

People
as Workers
in the Image
of God

Opportunities to
Promote Flourishing

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Christian leaders and managers, in light of and in response to God’s common grace, are capable of building organizational practices that foster employee engagement and promote human flourishing. In this article, we examine what it means for humans to be created in the image of God and therefore to be made to work and to use their unique gifts and strengths in such efforts. We will argue that it is precisely this constructive function of God’s common grace that is the key not only to individual-level flourishing but also to organizational-level and societal-level flourishing as well.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace. (1 Peter 4:10 ESV)

Community provides us an arena to exercise our gifts to build up others, but also through doing that helps us discover who we are, what our giftings are and what God would have us to do with our lives. —Cherie Harder¹

Introduction

Many people spend much of their lives working in businesses. For Christians who study businesses and those who lead and manage in them, there are compelling reasons not only to understand employee effectiveness within organizations but also how business practices affect the flourishing of people created in the image of God. Employee engagement is one crucial factor in employee effectiveness that has recently gained significant attention by both practitioners and academics.

There is growing evidence from both the academic and the business communities that lack of employee engagement is simply bad for business. In this article, we examine the role and effect of employee engagement on human flourishing as we investigate the extent to which God's common grace may be evident. We begin by describing theologically the nature of human flourishing and showing its connection with the constructive function of common grace. We then provide a brief background on the changing nature of human resource management (HRM) over the past century before considering the effect of employee engagement in the workplace from both organizational and theological perspectives. Finally, this article develops a case for the identification, leveraging, and development of character strengths that increase engagement and, in turn, improve both organizational performance and stakeholder flourishing. Figure 1 provides a simple overview of the topics. We conclude by discussing the implications and limitations of these perspectives.

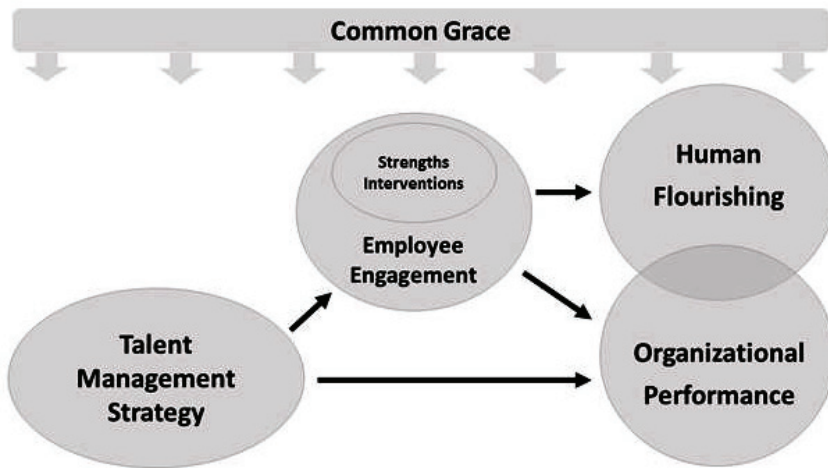


Figure 1

Human Flourishing and Common Grace

What is human flourishing? One answer to this question is to look at God's purpose for our living. The Westminster Shorter Catechism² notes as its first question and answer:

Quest. 1. What is the chief end of man?

Ans. 1. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

All creatures glorify God, simply by virtue of their having been made by him. However, only people can know him and experience the indescribable joy and pleasure that the relationship entails (Ps. 16:11). We enter into the knowledge of God by trusting in Jesus Christ who gives us eternal life according to the will of the Father. In short, it is our distinctly human privilege and calling, as the image bearers of God, to know God and to enjoy and glorify him forever.

Human flourishing is possible because of God's great love for his creation and, in particular, for his people. God has put a spark of divinity in each of us, and he has made known his will in Scripture and elsewhere so that by careful study and diligent labor we can do our work in a way that helps to fulfill God's purposes for his creation (cf. Eccl. 1:13; 3:11). Our work is one vital way that we can fulfill God's purpose for our lives (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31–11:1). Most often in our culture we think of our work as a means to an end.³ From this perspective, work is what we "do" so we can acquire more possessions and be "successful." This cultural perspective reinforces the false belief that work is all about us—our needs, our dreams, and our happiness. If we view work from God's perspective, we see that we have been created to work and this work energizes and supports our purpose. In this sense, work is much more than a product, a service, or an outcome. Work is a gift from God who loves us. God has given us the work we do (cf. Eccl. 3:9–12), and he intends that we should find our work satisfying and enjoyable. Stephen Grabill provides the following commentary in his introduction to Lester DeKoster's *Work*:

