

# **Ikigai as A Tool for Developing Human-Centric Workplace Using Artificial Intelligence**

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## **Abstract**

*The business world has undergone significant changes in the last decade, partly due to the rapid and intense development of technology. As a result, traditional leadership models based on authority are fading, replaced by new models founded on values, a sense of belonging, active listening, learning, and sharing. Particularly, younger employees expect authenticity, accountability, respect, and honesty from their leaders. The fast dynamics and pace of technology and progress can be aligned with various effective approaches that prioritize understanding the individual. One such approach is ikigai. This paper focuses on the concept of ikigai and how it can be incorporated and utilized in human-centric workplaces and workplaces supported by the use of artificial intelligence. With a literature study on ikigai, we aim to present an alternative method of entrepreneurial leadership with an emphasis on values and individual self-fulfillment.*

**Keywords:** ikigai, artificial intelligence, emotional intelligence, human-centric work, hybrid work

## **INTRODUCTION**

In an era where digitalization and artificial intelligence are transforming traditional business models and work environments, organizations face the necessity of developing workplaces that not only meet technological requirements but also maintain the human dimension of work. The research problem we address arises from the need to balance modern technological innovations with the personal satisfaction and well-being of employees. In this context, ikigai, human-centric hybrid work, and artificial and emotional intelligence emerge as key concepts that can contribute to the creation of more meaningful and fulfilling workplaces.

Ikigai, a concept emphasizing the search for personal meaning and satisfaction in work, serves as a foundation for employee motivation and engagement. Aligning an individual's ikigai with organizational goals can lead to greater productivity and personal fulfilment. Human-centric work, which combines flexibility and technological support, allows employees to find a balance between work and personal life while maintaining a high level of cooperation and productivity.

Artificial intelligence, as a tool for automating and optimizing work processes, offers numerous benefits, but it is crucial that its implementation does not neglect the human aspect. The integration of artificial intelligence into work environments must be designed to support and complement human capabilities, which, in turn, requires the development of systems sensitive to human needs and that promote collaboration between humans and machines.

Emotional intelligence also plays a key role in establishing successful interpersonal relationships and leadership in technologically advanced work environments. The ability for empathy, self-awareness, and effective communication is essential for maintaining a positive work culture and fostering collaboration among employees.

This article presents a review of the literature exploring the connections between ikigai, human-centric work, artificial and emotional intelligence, and their impact on designing future workplaces. Through the analysis of various studies and theoretical frameworks, the article explains how the synergy of these concepts can contribute to the development of work environments that are productive, technologically advanced, and deeply human.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a literature review methodology, analyzing existing research and theoretical frameworks related to ikigai, human-centric work, artificial intelligence and emotional intelligence. By synthesizing findings from various studies, the article explores the connections between these concepts and their impact on designing future workplaces.

The article is based on the following research questions.

1. How can the integration of ikigai principles into organizational strategy enhance employee motivation and productivity?

2. What are the key benefits and challenges of implementing human-centric hybrid work models in modern business environments?
3. How can artificial and emotional intelligence be leveraged to maintain the human dimension in technologically advanced workplaces?

## **IKIGAI**

Ikigai is derived from the words "iki" (life) and "gai" (value). The concept of ikigai is based on the search for meaning (value) in life, which the Japanese equate to the reason we get up in the morning. The concept of ikigai is depicted with a diagram where four areas intersect. These areas relate to what an individual loves, what they are good at, what the world needs, and what they can be paid for. At the intersection of these four areas lies an individual's ikigai.

The concept of ikigai offers leaders the opportunity to identify and realize the true purpose of both employees and the organization. Leaders can effectively incorporate the principles of ikigai into their organization's strategy by recognizing the intersection between employees' passions and talents, which are then combined with the organizational needs and values into which the organization is willing to invest (Garcia & Miralles, 2016, pp. 53-55).

Ikigai offers significant added value to businesses (both small and large) from the perspective of modern business practices and life itself. By providing a framework that combines personal passions, talents, world needs, and financial viability, ikigai enables leaders and companies to better understand and realize the true purpose of both themselves and their organizations. In a new era where technology, market conditions, and employee expectations are rapidly changing, ikigai can help companies remain flexible and focused on what is truly important. By emphasizing the discovery of common ground among the four elements of ikigai, companies not only enhance personal satisfaction and motivation but also improve their engagement and productivity (Mitsubishi, 2018, pp. 51-56).

## **FUTURE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT**

Traditional career paths are shifting as more employees embrace nontraditional employment models and career breaks. A 2022 LinkedIn survey indicated that 62% of workers had taken a career break, with 35% considering one in the future. Economic cycles, caregiving, conflicts, natural disasters, and evolving technologies contribute to these changes. As these atypical paths become mainstream, traditional talent management strategies become barriers to talent acquisition and retention. Integrating ikigai, which aligns personal passions with professional roles, can enhance employee satisfaction, motivation, and productivity, helping organizations navigate these new career dynamics effectively (McRae et al., 2024).

