

How work works for the new generations?

Raluca Iuliana GEORGESCU

B & Associates, Romania
raluca.georgescu@infinitemgroup.com

Dumitru Alexandru BODISLAV

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania
alex.bodislav@ase.ro

Abstract. *This paper investigates the essential components required to establish a work environment that is safe, motivating, and goal-oriented, and that promotes employee productivity, well-being, and engagement. It pinpoints the primary factors that contribute to the creation of such an environment, such as the availability of mental health resources, the flexibility of work arrangements, and the straightforward communication of job security and prospects. The study underscores the significance of a workplace culture that is equitable and respectful, actively combats bias, harassment, and discrimination, and promotes creativity and innovation through inclusivity. The significance of management is underscored, emphasising the necessity of communicative, supportive leadership that offers consistent positive feedback, career development opportunities, and empowers employees with autonomy in their positions. The research also investigates the influence of constructive coworker relationships, diverse and challenging tasks, and manageable burdens on the prevention of burnout and the maintenance of motivation. Lastly, the paper explores the ways in which long-term employee satisfaction and organisational success are influenced by continuous training and career advancement opportunities. According to the results, a supportive, well-rounded work environment not only improves individual well-being but also results in enhanced organisational outcomes, such as increased productivity, reduced turnover, and a stronger corporate reputation.*

Keywords: work, productivity, “bare minimum” concept, manipulation.

JEL Classification: J24, M54.

1. Introduction

A safe, motivating and goal-oriented work environment inspires employees to give their best work. It includes elements that are social, psychological, and physical and that assist with productivity and well-being.

It is essential to have access to mental health resources including stress management classes, employee assistance programs (EAPs), and counselling services. Employees can better balance their personal and professional life with flexible work schedules, remote work alternatives, and sufficient vacation time. Anxiety and uncertainty are decreased when stability in employment and prospects are communicated clearly. There should be a fair culture that actively addresses bias, harassment, and discrimination, and all employees should be treated with respect.

Creativity and innovation are encouraged by an environment where all workers feel appreciated and included. An environment based on strong teams and a feeling of community can be developed by promoting cooperation and honest communication. An personable, encouraging, direction-giving but professional manager goes a long way towards establishing a positive workplace.

Consistently providing positive feedback, creative criticism and acknowledging accomplishments makes workers feel appreciated and inspired. Long-term employee engagement is supported by offering career development options like training, coaching, and advancement. Providing workers with independence and decision-making power in their positions promotes efficiency and fulfilment at work (Becker, 2003). Employee engagement and awareness are increased when company objectives, expectations, and changes are communicated openly, giving a sense of stability and balance. Maintaining a sustained level of productivity and preventing burnouts is achieved by ensuring that staff have a manageable workload.

Maintaining motivation and engagement can be achieved by assigning a range of challenging and interesting tasks for employees that will make them feel creative and helpful, giving them a sense of achievement, which will bring satisfaction at both ends.

Establishing a helpful and pleasurable work environment is facilitated by cultivating pleasant interactions and relationships among coworkers by creating different tasks that will allow them to bond by mixing the best of their abilities and qualities over solving those tasks. An enjoyable work environment may be maintained, and problems can be kept from getting worse by having clear procedures in place for handling and resolving disagreements.

Continuous training and chances for career advancement enable employees to advance their careers and acquire new skills. In addition to improving employees' well-being and job satisfaction, a healthy work environment improves organizational results like productivity and minimizes turnover, all of which contribute to a positive corporate reputation.

2. The key to lack of productivity – the story behind the “bare minimum”

The phrase "bare minimum" in a work setting describes completing the bare minimum of work necessary to meet expectations or carry out job tasks without going above and beyond what is officially needed.

Completing chores as quickly and with as little effort as feasible, avoiding going above and beyond or accepting additional responsibilities, doing the bare minimum required by supervisors or to fulfil the demands of the job, completing the essential tasks of the position without looking for ways to innovate or improve upon it is eventually creating an environment that is affecting both ends.

Going further on the idea of “bare minimum”, it could consist of a low level of interest in contributing to meetings or only joining in on team projects when called upon. Also refusing to take the lead or help with new tasks or projects, or responding to assignments or problems as they come up as opposed to planning and taking care of them beforehand is considered as doing the bare minimum. Failing to look for chances for career or personal growth, choice which will affect their career and life quality on long term, also creating work that is passable but not outstanding, and emphasizing completion above quality, not making the extra effort necessary to meet or surpass deadlines or guarantee excellent results.