Evangelicals have always had an implicit sense that work is good because it carries out the cultural mandate, but rarely, if ever, have they thought of work as one of the core elements of discipleship and spiritual formation. In fact, one of the most pressing needs among evangelicals today is to revive a commitment to whole-life discipleship. Christianity is about so much more than what happens for an hour or two on Sunday morning; it's a way of life and it affects every area of our lives, including our working life.⁴

Thus people can only experience the true joy and satisfaction of work when we receive salvation with gratitude and see its fruit as one way to carry out the purposes of God.

The creation account in Genesis 1–2 provides important context for our lives and for understanding this primary purpose. Van Duzer summarizes these main points:

God created the world and everything in it. It belongs to God. As part of this creation, God created men and women and endowed them with a unique dignity. They alone were created in God's image, designed from the beginning to reflect God's glory. They were created for relationship, with one another and with God. They were created as diverse creatures with differences that complemented each other and delighted God. They were called to work as co-creators with God, to steward the creation. God intended that men and women would take the raw materials that had been provided and, in partnership with God, help to grow and construct the kingdom here on earth.⁵

This creation mandate in Genesis highlights that our primary calling is to glorify God. Created in the *imago Dei*, or in "God's image," our lives are intended to reflect or reveal the divine glory—God's essence and character. Van Duzer also highlights several specific ways our lives are to be lived that will lead to flourishing.⁶ We reflect God's glory through

- nurturing our relationships with God and with one another;
- engaging in the work we have been called to undertake (i.e., meaningful work that engages our creativity, reflects our diversity, and grows out of and gives back to the community); and
- accomplishing God's purposes on earth through our work.

Together, these activities that define our work allow individual and communal flourishing as God intended. In terms of organizational and societal flourishing, work plays an important part in restoring the broken family of humankind. Work was designed to be good. It is our service to others that provides meaning for our lives and that is the primary form in which we make ourselves useful to others—and thus to God.⁷ God accomplishes his purposes in the world by equipping us with unique talents, skills, and abilities that he expects us to use in service to others. Through work that serves others, we also serve God, and he in exchange weaves the work of others into a culture that makes our work easier and more rewarding.⁸

From the beginning, God's intent was that created human beings would be his subordinate partners in the work of bringing his creation to fulfillment. It is not in humans' designed nature to be satisfied with things as they are, to receive provision for their needs without working, to endure idleness for long, to toil in a system of noncreative oppression, or to work in social isolation. Humans are made to be creative, and God meets human needs and preserves social order through these capabilities. God intends all to use their individuality and creativity to provide for themselves and others.

The creation mandate applies to all humans, whether or not they are followers of Jesus Christ. Common grace is the grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings, but it is different from saving grace. The word *common* here means something that is common to all people and is not restricted to only believers or the elect.⁹ Common grace, as Abraham Kuyper conceived it, is a theology of public responsibility and cultural engagement, rooted in Christians' shared humanity with the rest of the world. As a result of the fall, the image of God has been marred in believers and nonbelievers alike. God's common grace allows all humans to continue to engage the task of culture-making that he mandated prior to the fall. God restrains human sin so that while people are fallen and sin ultimately affects every area of life, they are not completely bad nor as bad as they could be. Further, human beings have been given natural talents, gifts and strengths, and the ability to develop and cultivate these. Together these elements allow both followers of Christ and those who are not to do civic good. God provides his grace so that all are nevertheless equipped to fulfill the mandate set for them and to work toward right ordering and human flourishing. Mouw concludes his essay on culture and common grace with the following statement on *imago Dei* and our response:

“all the words” God has spoken to us include also words of compassion for human beings who live in rebellion against the divine ordinances. In Calvinist thought, the need for exercising this compassion has been grounded in a strong theological emphasis on the fact that all human beings are created in the divine image. At their best, Calvinists have insisted that God himself continues to cherish that which he has created, even when that created reality has become deeply distorted by sin.... If God's deep love for humanity persists even despite the effects of sin, then, the theology of common grace is an important resource for our efforts as Christians to respect and reflect that love.¹⁰

In summary, human flourishing, work, and common grace flow together because all humans are made to be creators, work matters to God, and work contributes to God's purpose for our lives and our flourishing. We see evidence of

this in several ways. Work provides opportunities to create and cultivate trusting and interdependent relationships. It sustains opportunities to discern and refine God-given virtues (e.g., justice, creativity, humility) that reflect his nature and character. Work fosters opportunities to offer our unique identities and callings to God and to the world for the sustainable maintenance of the ecological and social order.¹¹ Our dedication of work to God gives meaning in our lives. Work provides for our individual needs, family needs, community needs, and even the privilege to provide for other's needs. In fact, the fruit of our labor is meant for the needs and desires of others (Phil. 2:3–4).

