



## 2015 Workforce Purpose Index

Work orientations of the U.S. workforce and associated predictive indicators of performance and wellbeing.

IMPERATIVE.



NYU

**The most  
valuable  
members of  
the workforce  
are Purpose-  
Oriented.**

28% of the 150 million-member U.S. workforce defines the role of work in their lives primarily as a source of personal fulfillment and a way to help others. These Purpose-Oriented Workers, roughly 42 million strong, not only seek out purpose in their work, they create it and, as a result, outperform the rest of the workforce.

Purpose-Oriented Workers aren't just teachers and social workers. They work and thrive in every industry and role from the accountants at professional services firms to the farmers growing our food to the designers at creative agencies.

The Workforce Purpose Index is the first comprehensive study of Purpose-Oriented Workers across the U.S. workforce. This Index provides the data to support the case that Purpose-Driven Workers are the foundation for successful organizations, a thriving economy, and healthy society overall.

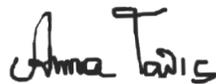
We all have a tremendous opportunity before us to define the success of our workforce by more than low unemployment rates, salaries and engagement, but instead by the number of members who are Purpose-Oriented. Our hope is that these results will enable employers to make decisions that lead to better social and financial outcomes for individuals, organizations, and the overall economy.

Imperative will continue to measure the orientation of the workforce every year until we close the 72% purpose gap in the U.S. workforce. It is our collective measure of progress on the greatest imperative of our time.

Imagine a workforce where Purpose-Oriented Workers are the majority.



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# Executive Summary

## Key Takeaways

- 28% of the workforce is Purpose-Oriented
- Purpose-Oriented Workers are consistently the most valuable workers
- Some industries and roles are much more effective at attracting this talent

Imperative defines work orientation as a psychological predisposition to the role of work in life. It is a stable mindset throughout one's career that transcends a specific job or employer. Workers with the same orientation have similar outcomes in their performance, engagement, expected tenure and other key measures of workplace effectiveness and wellbeing.

Some people see work in their lives as solely a source of income or status. Others are oriented to see work as primarily about purpose – personal fulfillment and helping other people. We categorize people into work orientations based on responses to psychological variables relevant to work.

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### Purpose Performs

Workers with a Purpose-Oriented Orientation are the most valuable and highest potential segment of the workforce regardless of industry or role. On every measure, Purpose-Oriented Workers have better outcomes than their peers: 20% longer expected tenure • 50% more likely to be in leadership positions • 47% more likely to be promoters of their employers • 64% higher levels of fulfillment in their work

In our work with employers, Purpose-Oriented Workers do significantly better in their performance evaluations across industries and roles.

Given the limited number of available Purpose-Oriented Workers, employers that are able to successfully compete for this talent are likely to see substantial gains in the performance and wellbeing of their teams.

### Purpose Gap

It is crucial to understand how to increase the supply of Purpose-Oriented Workers in the market. Their higher performance and wellbeing suggests that increasing their ranks in the workforce will lead to strong economic and social gains.

## US Workforce

# 28%

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### Purpose-Oriented

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The 2015 Workforce Purpose Index is a survey of the U.S. workforce based on a sample of 6,332 working adult respondents, with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of ±1 percentage point.

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## About The Workforce Purpose Index

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Imperative's Workforce Purpose Index is the first study on the state of purpose across the U.S. workforce. We designed it in partnership with NYU to be an annual barometer of the workforce. It was developed to serve as a resource for employers, educators, academics and policymakers to advance our collective efforts to realize the potential of work. Our findings provide a clear business case for purpose as the way to align our priorities and objectives.

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### Methodology and Sample

The Workforce Purpose Index is based on a survey designed to measure the current work orientation of U.S. workers by correlating the results of its nationally representative sample with key indicators of individual success and company performance.

Results for this report are based on a 36-question online survey conducted between August 13, 2015 and August 26, 2015. The survey was completed by a random sample of 6,332 adults employed full-time or part time, aged 18 or older, living in the United States. Our survey participants represent a wide range of industries, age groups, occupational levels, educational levels, and income levels. For results based on the total sample of employees, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1$  percentage point at the 95% confidence level, with proper weighting applied.

### AUTHORS

#### IMPERATIVE.

Aaron Hurst is the co-founder and CEO of Imperative, founder of the Taproot Foundation and author of *The Purpose Economy*. He is a passionate advocate for Purpose-Oriented Workers and their potential as change agents in organizations, cities and the economy.

Imperative is a B Corp advocating for Purpose-Oriented Workers and supporting organizations that embrace them. We believe they together have the power to transform the economy and society.