The transformation of the workspace has been in full bloom since the Covid-19 pandemic. Traditional employment frameworks are no longer appealing to job seekers as they do not offer flexibility and reduce creativity. This dimension aligns with the current technological development, where processes, services, and products need to be personalized.

Modern business environments, therefore, are based on creating human-centric workplaces focused on the individual needs of employees and allowing greater flexibility and consequently satisfaction at work. An approach to work design that considers human needs leads to more productive and motivated workforces. The advantage of these workplaces is that they combine functionality and aesthetics, which further contributes to greater satisfaction, health, and efficiency of employees (Miscovich, 2022).

From this perspective, *ikigai* can help companies and individuals stand out with a clearly defined identity, goals, and mission. Thus, *ikigai* is not only useful for personal well-being but has the potential to become a key element for innovation, competitiveness, and long-term success in the modern business world.

Employers are increasingly recognizing the need to provide employees with significant reasons to work for their organization and to convey the reason "why" they should perform their jobs. Investing in human-centric workplaces represents an investment in people and the future of the company. Companies that adopt these practices can expect greater employee loyalty, lower turnover, and better overall results. Successfully managing human-centric workplaces requires developing a mindset of learning and adaptation, which allows for continuous improvement and response to employee needs (Miscovich, 2022). The assumption that a workplace is merely a physical location is becoming a thing of the past. Based on this, leadership progress should be focused on the fundamental question of work design and practice, as work will become a combination of physical and digital spaces (Mahoutchain et al., 2023).

Organizations must transform traditional boundaries and design physical, digital, or hybrid environments that meet various work needs, respecting the preferences and goals of employees. A human-focused approach to designing choices allows for the development of UI applications that are economically beneficial and socially positive. The approach to choice architecture, stronger than ever in the era of big data, enables personalized interventions (Guszcza, 2018).

*Ikigai* further offers companies the opportunity to align their business models with socially responsible and sustainable goals, which is becoming an increasingly important topic for both providers and consumers in the market. By enhancing sustainable objectives, companies foster a culture that values holistic well-being and purpose, while also building stronger, more loyal relationships with all stakeholders.

Future workplaces are based on worker autonomy and technological advancement. The workforce structure has significantly changed in recent years, advocating for workplace models that best support their needs and well-being. Workplaces are becoming more flexible and technologically advanced, enabling employees to work from anywhere and at any time. This requires organizations to rethink new models that support different ways of working and promote collaboration regardless of location. Technological advancements, such as metaverses, play a key role in creating these new work environments, providing dynamic and interactive experiences for all employees (Mahoutchain et al., 2023).

It is anticipated that human-centred workplaces will become the prevailing trend in the future. This approach allows employees to choose how, when, and where they work, which can increase their satisfaction and productivity. At the same time, there is an emphasis on creating a work environment that reflects and promotes the values and goals of the company. Such workplaces contribute to employee engagement, as they feel their work and environment are aligned with the broader goals of the company. Organizations are developing diverse work ecosystems and introducing new work models that take into account individual differences and employee preferences (Miscovich, 2022). It is important that in developing autonomous UI systems, we consider a human-centered design that satisfies end-user needs and ensures meaningful interaction between humans and computers (Guszcza, 2018)

The positive attributes of the ikigai concept for hybrid human-centric workplaces are evident in its ability to merge individual passions, talents, and needs with the needs of the organization and the market. Ikigai, as an intersection of ancient Japanese philosophy and the modern world of technology, brings a balance between achieving business goals and maintaining the personal satisfaction and well-being of employees.

## **HUMAN-CENTRIC HYBRID WORK**

In a world where the level of digitalization is extremely high, we truly have countless options on how to spend our time. We are enabled to have jobs in foreign countries, online schooling, unlimited opportunities to learn new skills, engage in various hobbies, and follow numerous career paths. However, this endless array of choices can also lead to a feeling of overload or loss of direction if we do not know how to channel our energy in the right direction.

Leading organizations are already exploring new approaches to improving work environments, such as hybrid models and digital innovations that allow for better collaboration and greater flexibility. Examples like Unilever's "Retail Flex" model or BMW's digital factory highlight the potential of technology and flexible working practices to transform the way we work and enhance efficiency (Mahoutchain et al., 2023)

Hybrid work is becoming the foundation of human-centric workplaces, requiring organizations to reshape traditional working hours and the approach to office work. The concept of work is based on flexibility and efficiency, regardless of the work location, which is becoming increasingly popular among employees. Hybrid work strategies adopted by organizations focus on productivity and employee engagement and require management trust in their teams' ability to meet set goals. It is expected that by 2025, most organizations will have adopted a hybrid work model (Miscovich, 2022). A Workforce Preferences Survey (2022) showed that the hybrid work model has become the most popular among office workers. Thus, the hybrid mode of work is establishing itself as a key element in the future of work, aligning employee expectations and current work styles. Furthermore, according to survey results, quality of life health and well-being have surpassed good pay as the main reason for changing jobs (Workforce Preferences Barometer 2022, 2022).