The Shifting View of Human Resources

The field of business that most closely engages these topics of human work and flourishing in organizations is human resource management (HRM). After a brief review of the shifting view of human resources over the past century, we will first highlight the problem of low employee engagement and then focus on the opportunities associated with improving employee engagement at work as associated with the identification and cultivation of character strengths.

Business leaders' understanding of the role and purpose of human resources has shifted dramatically over the past 120 years. This has come about in part due to changes in the economy and in organizations. Over this period, there has been a significant shift from goods-producing economies to service-producing economies.¹² As a result, the way companies are valued has begun to transition from valuations based primarily on their physical assets, such as machinery, technology, and facilities, to assessments of their intangible assets, especially their people. Figure 2 highlights transitions and the changing view of people as workers.

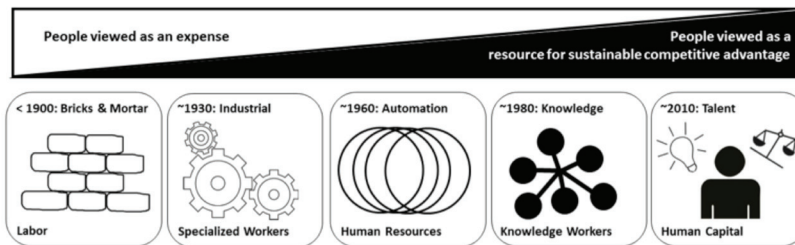


Figure 2

Throughout this history, every era had a beginning, a middle, and an end. While transitions occurred at different times across various industries and geographies, it is the transitions themselves that are particularly challenging. Companies that do not prepare or respond to transitions find themselves struggling.¹³

The most recent transition has moved us into what is frequently called the age of talent. The foundations of this age can be traced to research done in the late 1990s by McKinsey and that was detailed by Michaels, Handfield-Jones, and Axelrod in their book *The War for Talent*.¹⁴ The current age of talent requires an increased focus on people in the organization. People are viewed, treated, and developed as resources that can increase in value over time. These considerations are often referenced as talent management. This age has an increased recognition that people vary greatly in their knowledge, skills, abilities, values, and virtues. Thus hiring, placing, developing, rewarding, and retaining specific talent is central to competitive advantage. An effective talent management strategy connects with business strategy and influences business results. Additionally, the current age is marked by the changing bases of competition in more markets that morph more quickly. In this case, the keys to survival (or domination) are (1) dynamic capabilities that adapt firm resource configurations more quickly and effectively than the competition,¹⁵ and (2) the forging of close stakeholder relationships through outstanding responsiveness (e.g., great service, great community citizenship, and great relationship-based purchasing) that thereby absorbs complexity. Both are facilitated by talent—making talent an organizational resource that generates competitive advantage across a wide range of industries and geographies.¹⁶

Unfortunately, many organizations still fail to recognize the value and importance of their talent. Recent data suggest that one quarter of US employees have been with their company less than a year.¹⁷ In most organizations, it takes the employee at least this long to become fully functional and to make productive contributions. According to the same data, more than half of US employees have been with their organizations less than five years. It can often take this long for employees to obtain meaningful experiences with the organization, its customers, and the products. Businesses recognize that high levels of employee turnover and churn are difficult and expensive for organizations. However, the quiet killer of an organization's competitive advantage is lack of employee engagement. Generally, employee engagement refers to an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for their work.¹⁸ Employee engagement is part of employee retention and integrates the classic constructs of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