Imperative has created this report in collaborative partnership with Dr. Anna Tavis, adjunct professor at the School of Professional Studies, New York University. She has also served as a professor at Williams College and Fairfield University, and held a post-doctorate fellowship at Columbia University. Previously, she held senior positions in organizational development at companies across various industries throughout the globe including Motorola, Nokia, AIG, and United Technologies.

# Work Orientation

## **Definition**

“Work orientation” is the term coined by psychologists to describe the approach that people take to their work throughout their career, regardless of their particular job. It is the way a person sees the role of work in their life.

Research has shown that we are wired to see work in one of two ways – being primarily about personal fulfillment and serving others or about status, advancement, and income.

People consistently identify one of these work orientations as their predominant view of work.

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## Work Orientation Is Stable

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Work orientation cannot be explained by demographic factors like socio-economic status, age, gender or race, nor by environmental factors such as income, job-level or role. Two people in the same role in the same company with the same demographic profile can have distinctly different work orientations.

Work orientation is a consistent variable in a person's career. If they begin their career Purpose-Oriented, they will likely remain so through retirement. It is a trait, not a state.

This means that someone is Purpose-Oriented, not just in a moment in time or in a specific situation. It isn't dependent on their job, manager or company. It is core to who they are.

Unlike measures such as employee engagement, work orientation is a predictor of future behavior and performance, since it is stable and less dependent on external variables. Because of this stability, work orientation is a valuable measure for individuals, organizations and the entire workforce.

### ROOTS OF WORK ORIENTATION

The concept of work orientation was first researched by Amy Wrzesniewski, Clark McCauley, Paul Rozin, and Barry Schwartz in their paper, "Jobs, Careers, and Callings: People's Relations to Their Work." Their research identified the presence of work orientations.

Imperative has been studying work orientations at leading employers across industries to understand how they impact organizations.

### WORK ORIENTATION VS. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Gallup defines engaged employees as those who are involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and workplace.

Many companies rely on this measurement framework with the assumption that our workplace environment is the variable that matters. They assume that employee engagement is closely linked to what employers provide in terms of resources, clear vision, feedback, incentives - and not the work orientation that their employees bring to the table.

Work orientation research suggests engagement may have more to do with who is hired rather than their work environment or job function.

In 2015, **28%** of the 150 million member U.S. workforce is Purpose-Oriented. These 42 million people work in diverse roles and industries from baristas to Fortune 100 CEOs.

The remaining **72%** of the workforce define work around financial gain or achieving social status and advancement. This is an estimated 108 million people. They are focused on extrinsic rewards and have a more transactional relationship with work. They see work as a means to an end versus an end in itself.

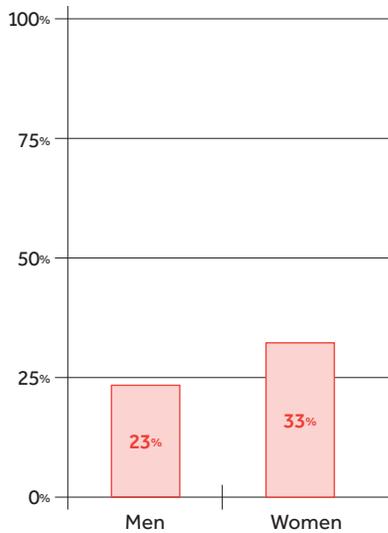


The orientation of the workforce is a core indicator of its performance and wellbeing both today and as long as those people remain working.

# Work Orientation Supports All Types of Workers

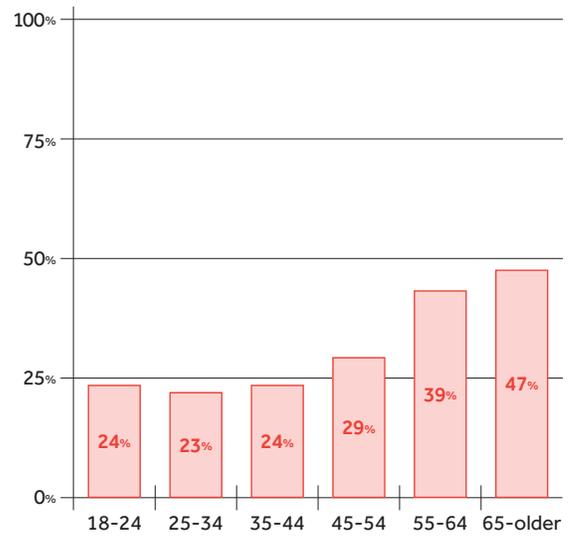
Work orientation provides a measure of the workforce that is not biased against traditionally marginalized members of the workforce. Women and people over 55 are more likely to be Purpose-Oriented Workers. Income (see page 21) and race have little to no bearing on whether someone is Purpose-Oriented.

