

How can we measure the quality of work?

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The Taylor Review into modern employment practices has called for a new focus on the quality of work. Tania Coke, a senior mediation consultant at Consensio, explores how this can be measured and why work can be humanised to balance the trend in automation.

The Taylor Review into modern employment practices makes a bold proposal: there should, Taylor writes, be a government minister responsible for measuring and improving people's experience of work. At a time when many fear that automation and globalisation are de-humanising the nature of work, this proposal is very timely.

And it raises a big question: how should we measure the quality of work?

If one of our goals is to humanise the working experience, we should design a framework that encompasses different dimensions of our humanity. Then we can measure work according to how far it challenges and fulfils workers across each of those dimensions.

The intellectual dimension would be an obvious starting point. This is already a criterion that many graduates apply when choosing a job: they want work that will stimulate and hone their intellectual faculties. Then there is the emotional dimension.

Many people seek fulfilment in their work through expressing themselves and relating to others emotionally. There is another dimension which is often overlooked in the corporate environment: the physical.

Is the work stimulating and fulfilling us on a sensory and corporeal level? I doubt many office workers would answer yes, but must that be so? Could it be possible to engage and develop all three dimensions in our working lives?

Consider a task common to many office jobs: giving a presentation. The task can be intellectually fulfilling: it's an opportunity to apply logic in building a compelling argument. It can also be emotionally fulfilling: we can for instance draw on intuition and compassion in responding to the audience's questions.

It can also be physically fulfilling: we can pay attention to the visual aesthetic of the slides; we can vary the rhythm and pitch of the voice for greater impact; we can physicalise our ideas through gesture and movement.

Corporate culture tends to favour the intellectual over the emotional, and certainly over the physical dimensions. But what if we were to give importance to all three? Not every job need be equally fulfilling in all three dimensions but there could be a baseline requirement in all three.

If so, might we be able to create a healthier and more stimulating experience for tomorrow's workforce?