As we have transitioned into the age of talent, it is clear that companies that truly understand and engage their employees will be best positioned to compete, innovate, and succeed.¹⁹ Yet in the United States, Gallup reports that just 30 percent of employees feel engaged and inspired at work.²⁰ At the other end of the spectrum are roughly 20 percent of American employees who are actively disengaged, which is estimated to cost \$450 to \$550 billion annually. According

to Gallup, actively disengaged employees are unhappy and unproductive at work and are liable to spread negativity to coworkers. The other 50 percent are only present but not inspired by their work or their managers. Around the world, across 142 countries, the proportion of employees who feel engaged at work is just 13 percent. The impact of a lack of engagement on individuals is severe. For most employees, work is a depleting, dispiriting experience, and, in some obvious ways, it is getting worse.²¹

Several factors contribute to this problem. For example, demand for employees' time is increasingly exceeding capacity. Increased competition for jobs in a leaner, postrecession workforce has reduced employment opportunities and has caused employees to remain at their current jobs even when their engagement is low. Further, the rise of digital technologies also exacerbates the current problems with low engagement. They expose us to increased amounts of information and requests that we feel compelled to read and respond to at all hours of the day, every day of the year.

The impact of engaged employees on organizational outcomes is equally striking. Gallup reports that the top 25 percent most-engaged teams in any workplace will have nearly 50 percent fewer accidents and have 41 percent fewer quality defects.²² Teams in the top 25 percent incur far fewer healthcare costs as well. Gallup also reports that the 30 percent of employees that are engaged come up with most of the innovative ideas, create most of a company's new customers, and have the most entrepreneurial energy. Engaging their employees must be a priority for organizations.²³

Christians value the creative gifts of others. We have a responsibility to better leverage social science research in order to steward our organizational responsibilities. However, we must reject the perspective that views God's prized creation—people—primarily as organizational capital or property that provide a return on investment. Humans are not merely capital.

Thus far, we conclude that we are all created in the image of God as creators and workers, and our work matters and is important to God. Because of his common grace, believers and unbelievers alike can contribute to human flourishing. Yet rather than organizational and personal flourishing, far too many of us find ourselves with the dilemma of diminishing employee engagement and productivity.

Employee Engagement and Character Strengths

For decades, managers believed that employees who were satisfied with their jobs would be highly motivated and perform well. Yet in their meta-analysis investigating the true relationship between job satisfaction and job performance, Iaffaldano and Muchinsky²⁴ concluded that the relationship between job satisfaction and worker motivation is actually relatively weak. More recently, researchers have turned to a broader construct that has shown stronger relationships to important organizational outcomes—namely, employee engagement.

The concept of employee engagement was developed to explain that which traditional studies of work motivation overlooked—namely that employees offer up different degrees and dimensions of themselves according to internal calculations that they consciously and unconsciously compute.²⁵ The engagement concept is framed on the premise that workers are more complicated than simply being “motivated” or “not motivated” on the basis of external rewards and intrinsic factors. Employee engagement has been defined as “the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.”²⁶ Engagement involves cognitive processing (how we think about our work), emotional processing (the activation of positive affect), and physical processing (exerting effort and energy and extra role behaviors). More recently, the Corporate Executive Board has defined employee engagement as “the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization and how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment.”²⁷ Employee engagement frameworks expand the factors that influence work.

During the 1990s, Gallup took a broad look at how organizations were managing their people and determined that most were shooting in the dark. They assembled an impressive group of social scientists to examine 1 million employee interviews and hundreds of questions that had been asked for decades regarding which aspects of work were most powerful in explaining workers’ productive motivations on the job. Wagner and Harter²⁸ report the twelve individual elements (items) that were found. These twelve elements can be broadly categorized into the following four themes and comprise Gallup’s Q12 measure of employee engagement:

1. **Clear Direction:** (1) knowing priorities and what is expected, (2) connecting individual work to the mission or purpose of the company
2. **Strengths:** (3) ability to apply my strengths in my work daily

3. **Support:** (4) necessary resources to perform well, (5) encouragement and support for development, (6) opportunities to learn and grow, (7) regular performance feedback, (8) others do quality work
4. **Belonging:** (9) recognition or praise for doing good work, (10) someone at work cares about me, (11) my opinions matter, (12) best friend at work

Gallup's twelve elements have been shown to be strongly related to several organizational outcomes including: reductions in absenteeism, employee turnover, counterproductive behavior (e.g., theft), quality defects, and accidents, as well as significant increases in job performance factors such as customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitability.²⁹

These employee engagement themes share attributes that through God's common grace are similar to those that characterize human flourishing. People are made to utilize our diverse gift for creative work that serves others and allows us to grow in community. Table 1 highlights parallels between the theological attributes of work developed earlier and these four themes that operationalize employee engagement.