Purpose Orientation by Gender ■ % Purpose Oriented



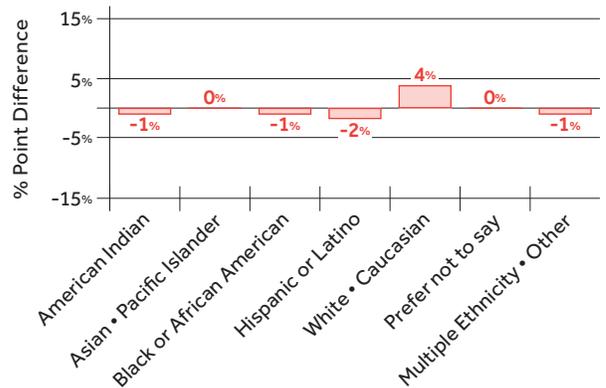
Although the chart above shows a moderate difference in work orientation by gender, that difference becomes smaller (but still significant) when controlling for other variables.

Purpose Orientation by Age ■ % Purpose Oriented



Although the chart above shows a moderate difference in work orientation by age, that difference becomes smaller (but still significant) when controlling for other variables.

Purpose Orientation by Race/Ethnicity ■ % Purpose Oriented



Although the chart above shows a moderate difference in work orientation by race, that difference becomes trivial when controlling for other variables.

# Purpose- Oriented Workers at Work

## **Key Takeaway**

Purpose-Oriented Workers show up at work in a big way. They thrive as employees and human beings at significantly higher levels in every measure.



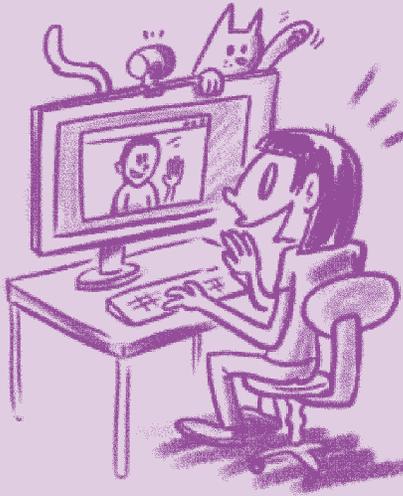
The roughly 42 million people in the U.S. workforce who are Purpose-Oriented approach work as a way to gain personal fulfillment and help others, regardless of their job.

## Relative Performance

To assess Purpose-Oriented Workers relative to their peers, we worked with a diverse range of employers including LinkedIn, West Elm, the YWCA of Greater Chicago, and others to help define employee outcomes and attributes that were associated with both the employee's personal success and the organization's.

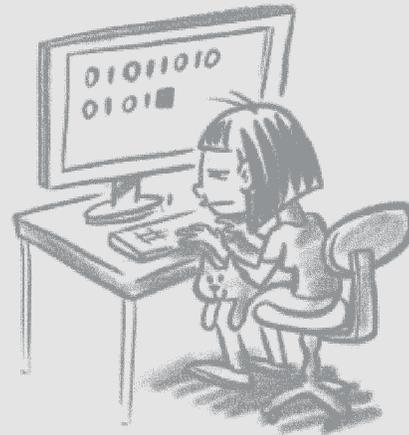
In conducting these workplace index studies and correlating findings with performance data, Imperative found that Purpose-Oriented Workers consistently outperform their peers across all key indicators. This same pattern held true in the Workforce Purpose Index across demographics, roles, and industries.

### Purpose Oriented Workers



- More likely to be leaders
- Are dynamic, curious and self-advocates
- Experience their work as making an impact
- Grow personally and professionally at work

### Non-Purpose Oriented Workers

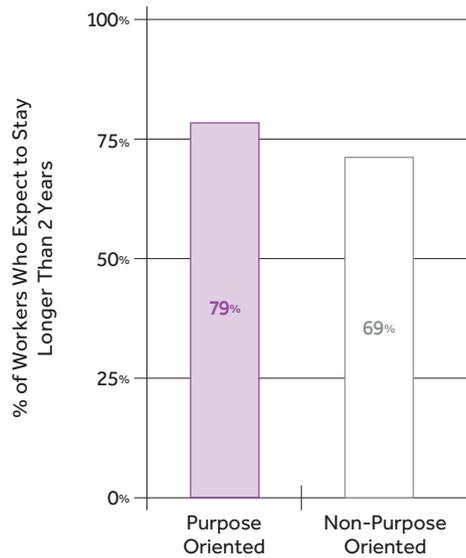


- Expect to leave their job sooner
- Speak poorly of their employers
- Gain less from their work
- Lack deep relationships at work

## Purpose-Oriented Workers Have Longer Expected Tenure

Purpose-Oriented Workers expect to stay in organizations longer than their peers. Tenure is a critical measure for the workforce as it relates to both the costs of turnover to employers as well as job satisfaction.

