

Activity 5.4: Case Study – Other Things Matter

Name: _____ Date: _____

Introduction

You have just graduated college with your degree in hand. You quickly find a job that pays a salary of \$80,000 a year. It is the job you have strived for and you are looking forward to beginning your career in a productive and meaningful environment.

Fast forward a year into the job. You find yourself doing meaningless tasks lacking both purpose and recognition. You keep in mind that you have a good salary. At the same time, you consider how much longer you can place a value on that pay when little to no recognition or purpose is placed on the work you do. Do other things beyond pay really matter?

College professors Dan Ariely, Emir Kamenica, and Drazen Prelec designed an experiment to explore whether meaning matters in attitudes toward work. They distinguished two different ways individuals can derive meaning from their work: through recognition and through a sense of purpose. *Recognition* means that one's efforts do not go unnoticed. *Purpose* means that workers perceive their work as a part of a general objective that is valued.

Measuring the Achievement of Economic Goals

College students volunteered to participate in an experiment in which they were paid to build Bionicle figures (Bionicle is a Lego brand construction toy). Participants were paid on a declining unit wage schedule: they were compensated \$2 for the first Bionicle built, \$1.89 (11 cents less) for the second, \$1.78 for the third, and so on, with the wage declining by 11 cents for each successive Bionicle. When a Bionicle was completed, the amount earned for that Bionicle was recorded, and subjects were then asked if they would like to build another Bionicle. The only choice participants had to make was at what point they wanted to stop making Bionicles.

The experiment took place in a room in which there were only two people: the student participating in the experiment and an experimenter. The study participants were randomly assigned to one of two work conditions and they had no knowledge of the work condition to which they were not assigned.