Table 1

Employee Engagement Themes (Wagner & Harter, 2006)	Theological Attributes of Work
Clear Direction	Meaningful and creative work; work that improves the lives of others
Strengths	Nature and image of God; diversity in gifts, talents, and strengths
Support	Growth and development of our gifts, talents, and strengths; feedback for improvement
Belonging	Nurturing trusting and interdependent relationships

While keeping employees happy or satisfied by paying them excessively or offering many workplace benefits and perks can help build a more positive workplace, increasing satisfaction is insufficient to create sustainable change, retain top performers, and positively affect the bottom line. Satisfied or happy employees are not necessarily engaged employees. Engaged employees have well-defined roles in the organization, make strong contributions, are actively connected to their larger teams and organization, and are continuously progressing.

By understanding and measuring individual differences more effectively and matching people with jobs/teams/organizations that best fit their uniqueness, we increase the likelihood of improving employee engagement. Increasing employee engagement has a positive impact on employee motivation and performance and has the potential to significantly contribute to individual and organizational flourishing.

There are implications of this positive impact of engagement for Christian managers and leaders. We are created with unique gifts and abilities that include our personalities as well as the ability to grow and develop through life experiences and intentional practices (e.g., skills and virtues). Organizations that understand and leverage these ideas are likely to more fully engage their employees and drive both individual and organizational flourishing. Specifically, these include two of the many ways that employee engagement can be improved that relate to the *imago Dei*. One way provides employees with the opportunity to “do what they do best” at work (i.e., strengths); and the other creates opportunities to learn and to grow at work (support).

In particular, we propose increased attention to those individual differences that highlight our *imago Dei* as we look at virtues and character strengths. One promising approach to understanding and developing strengths is based on the seminal work of Peterson and Seligman.³⁰ While there are many ways to talk about human strengths, one of particular relevance for our discussion is virtue and character strengths that are empirically associated with human flourishing. For the most part, these virtues and character strengths are consistent with Christian formulations of virtue that relate well to the nature and character of God. Peterson and Seligman,³¹ authors of *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, present the results of a multiyear study involving dozens of distinguished social scientists. The result is a helpful “common language” for understanding and discussing these core human capacities. This framework (referred to here as the VIA Classification of Character Strengths) is regarded as a cornerstone of the expanding field of positive psychology and draws interest from a wide range of professions and disciplines. The framework has also been validated in fifty-four nations and across the United States.³² This work represents arguably the most significant effort to review, assemble, research, and classify positive strengths/traits in human beings.

The VIA Classification framework is descriptive, not prescriptive. The emphasis is on classifying psychological elements of the attributes that are generally recognized as goodness in human beings across cultures, nations, and beliefs, rather than prescribing what humans “should” do to be good or to improve themselves. The classification is not a taxonomy of strength as taxonomies require

an underlying deep theory explaining multiple relationships among constructs. Instead, it is a “classification,” a conceptual scheme that is holistic. Like the periodic table of elements as a classification of the chemical foundations of all matter on an atomic level, the VIA classification is a classification of positive character traits in people. The VIA framework offers cognitive strengths (under the virtue of wisdom), emotional strengths (courage), social and community strengths (humanity and justice), protective strengths (temperance), and spiritual strengths (transcendence). Character strengths such as creativity, perseverance, love, fairness, humility, and gratitude are part of this framework (see Appendix A for the full description of the VIA Character Strengths). Table 2 summarizes the congruence between the VIA Character Strengths and many of the established Christian virtues and character traits highlighted throughout Scripture.