Expected Tenure by Work Orientation

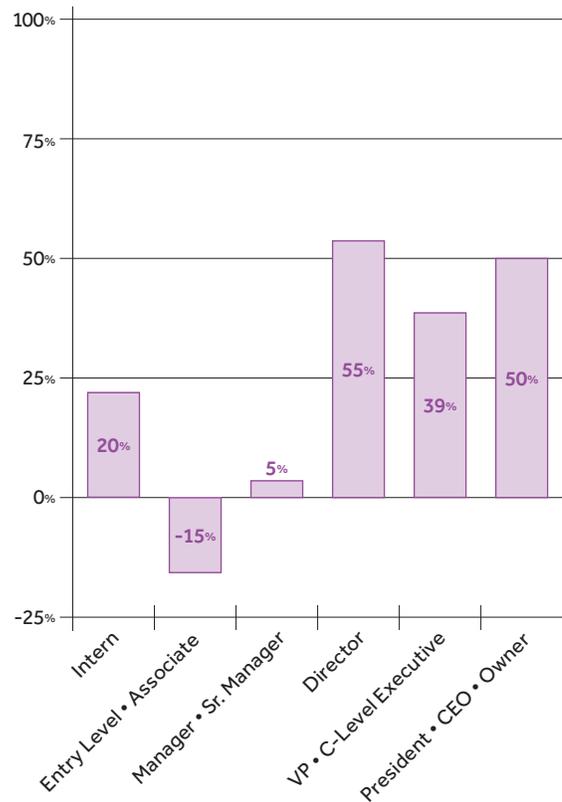


**Purpose-Oriented Workers are 50% more likely to be in the top position in their organization.**

## Purpose-Oriented Workers Are More Likely to Be Leaders

Purpose-Oriented Workers were 55% more likely to hold Director positions, 39% more likely to hold Vice President or C-Level positions, and 50% more likely to be in the top position in their organization. Even when controlling for other factors, Purpose-Oriented Workers were more likely to be in leadership roles than their peers.

Percentage Difference between Purpose-Oriented and Non Purpose Oriented Workers by Occupational Level



## Purpose-Oriented Workers Are Ambassadors

Purpose-Oriented Workers are significantly more likely to recommend their employers to others than their peers. These workers are ambassadors for their organizations, generating high employee net promoter scores (eNPS).

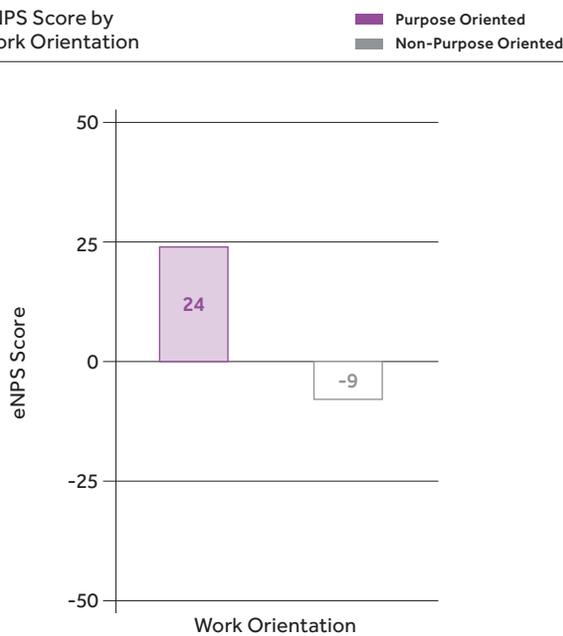
In contrast, Non-Purpose-Oriented Workers were much more likely to be detractors (41%) than Purpose-Oriented Workers (23%). Employees who are detractors may be actively hurting the organization’s reputation.

As high eNPS scores are correlated with high performance, retention, and brand reputation, Purpose-Oriented Workers are more likely to provide high value to their employers.

