

Modes of Engagement developed by Alise Cortez, PhD

Mode of Engagement – a “moment in time” snapshot of how a person is experiencing work in relation to identity

A person’s Mode of Engagement is mutable and captures the dynamic person-situation exchange

Mode of Engagement	Description	Maslow’s Meaning Level	Importance of Work for Identity	Work-Identity Relationship
Transcendent Connection	I am called by a force external or sacred to me (usually God or some higher power) to the work I do. This work is “self-abnegational” in nature, meaning I am serving something or someone beyond my own immediate ego interests. A lot of the meaning I register in the work comes from facilitating connection between the people I serve and a higher power or God , as well as my own strong commitment and connection to this faith.	+8 Transcendence	Very importance to “essential” to who I am as a person	Person and work are Inseparable, Self-Expressive (positive)
Living My Purpose	I am doing work that represents my highest values, or I feel the work represents my purpose for living . I catch myself thinking, “I’m doing the work I’m supposed to be doing.” In many ways, the work I do is a personification of who I am at my most fundamental core and allows me to profoundly and authentically express myself through it. The work I do is essentially inseparable from who I am.	+7 Purpose	Very importance to “essential to who I am as a person	Person and work are Inseparable, Self-Expressive (positive)
Authentically Impacting Society	I am strongly imprinting my work with who I am and am doing so by deeply expressing my values through my work, whether traditional in nature or attached to my religion or faith. I both find deep fulfillment and it is very important to me that I am contributing to a cause larger than myself, that I really make a difference at work, and am having a legacy impact on my community or society at large . I also feel very connected to either the people I work with or those I serve. I often really enjoy teaching or speaking as an aspect of the work I do and feel I am good at these activities. I “want my life to count” and to feel I’ve done significant work to benefit a broad group of people and want to do the work in such a way that I authentically express who I am at a deep level.	+5 Thinking (plus values)	Very importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (positive)
Organizational Mission Alignment	While I am certainly expressing myself in my work, I am strongly attracted to, inspired by, and feel a strong identification with the organization or group of people with whom I work. In other words, my values and the mission of the organization are in strong alignment , and my connection to the organization and its people is the principal source of meaning in my work, though I do find many other aspects satisfying and fulfilling, as well. The mission of this organization inspires me and gives me a purpose for myself that connects me with something much larger (or more important) than myself. I may be a person who highly values collectivism or being part of a group I really believe in and thus highly values belonging to this group for work purposes.	+5 Thinking (plus values)	Medium-high to very importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (positive), Resonant (positive), Work Informs Me (positive)

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Challenging Cognitive Resonance	I have a strong need for cognition or intellectual work, and the work I do is a principal way to provide that satisfaction and challenge. I am drawn to the particular work I do, perhaps even “addicted” to it, and am doing work that feels like a natural fit to whom I am – my characteristics, skills, and behavioral tendencies. In terms of path, I knew from a young age or early in my career that this is the kind of work that suited me, or I found it later in life and immediately knew it was a fit. Either way, the work feels natural to me and “hand in glove.” I am dedicated to the work I do or the field I’m in and I find it so innately satisfying I would even continue doing the work beyond financial need. I tend to “blur the lines” between work and my personal life because I am “just me” at work and the work suits innate aspects of myself. I might also believe I can’t imagine doing any other kind of work.	+5 Thinking	Medium-high to very high importance to who I am as a person	Resonant (positive), Self-Expressive (positive)
Self-Actualizing	While I am certainly expressing key aspects of myself in my work, I first and foremost recognize it or expect it to be a vehicle for my own constant personal growth or self-cultivation to realize my potential and who I can ultimately become. Many aspects of my work are very satisfying to me, and I am quite passionate and energetic about the work I do and the growth I am experiencing because of it. While there are many aspects of life that can help one develop, the work I do is a big arena in which to embark on personal learning and growth, and this personal result is a very central motivation for me. I may even realize there is an active synergy, or interaction, between me and my work, which creates an upward growth spiral to which I aspire. I also tend to see my work as “a journey, not a destination” in that the associated growth is never ending and never fully complete. I feel like I’m in a constant and active state of “becoming.”	+5 Thinking	Medium-high to very high importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (positive), Synergistic or Interactive
Genuinely Impacting the Organization	I am strongly imprinting my work with who I am and often do so by deeply expressing my values, whether traditional in nature or attached to my religion or faith, and I derive much of my work meaning by knowing I am strongly impacting the organization I work for by creating sustainable processes, developing people, implementing a succession plan, or serving my customers, etc. I also feel very connected to either the people I work with or those I serve – whether colleagues, subordinates, or clients/customers. Often, I am a leader or strong individual contributor and focused on the success of the company or organization.	+ 5 Thinking, +4 Esteem	Medium-low to high importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (positive), Distinct (as other life aspects also quite important)
Gainful Resonant Competency	I am doing work that feels natural to me and suits me – my traits or characteristics, skills, behavioral tendencies, and often my perspective or values. I may also even have gravitated to the work at a young age or been early inclined to do it. I take pride in working in my field and being competent or good at the technical or profession-specific details of my work. I enjoy expressing various aspects of my personality or values	+5 Thinking, +4 Esteem	Low to medium importance to who I am as a person	Resonant (positive), Self-Expressive (positive)