Table 2

VIA Character Strengths	Associated Christian Virtues
Wisdom: creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective	<i>creativity</i> (Isa. 64:8; Eph. 2:10); <i>curiosity</i> (Prov. 12:1); <i>wisdom</i> (Eph. 5:15–17; Prov. 19:20); <i>knowledge</i> (2 Peter 1:5–6); <i>prudence</i> (Prov. 13:16; 1 Thess. 5:21); <i>judgment</i> (Ex. 18:26; 2 Chron. 19:6)
Courage: bravery, persistence, integrity, zest	<i>courage</i> (Deut. 31:6; 1 Cor. 16:13; Phil. 4:13); <i>steadfastness</i> (2 Peter 1:5–6); <i>persistence</i> (Phil. 3:14); <i>integrity</i> (Prov. 10:9; Acts 24:16); <i>energy</i> (Col. 1:29)
Humanity: love, kindness, social intelligence	<i>love</i> (2 Peter 1:5–6; Gal. 5:22–23; 1 Cor. 13:13); <i>brotherly affection</i> (2 Peter 1:5–6); <i>kindness</i> (Gal. 5:22–23)
Justice: teamwork, fairness, leadership	<i>justice</i> (Mic. 6:8; Isa. 1:17); <i>teamwork</i> (1 Cor. 12:20–25; Eph. 4:16); <i>leadership</i> (Deut. 1:15; 1 Tim. 2:1–2); <i>fairness</i> (Matt. 7:12; James 2:1–5)
Temperance: forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation	<i>forgiveness</i> (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13); <i>self-control</i> (2 Peter 1:5–6; Gal. 5:22–23; Titus 2:12); <i>patience</i> (Gal. 5:22–23); <i>humility</i> (Mic. 6:8)
Transcendence: appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality	<i>gratitude</i> (Ps. 136:1; 1 Thess. 5:18); <i>faith</i> (1 Cor. 13:13); <i>hope</i> (Jer. 29:11; 1 Cor. 13:13); <i>joy</i> (Prov. 17:22; Phil. 4:4; Gal. 5:22–23); <i>faithfulness</i> (2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 5:22–23)

Character strengths can be developed. For example, Meyers, van Woerkom, and Bakker³³ identified fifteen studies that examined the effects of positive psychology interventions that included intentional activities that

1. build positive individual traits (e.g., the Reflected Best-Self Exercise;³⁴ cognitive-behavioral solution-focused coaching³⁵),
2. cultivate positive subjective experiences (e.g., gratitude journals;³⁶ positive psychological capital³⁷), or
3. build civic virtue and positive institutions (e.g., appreciative inquiry³⁸).

The authors concluded that these interventions are promising tools for enhancing employees' well-being and performance. Additionally, they found that these interventions also tend to diminish stress and burnout and, to a lesser extent, depression and anxiety. One three-year study found that focusing on character strengths was among the three most crucial drivers of employee engagement (along with managing emotions and aligning purpose). It recommended that employees be encouraged to identify, use, and alert others about their signature strengths as well as converse with managers about the opportunities to use strengths in the organization.³⁹ In another recent study, employees who used four or more of their signature strengths had more positive work experiences and were more likely to sense work as a calling than those who expressed less than four.⁴⁰ Even more encouraging, not only do virtues and character strengths encourage and support individual flourishing and employee engagement, but also they are "contagious" and can lead to virtuous organizational cultures that promote organizational flourishing.⁴¹

The strengths movement arose in response to management strategies and human tendencies that focused solely on individuals' areas of weakness. Yet, some argue that the movement has gone too far.⁴² When practiced with a single-minded focus, the strengths approach can become an exercise in self-indulgence. It emphasizes what comes easily for managers and what they enjoy doing. The concern is that organizational needs related to the position and what the person's job is designed to provide can be ignored. If that happens, then organizational performance will suffer. Further, strengths and weaknesses are not so easy to disentangle. Strengths that have led to success, the very ones that advocates claim should be enjoined, can become weaknesses over time or in a new situation.⁴³

Therefore, virtues and character strengths are themselves human capabilities that through employee engagement enable people to make positive movements toward the fulfillment of the creation mandate, the provision of human needs,

and the maintenance of social order. At the same time, firms must discern person-job fit as they hire and develop employees. When both considerations are balanced, we believe they will foster individual, social, organizational, and creational well-being.

Three Practices to Increase Employee Engagement by Focusing on Strengths

There are different ways to leverage this connection between strengths and employee engagement. Three practices in particular that hold considerable promise for improving this relationship are job crafting, hiring assessments, and employee development of strengths at work. We look at each of these in turn.

Job Crafting

One specific intervention to leverage the connection between strengths and engagement is the recent work on job crafting.⁴⁴ Job crafting is an approach to job design that expands perspectives to include proactive changes that employees make to their own jobs. Employees instead of organizations are the originators of changes in the job. Job crafting involves “the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work.”⁴⁵ By modifying components of their jobs, employees can change the social and task components of their jobs and experience different kinds of meaning of the work and themselves. Researchers have found that job crafting has positive effects on employees’ degree of psychological well-being⁴⁶ and employee engagement and performance,⁴⁷ suggesting that job crafting has the potential to contribute to both individual and organizational flourishing.