## EMPLOYEE NET PROMOTER SCORE

Leading employers use Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) to measure the state of their workforce. eNPS is a simple metric that identifies whether employees are Promoters, Detractors or Passives when it comes to recommending their organization as a great place to work.

eNPS Score by Work Orientation

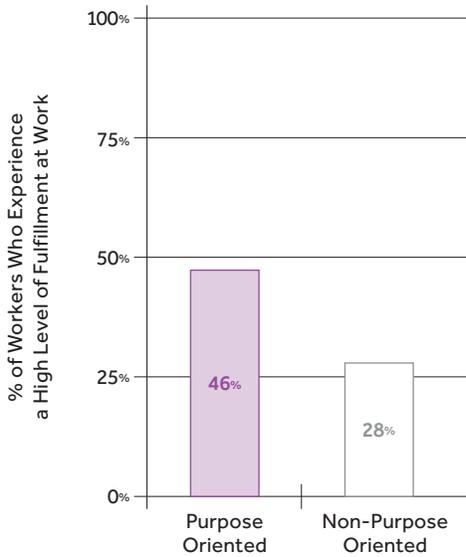


### Purpose-Oriented Workers Experience More Meaning at Work

Purpose-Oriented Workers see work as a source of meaning and fulfillment. They actively seek to create meaning even when they do not inherently experience it in their job. They were 65% more likely to experience a high level of fulfillment in their work.

Purpose-Oriented Workers experience these sources of meaning at much greater levels than their colleagues in the exact same role and industries.

Level of Fulfillment by Work Orientation



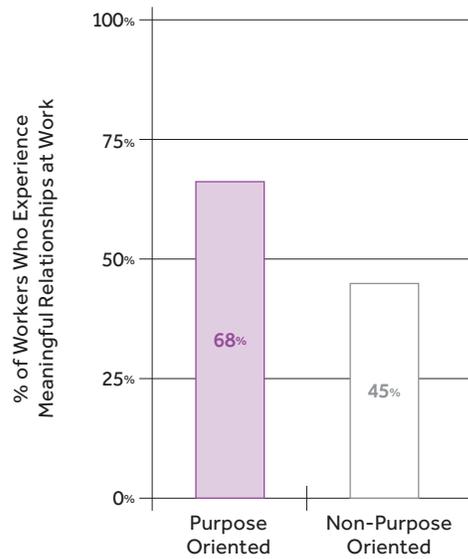
#### LEVEL OF FULFILLMENT

At any given point in time, workers experience a level of meaning or fulfillment from their work. It is a combination of how they are currently feeling about their relationships, impact, and personal growth.

### Purpose-Oriented Workers Have Stronger Relationships

Purpose-Oriented Workers reported having more meaningful relationships at work with coworkers, customers, and clients. They actively foster powerful bonds with their colleagues.

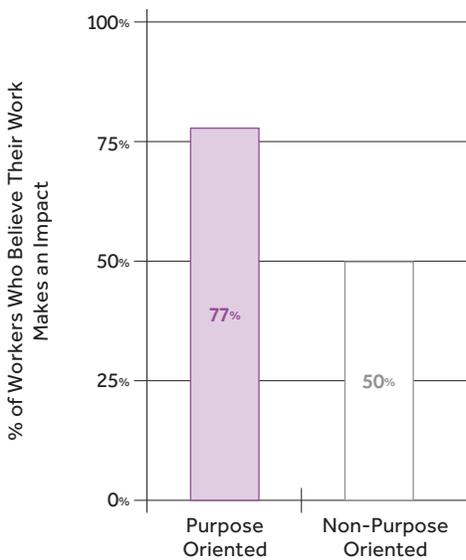
Relationships by Work Orientation



### Purpose-Oriented Workers Believe Their Work Makes an Impact

Purpose-Oriented Workers feel they make a more meaningful impact through their work than their colleagues feel. We found that they experience a sense of impact in the same work that their colleagues report lacks impact.

Impact by Work Orientation

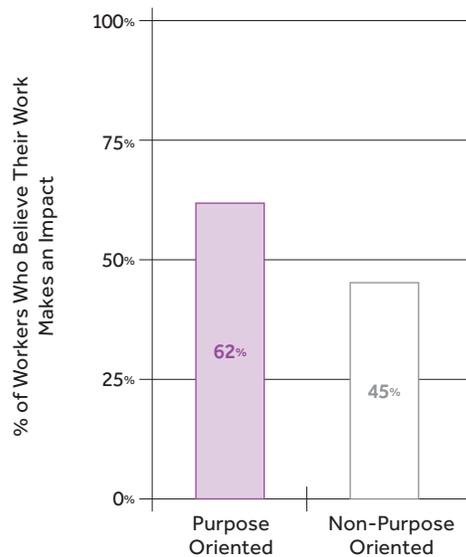


### Purpose-Oriented Workers are More Likely to Grow

Regardless of the job or industry, Purpose-Oriented Workers report experiencing greater personal and professional growth in their work. Unlike their colleagues, they more consistently seek out and recognize opportunities for growth.