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	through the work I do, as well. I also enjoy being successful in my field and earning a good income , as those are both important factors for my self-esteem. I do have other things in my life, though, that are as important or sometimes more important to me than the work so the work is not super central to who I am. I enjoy it, though, and feel pride in being skilled in this profession.			
Chosen Achievement Path	I may not have known I wanted to do the kind of work I am doing or may have fallen into the work I do, but I find it satisfying and make the work with how I do it. Tangible results and hard work are really important to me, as they demonstrate my contribution and success to myself and to others. The most meaningful aspects of my work are the career advancement, compensation, power, prestige, respect, status or rank, and feeling of success this work affords me.	+4 Esteem or Feeling	Medium to very high importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (positive)
Relational Caring	My relationships at work are the most meaningful aspect of the work I do. I pride myself in either being exceptional with people and connections and I feel strongly compelled to <i>care</i> for customers/clients or other people in my work realm. This caring aspect of my work is what really makes my work for me, and it’s different than simply relating or enjoying other people – I am actively and lovingly taking care of the people I serve. The trust and dependability that comes with these relationships is also very important to me.	+3 Relationships	Medium to very high importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (positive)
Instrumental Marketable Skill	I am certainly expressing key aspects of myself in my work and enjoy and often feel passionate about the work I do. I likely live a very full life or have other things that are also very important to me, outside of work, whether they are hobbies, other interests, my family, or my faith. I am happy with the work I’ve chosen and take pride in being competent and good at the work while achieving strong results. I recognize I am primarily exchanging skills for an income or work-life balance that affords me access to other really important parts of my life, or I simply don’t expect work to provide more meaning beyond these things (“work is work”). I have many other parts of my life that make me “me,” and work is only a small part of that mix.	+2 Safety or Compensation	Very low to low-medium importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (positive), Distinct (other life aspects very important), Resonant (positive)
Conflicted Fit	While there are some or even many aspects of the work I enjoy and feel fit with my personality or talents, there are also a large or almost equal number that are just not working for me or don’t suit who I am. I enjoy the work much of the time, but I also find myself interested in doing some other, more interesting or suitable work somewhere else, or perhaps work that would allow me to express more of myself. I may feel held back in my career here or not well respected in this work setting. Or	Various levels	Low to medium-high importance to who I am as a person	Resonant (positive), Resonant (negative), Self-Expressive (positive), Self-

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	maybe I’m interested in doing something altogether different or not even working anymore at all. I feel conflicted about my situation, but I’m not so unhappy that I am contemplating leaving or quitting, rather I find myself rationalizing to myself why I stay or just settling for it for now. It’s likely I am doing the right (or suitable) work but in the wrong place or environment.			Expressive (negative), Distinct (other life aspects also important)
Wanting More but Comfortable	There are some aspects of the work I do that I really enjoy and certainly express aspects of myself in doing the work. But at the end of the day, week, or month, there are slightly more areas of discontent than contentment. I am primarily staying in this work for the financial compensation I receive, so there is some apathy here. I would love to do some other kind of more interesting or suitable work. I’m not miserable but I’m not especially happy, either. I remain in the work because I’m comfortable with the work arrangement and it’s just easier to stay rather than putting much energy into looking for different, potentially better work.	-2 Safety or Compensation	Very low to low importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (positive), Self-Expressive (negative)
Diminished Esteem	While there are aspects of the work I do that I find satisfying, they are overruled by a sense of distraught I feel about the work and myself as a result. I like many aspects of the field or work I do, but I’m also keenly aware that I feel like I’ve not achieved what I’d like to through my work, that my contributions are not what I would like them to be, and I am not who I would like to be as a person through this work. It is an upsetting place to be that has me longing to find other, more meaningful work where I can be more successful and just be more of who I am.	-4 Esteem or Feeling	Low to very high importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (negative), Resonant (negative), Distinct (searching for other work)
Existential Crisis or Tribulation	I do enjoy some or even several aspects of my work and often feel I am quite good at them, but I am intensely consumed by the idea that I long for work that allows me to express much more of who I am or to have the overall fulfilled life I want. I often feel I am wasting my potential doing the work I do, which makes me feel very bad about myself and my life. The problem may be that I either don’t yet know what I should be doing to fulfill my purpose or potential (i.e., what kind of work) or may feel dependent on the income or situation I am in and so feel trapped with little or no way out. It is very hard to come to work each day and I may resent many aspects of the work or work experience, but right now I feel trapped and unable to leave for a different opportunity. I feel an acute need to do something much more significant with my life through work that I have not yet found or am not currently experiencing. This is a very distressing place to be.	-7 Purpose	Very low to high importance to who I am as a person	Self-Expressive (negative), Self-Expressive (positive)