Research on person-job fit suggests that when employees perceive congruence between themselves and their jobs, they are more likely to experience work as being personally meaningful and respond with enhanced job performance and engagement.⁴⁸ Job crafting has been identified as the process of employees’ redefining and reimagining their job designs in personally meaningful ways.⁴⁹ That is to say, employees bear some responsibility to create meaningfulness in their work. Employees crafting their jobs are given the authority to proactively reshape the boundaries of the work using multiple categories of job crafting techniques. For example, employees can alter the set of responsibilities prescribed by a formal job description by adding or dropping tasks; altering the nature of tasks; or changing how much time, energy, and attention are allocated to various

tasks (e.g., a technology savvy customer service representative offers to help her colleagues with their IT issues).

Berg et al.⁵⁰ offer several areas where employees can focus when crafting a job. First, job crafting in ways that align with employees' key motives can foster engagement by enabling employees to pursue outcomes that they care about and deeply value. Motives are the specific outcomes that drive individuals to put forth effort and persevere (e.g., enjoyment, personal growth, social connections).⁵¹ Second, job crafting in ways that enable employees to leverage strengths can cultivate engagement by helping employees utilize what they are naturally capable of doing well.⁵² Finally, doing it in ways that create opportunities to pursue passions can be a rich source of employee engagement. Passions consist of the activities and topics that spark deep interest (e.g., learning, teaching, using technology).⁵³ Therefore, job crafting can be implemented as a management tool to encourage employees to understand more fully their unique, God-given, and God-reflecting strengths and how their strengths best contribute to effectively performing the job. In this way, research suggests that employees will be more likely to be engaged and that both the employee and the organization are more likely to experience the positive outcomes associated with high employee engagement.

Hiring Assessments

A second area for potential to leverage the connection between strengths and engagement is in the area of employee selection. To date, there has been limited work done to incorporate strengths into the hiring and placement processes. Matching a person to the right job, or a job to the right person, is one of the most complicated responsibilities any manager will face. It is no wonder that most organizations struggle with this. Of the twelve elements of employee engagement, Wagner and Harter⁵⁴ suggest this is the most challenging to improve. Through selecting the right leaders, managers, and employees for any role, organizations can strategically boost engagement. It is a mistake to assume that employees know their strengths. We are biased to believe that others are similar to us so that we often do not view our unique capabilities as strengths. People often take their most powerful talents for granted or may not even be aware of them at all. Fortunately, there are several available assessments to help individuals identify their strengths (e.g., VIA Survey, Clifton StrengthsFinder).

To improve engagement through employee selection, we need research and practical tools to develop hiring strategies that focus on identifying a candidate's character strengths and linking these to job requirements. This must start with methods to incorporate character strengths into traditional job analysis processes.

Job analysis is the process of understanding the important tasks of a job, how they are carried out, and what human attributes are necessary to carry them out successfully. In short, job analysis is an attempt to develop a theory of human behavior about the job in question.⁵⁵ Job analysis results are used in creating job descriptions, recruiting, selection, and many other HRM functions. There is also an opportunity to develop and validate robust psychometric assessment tools through which character strengths could be shown to predict job performance, similar to those currently used to measure cognitive ability, personality, and other individual difference constructs. To date, we lack research evidence to evaluate whether or not commercially available assessments of character strengths are sufficiently related to job performance measures to justify their use as hiring tools. Establishing linkages between personal strengths and job features will require work both to further refine the reliability and validity of the assessment tools and to develop job performance measures that can serve as robust criterion measures for these analyses. Gathering validation evidence for hiring tools is akin to stamp collecting;⁵⁶ it is time we start our collection for strengths.

Employee Development

The third area and the best opportunity for people to grow and develop is to identify the ways in which they most naturally think, feel, and act, and then build on those talents to create strengths for consistent excellent performance. Building employees' strengths is a far more effective approach than trying to improve weaknesses.⁵⁷ When employees know and use their strengths, they are more engaged, have higher performance, and are less likely to leave their company. When employees feel that their organization cares for and encourages them to make the most of their strengths, they are more likely to respond with increased discretionary effort, a higher work ethic, and more enthusiasm and commitment. Gallup's studies show that using and developing strengths leads to improved health and wellness outcomes.⁵⁸ The more hours that employees are able to use their strengths to do what they do best, the less likely they are to report experiences of worry, stress, anger, sadness, or physical pain during the previous day. Openly discussing strengths during team meetings can help team members deepen their understanding of the team and the strengths approach. Project roles and tasks can be assigned based on each member's unique strengths; firms can incorporate strengths more thoroughly and systematically into performance reviews to help employees set goals based on these strengths.