They are significantly more likely than their peers to speak up for themselves at work, embrace changing dynamics, and proactively improve themselves professionally. These competencies are the foundation of how they achieve personal and professional growth.

Growth by Work Orientation



# Purpose-Oriented Worker Distribution

## **Key Takeaways**

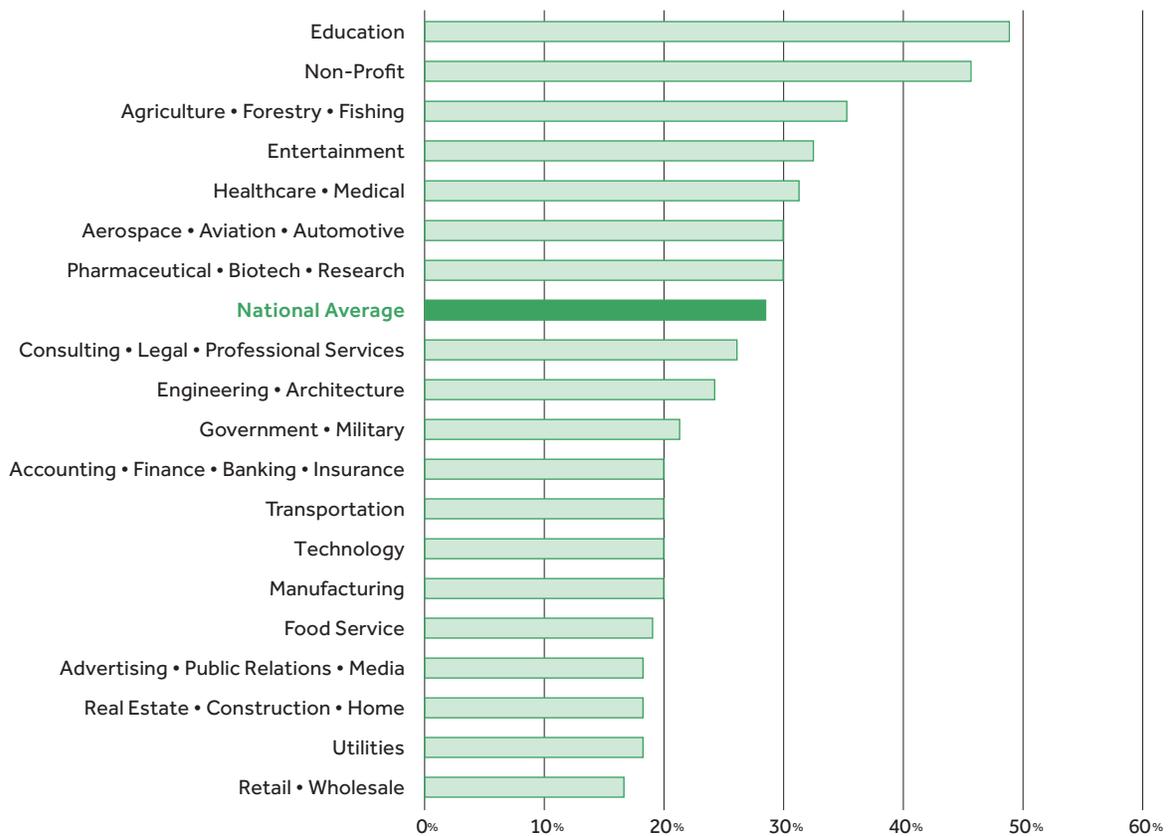
Purpose-Oriented Workers exist and can thrive in all roles and industries. However, certain industries and roles attract and foster Purpose-Oriented Workers significantly more than others.

# Purpose-Oriented Workers Exist Across Industries

Every industry has at least 16% Purpose-Oriented Workers and no industry polled has more than 48%. The largest percentage of Purpose-Oriented Workers is in education and nonprofits but they are also found in large numbers in agriculture, biotech, health-care, entertainment and research/science. They are less common in accounting, advertising, business services, finance/banking, food service, retail, and transportation.

