

Make work meaningful The first and perhaps most important part of employee engagement is job-person fit. Despite these pressures to improve productivity, research shows that when we enrich jobs, giving people more autonomy, decision-making power, time, and support, the company makes more money.¹² Psychologist Daniel Pink writes that people are driven by "autonomy, mastery, and purpose."¹³ Individuals crave work that lets them leave a unique fingerprint on a finished product. Zeynep Ton, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor, in her book *The Good Jobs Strategy* shows that retailers like Whole Foods, Costco, UPS, and Mercadona deliver higher profitability per employee by giving their employees above-average wages and greater control over their jobs.¹⁴ The idea of "lowering the cost of labor" to save money backfires because people simply become less productive as their workload goes up. At Mercadona and Costco, for example, stores are staffed by people cross-trained to handle many positions: They manage cash registers, stock shelves, rearrange the store, develop promotions, and manage others. Fewer than 40 percent of all hiring teams use any form of formal prehire assessment: Most managers look for relevant experience, college credentials, or GPA.¹⁵ While these seem to be sound criteria for success, when organizations study the characteristics of high performers, they find that other "fit factors" actually drive success and happiness on the job.¹⁶ A movie theater company found, for example, that theater employees who drive the highest levels of customer satisfaction and concession sales are not those with good grades or strong academic experience but rather people who "like to have fun" and "love to serve others." An insurance company found that the best salespeople were not those from top schools but rather those who had experience in the auto industry and no typos on their resumes. When we hire people who fit, they perform well, and they love their work.¹⁷ The concept of culture has also become an important part of job fit. Zappos, a company that prides itself on culture as strategy, uses its 10 core values to assess people for cultural fit in the early stages of the application process.¹⁸ By getting to know candidates well (through online and phone meetings) before people even apply for jobs, Zappos can assess fit and help people decide if they should even apply for a job. This type of assessment has helped Zappos maintain a high level of engagement, low turnover, and its place among one of the best customer-service providers in online retail.¹⁹ Research also shows that meaningful work takes place in small teams. Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon.com, is reported to have said that "if there are more than two pizzas in the room for lunch, then the team is too big." The result is both a set of highly empowered teams that have the training and freedom to be both autonomous and productive as well as above-average retention and engagement rates. We need to make sure jobs are meaningful, people have the tools and autonomy to succeed, and that we select the right people for the right job. Small teams feel empowered, they make decisions faster, and the people get to know each other and can lend a hand when one of the teammates needs help.²⁰ Finally, engaged people need time to think, create, and rest. Well-run companies constantly look at the work they do, trying to find ways to outsource more to technology and produce more output with less expensive human input. As we design jobs to be meaningful, we must also carefully select the right person for each job. This is anything but a simple undertaking. Nearly every job has been changed and often transformed by technology, and we constantly look for ways to do more with less.