It is not always possible to find the perfect candidates for jobs, especially managerial ones, and so development is crucial. Eichinger, Dai, and Tang⁵⁹ conducted a study investigating manager competencies and found that very few

managers have five or more competencies at which they are stronger than most other managers. Even fewer have five or more strengths aligned with managerial features that organizations need to compete. These authors conclude that the best bet for driving organizational effectiveness through leadership development is to help leaders become ongoing learners who can regularly sharpen their current strengths and continually acquire new capabilities to meet dynamic business demands and challenges in the global economy.

In general, it is progress that distinguishes a career (and calling) from employment that is “just a job.” Employees who have an opportunity to learn and grow at work are twice as likely as those on the other end of the scale to say they will spend their career with their company.⁶⁰ The process of identifying, improving, and investing in ways to develop areas of strengths has specific impact on others that can lead to human flourishing and organizational performance.

Conclusion

We are created in the image of God, and this is “very good” (Gen. 1:31), but our sinful nature often causes us to idolize the creation instead of the creator. We worship self instead of the Holy One. Instead of living and working with joy and gratitude (being little images of the living God), we make big images of ourselves and consider God the little one.⁶¹ Mouw⁶² provides a relevant caution about a common grace approach in business:

Those of us who endorse the idea of common grace would do well to recognize the ways in which its teachings frequently have fostered a triumphalist spirit that has encouraged false hopes for a premature transformation of sinful culture. But for all of that, the theologians of common grace have nonetheless been right to insist that the God who is unfolding his multiple purposes in this present age also calls his people to be agents of those diverse Kingdom goals. It is important for us in these difficult days to cultivate an appropriate Calvinist sense of modesty and humility in our efforts at cultural faithfulness. But we cannot give up on the important task—which the theologians of common grace have correctly urged upon us—of actively working to discern God’s complex designs in the midst of our deeply wounded world.

Nonetheless, common grace gives us a framework for pursuing our callings as Christian scholars and practitioners. Discernment and the Spirit’s guidance in our hearts and minds are central as we ground ourselves in the life and thought of the community where the Spirit is openly at work. While we proceed with caution, we go about our business in hope.⁶³

Work is both a gift and a blessing. It can be a source of great fulfillment and satisfaction, a path to lasting relationships, a means to creating a legacy to benefit others, and, above all, an everyday opportunity to advance God's holy, righteous, good, and true agenda on earth as it is in heaven. Approaching work as the image bearers of God, seeing it as a gift of God for furthering his purposes, can make it a glorious adventure of daily labor in his presence, for his glory, and unto his saving and sanctifying purposes. In this age of talent, where workers are increasingly viewed with their unique gifts and talents and are valued for them, we have a wonderful opportunity. Our challenge as Christian human resource management professionals and managers is to further influence our organizations to support research and adopt practices that recognize and support the unique gifts, talents, and strengths of our employees, provide opportunities to develop these strengths, and therefore move them fully to engage in their work.

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Appendix A: The VIA Classification of Character Strengths*

1. **Wisdom and Knowledge**—Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.
 - *Creativity* [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it.
 - *Curiosity* [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering.
 - *Judgment* [critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly.
 - *Love of Learning*: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows.
 - *Perspective* [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.
2. **Courage**—Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal.
 - *Bravery* [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it.
 - *Perseverance* [persistence, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks.

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- *Honesty* [authenticity, integrity]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions.
 - *Zest* [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated.
3. **Humanity**—Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others.
- *Love*: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people.
 - *Kindness* [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them.
 - *Social Intelligence* [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick.
4. **Justice**—Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life.
- *Teamwork* [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share.
 - *Fairness*: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.
 - *Leadership*: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintaining good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.
5. **Temperance**—Strengths that protect against excess.
- *Forgiveness*: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.

- *Humility*: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is.
 - *Prudence*: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.
 - *Self-Regulation* [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions.
6. **Transcendence**—Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning.
- *Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence* [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.
 - *Gratitude*: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.
 - *Hope* [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about.
 - *Humor* [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes.
 - *Spirituality* [faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.