## Purpose Orientation by Industry

■ % Purpose-Oriented Workers

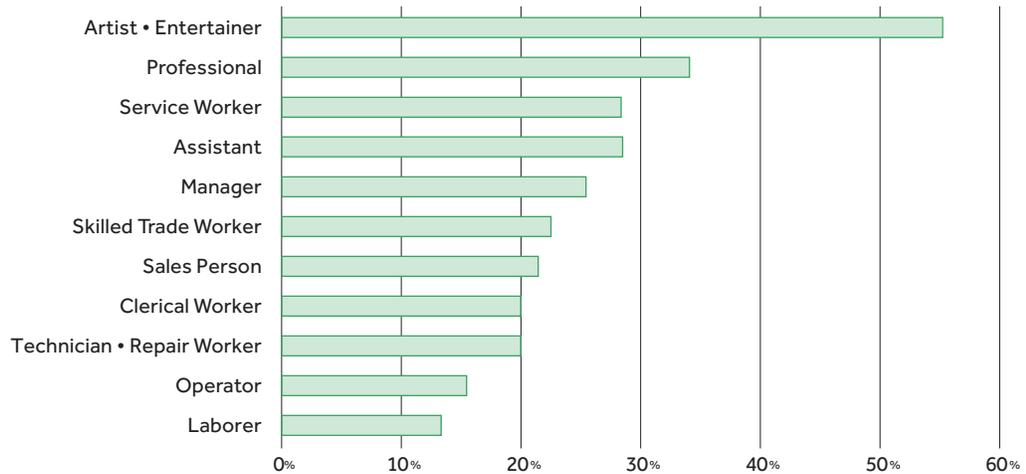


## Purpose-Oriented Workers and Job Types

Every job type studied has at least 13% Purpose-Oriented Workers and no job type has more than 55%. Of the job types we examined, the largest percentage of Purpose-Oriented Workers are artists and entertainers, professionals, and service workers. The lowest percentage is laborers, operators, and repair workers.

### Purpose Orientation by Job Type

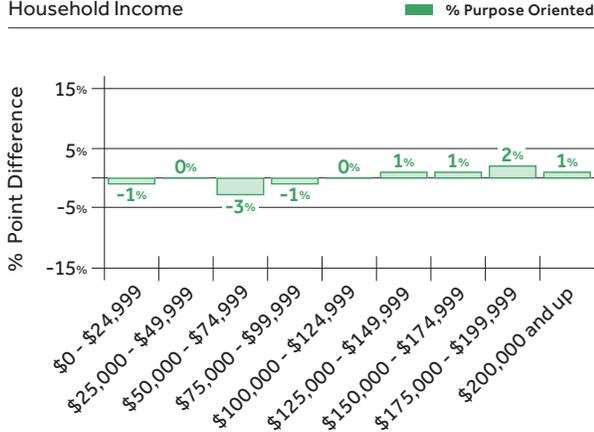
■ % Purpose-Oriented Workers



### Income and Purpose-Orientation

Purpose-Oriented Workers are paid the same as their peers. They were equally represented across all income brackets when compared to those who define work as being about financial reward or advancement. While they gain more fulfillment from their work by being Purpose-Oriented, they as a whole don't make a financial sacrifice.

Purpose Orientation by Household Income

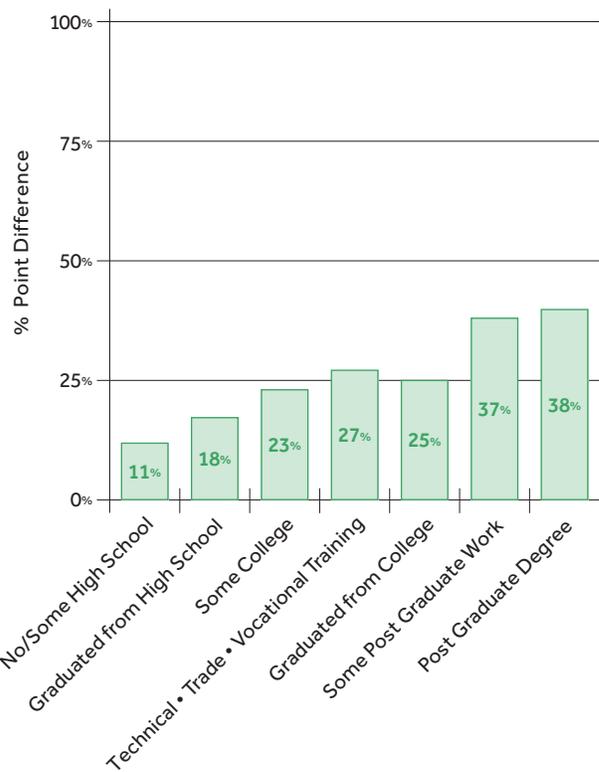


**Purpose-Oriented Workers don't make less money than their peers who are money-oriented.**

### Purpose-Oriented Workers are Better Educated

Controlled for income and age, Purpose-Oriented Workers were still more likely to be more highly educated than their peers. They were less likely to have only earned a high school diploma and more likely to have advanced degrees.