Even while working as little as possible could be enough to keep a job, it can have negative consequences. A negative outcome would consist of reduced opportunities for advancement or career growth as a result of idleness, or being viewed by superiors and coworkers as disinterested or lacking motivation, which will lead to a unbalanced work relationship and environment, affecting everybody involved. Decreased motivation and personal fulfilment is an aftermath of applying the bare minimum strategy since work has little to no dedication beyond what is required.

To sum up, the "bare minimum" strategy is defined by an emphasis on getting by with little further work, involvement, or dedication to excellence.

3. The byways between determination and needs

How much effort someone is willing to put into their work is mostly determined by their motivation. Theories like Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT – Deci, Ryan, 1985), Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, et al., 1957, Herzberg, et al., 1959), and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) provide explanations for why certain workers could decide to perform the minimal amount of work.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), if an employee's basic needs—such a stable employment or a safe workplace are not satisfied, they are unlikely to be inspired to pursue more ambitious objectives like self-actualization. Under such circumstances, focusing on survival rather than growth may be reflected by doing the bare minimum.

According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, et al., 1957), there are two types of factors, like motivators (such as: success and recognition) and hygiene factors (like wage and work conditions). When workers feel that there aren't enough incentives or that there aren't enough hygienic aspects, they can get disengaged and put in less effort (Georgescu, 2020).

According to the self-determination theory, relatedness, competence, and autonomy are crucial for promoting self-motivation. Workers who believe their workplace inhibits their independence, undervalues their skills, or doesn't foster deep social relationships may find themselves doing just enough to get by.

The tendency of performing the bare minimum is also influenced by the changing ideas of society towards work-life balance. In the past, success was generally associated with hard labour and dedication, and work was frequently viewed as the focal point of life. But there has been a movement in culture, especially among younger generations, favouring family life, leisure, and personal well-being over career success.

The idea of "work centrality", which describes the significance of work in a person's life, can be used to explain this change. When it comes to people with low work centrality, employment is more of a means to an end—a way to make ends meet—than a source of fulfilment or identity. Considering that their main priorities are outside of the office, these people could not perceive the benefit of going above and beyond the bare minimum. This trend has been further exacerbated by social media movements that support self-care and work-life balance, which encourage employees to set personal limits and avoid going above and beyond at work.

Psychological principles like conformity and social proof imply that people often shape their behaviour after that of those around them. Employees may imitate their colleagues if they see them continuously performing the bare minimum with no consequences. This conduct has the potential to become deeply ingrained in the culture of the company, resulting in a cycle of minimal effort.

It's natural for workers to feel disengaged and demotivated when they believe their pay is unfair. In this situation, doing the bare minimum can be considered an act of protest. Workers may justify their low effort by arguing that it is consistent with their pay grade and that they are merely providing what they are paid to do.

Doing the bare minimum, in the short run, reduce stress and give someone a feeling of control over a perceived unjust circumstance. But there could be long-term effects as well that outweigh the short-term gains.

This kind of approach can damage the career in the long run. The lack of effort and interest may be seen by employers, which may reduce chances of getting a raise, getting promoted, or even losing the job. This may put people in a downward spiral of limited, minimal income and slow professional progress.

Even if this type of action may seem reasonable to some employees, others may see them as passiveness or a lack of professionalism. Their reputation may suffer because of applying

this type of strategy, making it more difficult for them to grow and advance in their current position or locate better prospects elsewhere.

Especially while looking for new employment, their professional reputation is quite important. A reputation for putting in the bare minimum might harm their network and result in bad references, which can limit their options in the future.

Regularly performing the bare minimum can result in a reduction in one's sense of fulfilment and self-worth (Miner, 2005). Additionally, it could encourage a pessimistic outlook that lets them feel stuck and unsatisfied with their job, which can affect other aspects of their life.

Taking a doing the bare minimum approach can have a detrimental effect on employees' mental health and eventually cause emotions of exhaustion, regret, and stagnation.

4. The macroeconomics that results from doing the "bare minimum"

Adopting the "bare minimum" approach at work can have a few negative implications on an individual, in the long term it can result in several detrimental effects on mental health, even while at first it could appear like a solution to lessen stress or prevent burnout.

