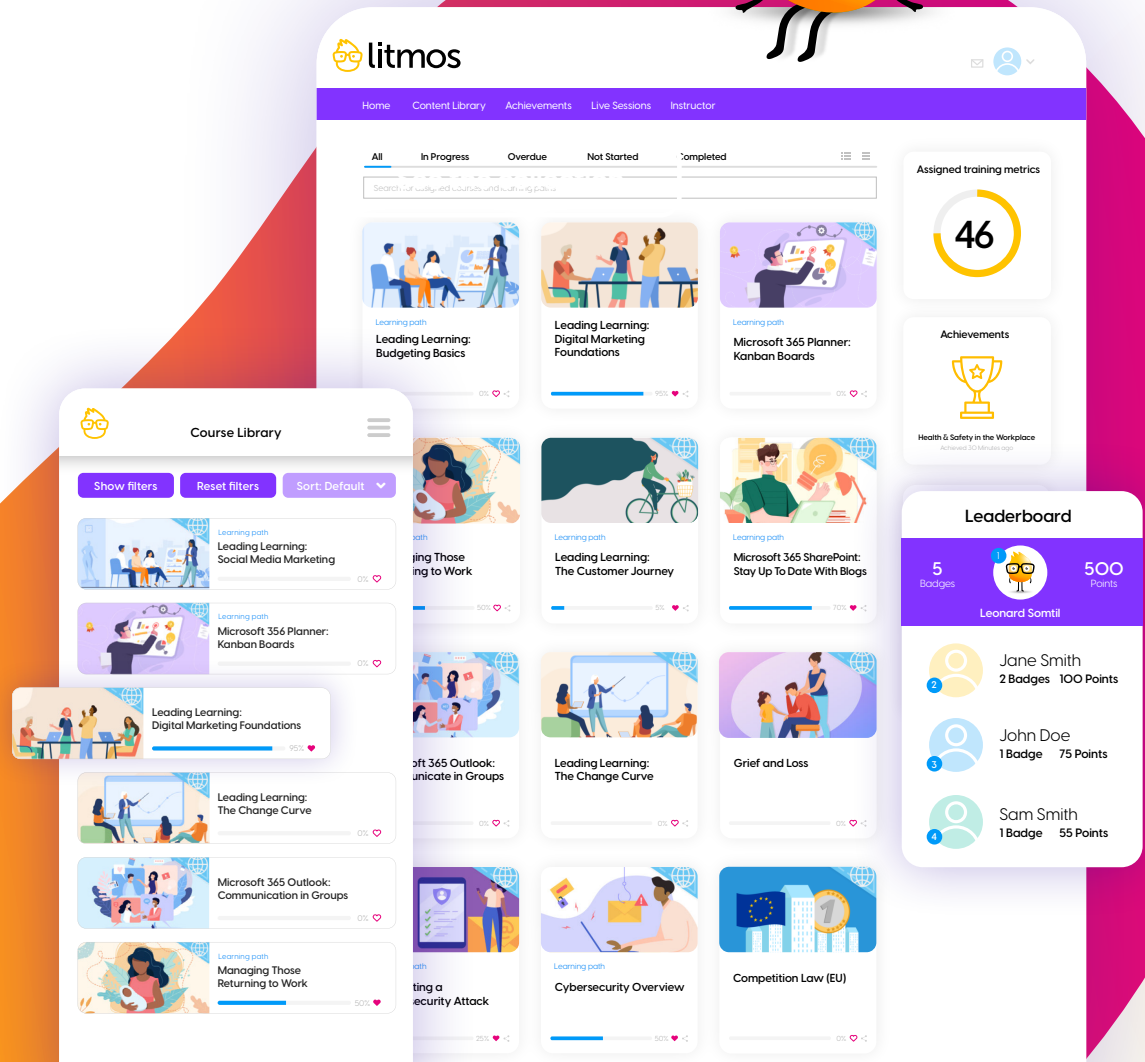
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About this research



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Technical Note

Surveys were administered to 526 recipients for a usable total of 432 respondents. The survey targeted learners (i.e., employees) at predominantly large companies (64% over 1k employees) across a variety of industries. 57% of the sample was female with an average respondent age of 41 years. All statistical analyses were conducted in R v4.1.1.



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