Purpose Orientation by Education Level



# Implications

## **Key Takeaways**

It is a social and economic imperative that we find ways to increase the percentage of the workforce that is Purpose-Oriented. In the interim, the employers that attract and empower this exceptional talent will have a significant competitive advantage.

**NEW GOAL POST FOR EDUCATION**

Given the importance of work orientation, our educational system should explore the role it can play in better preparing students to see work as a source of fulfillment in their lives. We need to measure and hold our educators, schools, and policymakers, accountable for the percentage of graduates who have a Purpose-Orientation to work. They must ensure students have the competencies to be able to build a career around the three sources of fulfillment: relationships, impact and growth.



**OPTIMIZE THE TALENT MARKETPLACE FOR PURPOSE-ORIENTED WORKERS**

We can create a more human and transparent job marketplace for Purpose-Oriented Workers. They should be able to make informed decisions about employment based on their likelihood to thrive at an organization and a given position. The stronger the demand for this talent the more pressure it will put on our organizations and society to design new systems with these workers in mind.




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# Pathways to Boosting Purpose in the Workforce

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**SHIFTING WORK ORIENTATION**

We have the opportunity to radically improve the wellbeing and performance of our workforce by helping develop more Purpose-Oriented Workers. In order to do so, we must not only enlist the support of employers, but parents, educators, and policymakers as well.



**PARENTS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN MODELING WORK ORIENTATION**

Research shows a strong connection between an individual's work orientation and the perception they had of their parents' orientation to work (Dekas, 2014). Those who perceived that their parents had a healthy orientation to work tended to follow suit. How we talk to our children about work may have a large impact on how they view work for the rest of their lives.



Findings show that developing Purpose-Oriented Workers is only part of the equation. Building organizations that empower people to embrace purpose orientations drives organizational success, engages communities and boosts the economy.

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## Purpose Employers

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Purpose Employers are organizations that attract and empower Purpose-Oriented Workers at significantly greater levels than their peer organizations.

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### Hire With Purpose

With the clear benefits of hiring Purpose-Oriented Workers and the limited supply of them in the workforce, there is a new war for talent – Purpose-Oriented talent. Employers should be looking to optimize their recruiting to attract these workers.

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### Promote on Purpose

High potential employees are Purpose-Oriented. They have the competencies that employers seek in high potential programs. Purpose Employers promote leaders who can attract and inspire other Purpose-Oriented Workers by example.

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### Replace Employee Engagement with Meaning-Making Measures and Approaches

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Employee engagement, the current measurement standard, begins with the assumption that work is something undesirable that a company has to “make” engaging through incentives or perks. The belief that work is inherently unpleasant has created a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Employers can better align with a healthy approach to work by measuring the level of fulfillment their teams expe-

rience and defining it as a partnership with them. It isn't something done to or for them. Employers should measure Level of Fulfillment (relationships, impact and growth) and use it to broker partnerships with each employee.



## Ongoing Research

There is some evidence about what creates someone's orientation to work. We also know that given the change in the orientation of people later in their lives, it is possible to change, even if not common. Further research on both topics would reveal critical strategies for the field. It is imperative that we come to deeply understand this process so we can begin to optimize our systems and society to boost the wellbeing of people and the performance of our workforce. It will also allow people the potential to fundamentally alter their work orientation towards meaning and fulfillment.

In the annual index, we will continue to track our collective progress in transforming the workforce and workplace and also look to further understand the path of Purpose-Oriented Workers.

# Recommended Next Steps

## For Employers

- Understand and celebrate the value of Purpose-Oriented members of your team
- Transform your recruiting to compete for Purpose-Oriented Workers
- Empower your employees to tailor their work to build strong relationships, make a meaningful impact, and grow personally and professionally

## For Purpose-Oriented Workers

- Understand your purpose drivers
- Tailor your job and career to optimize for strong relationships, making an impact and growing personally
- Be a role model and share the power of work in your life

## For Parents

- Talk about your work as being a source of fulfillment in your life
- Show your kids how you build relationships, make an impact, and grow through your work
- Find a moment everyday to practice and share gratitude and empathy for others

**For Managers**

- Understand what brings daily fulfillment to everyone on your team
- Model and share how you gain fulfillment at work
- Help each member of your team tailor their work to strengthen their relationships, increase their impact and grow

**For Educators**

- Be clear about the incredible value of work as a source of fulfillment when you talk about careers
- Help cultivate gratitude and empathy in students
- Empower students to explore the role of work in the lives of people they know

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Thank you.

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