Fundamental Human Needs

Definitions

Our point of view on human dynamics.

Human Dynamics + Work

We are a company that uses design to solve problems for people. As such, humans and their needs are always the starting point.

Our point of view on human dynamics and work is at the heart of an holistic offering of knowledge, tools, products, and services that helps organizations and their design partners envision and realize high-performing workplaces. It is based on the latest understanding of human dynamics, organizations, and the sociology of work. It is about how humans operate and about how humans come together to create value.

Our human dynamics and work point of view addresses how we create prosperity, balancing purpose and profits, balancing individual and organizational needs, and embracing both the physical and the cognitive.

- Our ongoing learning demonstrates compelling connections between our fundamental human needs and the management methods, technology and tools, and places that help us fully realize the concept of a great workplace
- We explore knowledge and insights on humans; our approach is based on the fundamentals of life, not industry.
- Our focus is the sociology of work—how people affect their work environments and how it affects them.
- The view is open and evolving. It is pragmatic and applied. It is generative and global.

We developed our view of the fundamental human needs based on an in-depth review of literature, study, and research from the past 80 years. From among that

substantive body, we arrived at the six needs that we believe are fundamental to all.

Achievement (CLICK HERE for WHITE PAPER)
We strive for excellence and take pride in our accomplishments.

Achievement is strongly associated with a desire to take responsibility, accomplish mastery, and be recognized for reaching high standards of work. It is also closely connected with autonomy and being trusted to perform based on demonstrated competence and contributions. In addition, motivation to achieve is greatest when goals are challenging but attainable.

Achievement is also connected with a desire to be stimulated at work and to have opportunities to grow, learn, and develop. In the literature, work achievement is often related to having goals and is also more correlated with tasks (versus relationships). Achievement is also rooted in social systems and much of the research on achievement emphasizes social systems and contexts that affect achievement—both the motivation to achieve and the ability to achieve.

A sense of achievement correlates with self-esteem, performance, productivity, and retention. It is also typically viewed by academics and researchers as a fundamental personality trait that can be cultivated and developed. Its development is related to the ability to delay gratification and be persistent. Based on research of childhood development, it is thought to be an intrinsic characteristic in children as young as five.

A deeper look at mastery could include a renewed emphasis on mastery, learning, and stimulation. It may also consider the emerging conditions for achievement—created by individuals, groups, and organizations. We can create the conditions more effectively than ever before because we know more about neuroscience and cognition than ever before. This may also be related to group and collective mastery and the connection to group and macro-cognition.

Autonomy (CLICK HERE for WHITE PAPER)
We seek freedom in our actions and decisions.

Autonomy is experienced as the freedom and the opportunity to take responsibility, and make self-determined choices. It is manifested as the latitude we have in terms of what, how, when, where, and with whom work is done.

Autonomy must always be balanced with the needs of a team or organization—and with an individual's accountability to tasks or the group. If the team or organization has too much control and the individual doesn't have enough, depression or disengagement can occur. On the other hand, if individual autonomy overruns team or organizational needs, an individual may be ostracized or otherwise socially punished by the group resulting in reduced effectiveness.

While all cultures value autonomy, cultures define it differently and prioritize it differently in relation to other needs, especially belonging. In addition, all workers need some level of autonomy, but jobs that feature greater requirements for complexity or creativity are those in which it is generally easier to provide autonomy in authentic ways and within the boundary of the task.

Autonomy is correlated with greater passion and creativity. It is also correlated with job satisfaction, commitment, and retention.

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A deeper understanding of autonomy may be about a broadened definition of choice and self-determination. Where previously companies sought to provide autonomy based on work content and task, a broadened definition encompasses where and how and when people choose to work. This is also connected to disruptive employment models in which workers have greater autonomy in choosing companies, projects, and commitments. This broader understanding of autonomy also encompasses shared leadership as some companies take steps to more widely disperse leadership among more members of the team, making way for increasing autonomy among greater proportions of staff within a company.

Belonging (CLICK HERE for WHITE PAPER)
We want a meaningful connection to others.