When someone does the bare minimum, they might not feel challenged or involved in their work, which might leave them feeling empty or unfulfilled, this can eventually lead to a feeling of meaninglessness and a decline in work satisfaction. Their work may feel uninteresting due to a lack of variation or challenge, which can lead to boredom and a lack of drive, both of which can worsen mental health.

Workers who put in minimal effort may be concerned about their job security, believing that their lack of effort will be exposed and may result in disciplinary actions or unemployment, leading to anxiety and tension because of this persistent concern. When one does the bare minimum, they frequently put off work until the last minute, which can lead to a vicious cycle of stress and procrastination as deadlines get near.

Making little to no effort might make people feel guilty or inadequate because they think they are falling short of their potential and that can feel like they are disappointing themselves and other people. Self-esteem may be badly impacted by this.

A common consequence of doing the absolute minimum is skipping out on extra chores, responsibilities, or team activities, which can cause social isolation at work and create an unbalanced work environment for everybody involved. This can be seen as poor-quality selfish type of behaviour among coworkers, since a lot of extra work activities will fall on them to complete, rather to be shared with everybody else so there will be no overload of work.

A disengaged approach has the potential to further separate people from the fulfilling aspects of their work, which can leave them feeling purposeless and disconnected from the objectives or core values of the organization.

Those who are performing the bare minimum may feel left behind as others advance or take on new responsibilities, which can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and contribute to concern about their professional trajectory, making them feel even more unhappy with their life and work quality.

The bare minimum approach can paradoxically induce burnout even though it may appear to be a means of preventing it. An alternative type of burnout that is marked by cynicism, a sense of inefficacy, and emotional tiredness can result from a lack of involvement, purpose, and fulfilment.

It can be cognitively taxing to constantly try to accomplish as little as possible, avoiding chores or duties, which over time can cause a sensation of exhaustion, fatigue and depression.

A person's work frequently plays a big role in defining their identity and people who always perform the bare minimum may experience identity and self-worth issues, wondering about their worth and purpose outside of the job. The bare minimum technique can lead to internal conflict and feelings of discontent and a separation from their sense of self if the work they accomplish is not in line with their personal beliefs or ambitions.

Those who stick to the bare minimum may eventually come to regret not making the most of their abilities or following their goals, resulting in long-term discontent and psychological anguish. Some may feel guilty if their lack of effort has a negative effect on their team or place of employment. Guilt can exacerbate stress and anxiety symptoms.

The phenomenon of doing the bare minimum can be attributed to a complex interaction between psychological elements such as organizational culture, motivation, burnout, and shifting cultural ideals. It takes a sophisticated grasp of these underlying psychological factors as well as a dedication to creating healthier, more enjoyable workplaces to address the issue.

A sustainable plan would be for people to look for strategies to pursue growth both personally and professionally, equilibrium as well as more meaningful work-life connections (Bodislav, 2011).

While doing the bare minimum at work might seem like a personal decision, the cumulative impacts can have long lasting major consequences for public services, innovation, workplace culture, social equality, economic growth, and general societal well-being.

Overall productivity can drop when a significant percentage of the workforce performs at minimum capacity. This lower productivity can impede economic expansion and impede innovation, both of which are essential for the evolution of society. Businesses may see a decline in market share, decreased profitability, and even job losses if workers' lack of effort causes them to become less competitive, which could have an impact on the overall economy.

A culture where doing the bare minimum becomes acceptable can spread, resulting in a widespread decline in work ethic and motivation across the workforce. This may reduce the sense of accomplishment that comes from meaningful work as well as overall

satisfaction with work. Workers who do the bare minimum may contribute less to team projects, which might harm teamwork and possibly cause resentment or conflict among coworkers who now have to bear even more responsibility, causing them to feel overload with work, creating conflict in the workspace and therefore, an unbalanced, negative work environment.

Innovation frequently demands going above and beyond the call of duty, whether it is through initiative, innovative problem-solving, or fresh idea proposal. A workforce that just concentrates on the bare minimum is less likely to push for innovation, which may block advancement across a range of sectors and industries. In sectors like healthcare, education, and public services, doing the bare minimum can delay necessary improvements and reforms, which will lower the quality of vital, critical services.

If the majority of workers are satisfied with doing the bare minimum, wages may stall, being that it's possible for employers to see no reason that it's necessary to provide raises or better working conditions considering the low quality of interest given by the employees for their job, which will lower their overall living standards and eventually add to income inequality.

Employees who work less may lose out on opportunities for growth, which could cause the divide between highly and lowly motivated workers to grow, this may eventually lead to a more stratified workforce in which only a small percentage of workers benefit from opportunities for advancement.

Doing the bare minimum can result in a drop in the quality of services offered to the public in public sectors such as healthcare, education, and government, which can have a detrimental effect on the well-being of society.

The public's trust in institutions can be damaged by a culture that places less emphasis on providing basic services and offer less and less quality in their services, which can make people more disengaged or doubtful.

Complex issues like environmental sustainability call for proactive measures and going above and beyond the bare minimum. Missed opportunities to stop climate change, secure natural resources, and advance long-term environmental health can result from a lack of effort and interest in these areas.

In a number of businesses, cutting corners may compromise ethical standards and result in inferior quality goods, services, or operations that could harm consumers or the environment.

5. Harmful minimalism vs. Constructive minimalism – social media' manipulative trend

It would be more beneficial to discuss salary openly with the employer if low pay is the problem. Looking at and being interested in possibilities for professional growth or more responsibility, which could result in a rise in salary, is also a good quality measure.

Taking advantage of the chance to learn new skills or obtain certifications that could open doors to a better-paying position or promotion rather than giving up is a good measure to apply. This proactive strategy might bring a feeling of accomplishment and a feel of more control career wise.

Looking for other options where work will be adequately compensated if the money is inadequate may be more empowering and, in the end, result in greater work satisfaction.

Finding a balance that allows to preserve mental health and professional integrity is just as crucial as maintaining fairness in efforts in relation to pay. Giving it all while operating within the constraints of a difficult circumstance can be more rewarding and may lead to better possibilities.

Low pay can certainly be a real source of dissatisfaction, but using it as an excuse to do the bare minimum might have unfavourable long-term effects, not just on personal life but on society as well. A more positive strategy could involve looking for better chances, learning new skills, or negotiating for fair compensation, all of which can result in increased job satisfaction and advancement.

The idea of minimalism is frequently praised for emphasizing effectiveness, simplicity, and getting rid of excess. But minimalism can take two different forms in the workplace: harmful minimalism and productive minimalism. Disengagement and a lack of effort are traits of harmful minimalism, which can jeopardize important functions and have negative repercussions on society (Bodislav, Georgescu, 2023; Bodislav, et al., 2023). Constructive minimalism, on the other hand, places an emphasis on productivity and work-life balance while making sure that important activities are completed to the highest standards and that societal demands are satisfied.

Employees who practice "doing the bare minimum" as a way to disconnect from their work rather than using it as a productivity strategy are guilty of harmful minimalism. This type of minimalism can often be caused by burnout, discontent, or a lack of drive. Even though it could give the person momentary relief, it can have negative effects on society and organizations.

Harmful minimalism can have disastrous effects in fields like public safety, healthcare, and education where attention to detail, precision, and dedication are essential. For example, the quality of treatment declines and patient risks may increase if the healthcare personnel carry out the bare minimum of responsibilities without pushing the extra mile to guarantee patient comfort and safety.

Harmful minimalism can damage company culture, which can set off a downward spiral of employee dissatisfaction and low morale. When workers see their colleagues working as little as possible, it might set the tone for minimal effort, which lowers overall productivity and creativity. This culture of disengagement has the potential to spread, increasing turnover rates, making it harder to find talent, and generally decreasing the effectiveness of the company.

Harmful minimalism can erode public trust and social institutions to a greater extent. When important societal functions are jeopardized by disengagement, communities are affected.

For instance, if social workers, emergency responders, or public employees take a minimalist approach, the standard of public services suffers, and people lose faith in these organizations (Georgescu, et al., 2021). Because individuals who depend on these services are frequently the most vulnerable, over time this can weaken social structures and promote inequality.

Constructive minimalism is an approach that prioritizes productivity, efficiency, and work-life balance without sacrificing the standard of the job or the demands of society. It involves establishing priorities for work, limiting off unnecessary tasks, and concentrating on what really counts. This kind of minimalism focusses on doing more with less, maximizing effect while preserving wellbeing, rather than doing less for the sake of doing less.