Belonging is experienced as inclusion, affiliation, acceptance, social validation, and social well-being. It is a feeling that we're in this together, and we share common experiences, struggles, and goals.

We are biologically predisposed to seek belonging because we receive a release of the neurotransmitter oxytocin when we experience it. In addition, we tend to synchronize with others—even to three degrees of separation. In other words, a person's well-being is statistically related to the well-being of people in his network from whom he has as much as three degrees of separation.

Belonging is connected to identity and self-esteem and it is correlated with reduced stress, better health, greater accountability, enhanced engagement, increased retention (vital friends), better productivity, and greater performance.

It is also closely connected to our fundamental needs for purpose and security.

Among our fundamental human needs, belonging (along with purpose) is "first among equals." It is a deep requirement for all humans. An updated understanding of belonging is based on knowledge of just how deeply the need is held and the neuroscience that drives it. We've always known it is important and science is now shedding light on myriad ways that our biology drives us as fundamentally social beings. This deeper understanding of belonging is also related to the study of community, groups, and identities that are derived from and impacted by the collective.

Purpose (CLICK HERE for WHITE PAPER)
We want to make a meaningful difference.

Purpose is experienced as a feeling of meaning in one's work, and the feeling that one's work matters. It is also experienced when we feel we are contributing to something bigger than ourselves. It is a feeling that work is significant. In addition, true purpose is always associated with making a difference for other people.

Purpose is fundamental to all, but it can be experienced at the job level, the career level, or at the vocation level. In order for it to be experienced, it is also important that an individual's values align with those of the organization. Various studies have demonstrated that given the choice, people will prioritize purpose over salary.

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Purpose can be achieved outside of traditional work with positive spillover into the work environment. In addition, the importance that a person places on pursuing her purpose is based on the achievement of lower-order needs such as financial well-being.

Purpose is strongly linked to attendance, engagement, job satisfaction, performance, and longevity. While purpose has always been important, there is a new emphasis on purpose and meaning in work, and it is frequently part of our national dialogue. Among all the fundamental human needs, purpose (and belonging) are "first among equals." Purpose drives people to trade off other choices to accomplish purpose. The new purpose is also holistic. It is not something that is accomplished in one compartment of life, but across the whole—inside and outside of what we traditionally consider "work."

Security
We desire health, safety, familiarity, and competence.

Security includes basic physical safety and job security. It is also about stability, predictable outcomes, and knowing what to expect. As one of our fundamental human needs, it is also defined as adherence to social norms, social predictability, and the feeling we can count on the people and culture around us. In this way, security can be experienced as physical, psychological, social, and emotional. Security is met as a lower order need and it is a "key to entry" for higher order needs such as purpose. The presence or absence of security is tied to fight-or-flight response and an ability to perform. In other words, its absence can inhibit performance. Its absence can also inhibit mental health.

Security is correlated with health, engagement, and performance.

The paradox of a deeper understanding of security is that often the greatest security is derived from flexibility. For example, when employees are most flexible to changing conditions, they actually gain the most security for their future job or career. The name given to this new dynamic of security is "flexicurity," which is in the middle of a continuum between flexibility and security.

Status
We seek recognition for our contributions.

Status is defined as our social or professional standing relative to the group. It is evidence the group values and appreciates us.

Status is most often conferred by the group when people are perceived as competent and selfless. The effects of the group valuing an individual by conferring status are amplified by social connections.

Status is experienced within a community and is associated with pride as well. Status is a fundamental need that all of us possess, and we are predisposed to seek it because when we feel a sense of status, pride, or recognition, we experience a release of a feel-good neurotransmitter, serotonin. At the graduation ceremony, it's not just the graduate who is rewarded with a serotonin release, it is also her family and friends who are sharing the experience. Research shows evidence of this need occurring as early as the teenage years.

Status is experienced based on the group to whom we belong, so the connection to brand, matters. People will sometimes choose to be associated with a company (think attraction, retention, and purchase behavior) based on the status of the company, not just their own status within it.