Constructive minimalism pushes employees to cut out unnecessary procedures and distractions in favour of essential quality work. Employees can accomplish more in less time by prioritizing high-impact tasks and optimizing procedures. This strategy is especially helpful in fields like technology, research, and entrepreneurship where creativity and flexibility are essential. Reducing unnecessary effort allows staff members to focus more on strategic and creative thinking, which promotes advancement and innovation.

Constructive minimalism's emphasis on work-life balance constitutes one of its most important advantages. By emphasizing productivity and eliminating unnecessary work, employees can accomplish their career objectives and yet make time for their families, personal interests, and relaxation. Maintaining this balance is essential for long-term health and can help avoid burnout, which can result in more sustainable career trajectories and greater job satisfaction all around. Businesses that embrace constructive minimalism frequently witness decreased employee attrition, increased engagement, and a happier work environment.

The high standard of the work is never compromised by constructive minimalism. Rather, it guarantees the efficient execution of necessary tasks and the satisfaction of society's needs. For instance, a constructively minimalist strategy in the healthcare industry would entail automating repetitive chores with technology so that medical staff can focus more on patient care. To ensure that students obtain a high-quality education while avoiding burnout, educators may choose to concentrate on the most effective teaching strategies (Georgescu, 2023).

In the workplace, minimalism can take the form of either productive efficiency or detrimental disengagement. Constructive minimalism provides a route to increased productivity, work-life balance, and long-term success, but harmful minimalism puts vital functions, workplace culture, and society well-being at risk. Organizations may profit from the benefits of minimalism while avoiding its drawbacks by creating an atmosphere that promotes efficiency without sacrificing quality. This well-rounded strategy guarantees that people can complete their personal and professional goals, innovation flourishes, and social needs are satisfied.

References

- Becker, G., 2003. *Capitalul uman. O analiză teoretică și empirică cu referire specială la educație*, C.H. Beck Publishing House, Bucharest.
- Bodislav, D.A., 2011. The Birth of the Regulated Company in the Macroeconomic Environment, *Theoretical and Applied Economics*, Vol. 18, No. 6(55), pp. 129-140.
- Bodislav, D.A. and Georgescu, R.I., 2023. A Sustainable and Resilient Socio-Economic Paradigm through Corporate Governance Intervention, *Theoretical and Applied Economics*, Vol. 30, No. 4(637), pp. 77-82.
- Bodislav, D.A., Georgescu, R.I., Andrei, I.V. and Osiceanu, D.C., 2023. Modern Leadership Communication and Strategic Lobbying, *Theoretical and Applied Economics*, Vol. 30, No. 3(636), pp. 219-230.
- Deci, E. and Ryan, R., 1985. The General Causality Orientations Scale: Self-Determination in Personality, *Journal of Research in Personality*, Vol. 19, pp. 109-134.
- Georgescu, R.I., 2023. Modern leadership in business organisations during economic disruption, *Theoretical and Applied Economics*, Vol. 30, No. 2(635), pp. 73-82.
- Georgescu, R.I., Vasilescu, A.C., Mair, A., Andreica, C. and Sarbu, A.M., 2021. Human Capital and Administrative Leadership, *Proceedings of the 17th Administration and Public Management International Conference*, Bucharest, Romania, 15-16 October, available online at: <http://confcamp.ase.ro/2021/wp-content/uploads/18_Georgescu_Vasilescu_-Mair_Andreica_Sarbu.pdf> [accessed on 28th of January 2024].
- Georgescu, R.I., 2020. *Strategii de valorificare a resurselor naturale în contextul globalizării*, Universitara Publishing, Bucharest.
- Herzberg, F., Mausner, B. and Snyderman, B., 1959. *The motivation to work*, Wiley Publishing, New York City.
- Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., Peterson, R.O. and Capwell, D., 1957. Job attitudes: Review of Research and Opinion, *Psychological Service of Pittsburgh*.
- Maslow, A., 1943. A theory of human motivation, *Psychological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 4, pp. 370-396.
- Miner, J., 2005. *Organizational behavior. Essential theories of motivation and leadership*, M.E. Sharpe Inc., Armonk, New York City.