Human-centric workplaces are increasingly focusing on integrating technologies that enable an intuitive and digitally enhanced user experience. The development and inclusion of smart technologies allow for greater connectivity among remote and hybrid workers and tailored workspaces aimed at improving health and well-being. The use of digital platforms for collaboration and communication, such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, and ThoughtExchange, is becoming standard. Some companies have begun to introduce even more advanced platforms for collaboration in augmented reality (Miscovich, 2022). The automation UI paradox describes how increased dependence on technology can reduce our ability to act when technology fails, requiring different skills. UI development brings challenges in ensuring that technology remains designed around human needs. Feedback loops and the psychological impact of algorithms can lead to undesirable effects, such as the spread of bias and deterioration of human well-being, hence it is important that the design of UI systems considers the end-users and the social context (Guszcza, 2018)

## **THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN MODERN WORK ENVIRONMENTS**

Self-awareness and understanding one's own ikigai in a technologically advanced world are becoming crucial. When people perform work that truly suits them and brings them joy, they enhance their own well-being and contribute to a more creative and innovative work environment, which can better leverage new resources such as the use of artificial intelligence. The benefits of combining artificial intelligence and ikigai are multifaceted. First, it ensures that technological advancements serve human needs and goals, rather than displacing them. Furthermore, it encourages employees to find meaning and value in their work, which is key to preventing occupational burnout, stress, and depression. Ikigai helps employees better understand artificial intelligence as a tool that enhances their productivity and creativity, without feeling threatened or replaceable. By encouraging employees to explore their ikigai, companies create a culture where innovation and learning are part of everyday work.

The framework of artificial intelligence expands the traditional understanding that AI is limited to simulating human intelligence or using machine learning. Artificial intelligence is used to automate tasks based on both explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge can be documented and easily transferred into algorithms for process automation, while tacit knowledge presents a greater challenge, as it is intuitive and stems from experience. Nonetheless, AI capabilities are rapidly evolving, enabling the automation of more complex tasks. However, it is important to understand that AI technology does not perceive or create meaning in the same way humans do. In practice, AI enables more efficient execution of routine tasks and can support humans in more complex activities, but it is crucial that its use is designed with an understanding of human needs (Guszcza, 2018)

Increasing concern exists regarding how filtering news and comments through algorithms can lead to filter bubbles and epistemically closed communities of opinion. Legal expert Cass Sunstein emphasizes in his recent book that this can increase the polarization of groups and

jeopardize rational debate, which is a prerequisite for a well-functioning democracy. He suggests that social network recommendation algorithms should be designed with human-centric design in mind, allowing for spontaneous, fortunate discoveries of alternative news and opinion articles to prevent polarization and groupthink. Furthermore, automation is only part of the story, as algorithms can also enhance human cognitive abilities. It is possible to achieve forms of collective intelligence between humans and computers if a human-centric approach to AI is adopted (Guszcza, 2018).

Artificial intelligence systems designed for automation or enhancing human capabilities are likely to bring greater economic benefits and social acceptability if user needs and psychological factors are considered. Designing these systems can bridge the gap between AI algorithm outputs and improved outcomes through better forms of collaboration between humans and computers. Therefore, it is fitting that the final word belongs to Garry Kasparov, from his recent book *Deep Thinking*, which highlights that many jobs will continue to be lost to intelligent automation, but the field of collaboration between humans and machines and the architecture and design of processes will flourish in the coming years. In both figurative and literal senses, the final word is design (Guszcza, 2018).

### ***Maintaining a High Level of Emotional Intelligence***

Maintaining a high level of emotional intelligence in an era where artificial intelligence takes over numerous tasks and responsibilities is also crucial from an ethical usage perspective. Emotional intelligence enables deep human interaction and understanding that artificial intelligence cannot yet offer. The ability to understand and manage one's own emotions, empathy, and successful communication with others, provides individuals with invaluable skills that are essential for interpersonal relationships, leadership, and collaboration. It is *ikigai* that can enhance an individual's level of emotional intelligence and highlight areas that are important to the individual.

In a world where artificial intelligence is transforming jobs and industries, emotional intelligence allows individuals to adapt, learn, and innovate. While artificial intelligence can process and analyze data faster than humans, creative and innovative processes often require a deep understanding of human experiences and perspectives stemming from emotional intelligence (Kirk, 2022).

*Ikigai*, which encourages the search for personal meaning and satisfaction, is closely linked to emotional intelligence. When individuals understand their passions, values, and abilities (find their *ikigai*), they are better equipped to manage their emotions, motivate themselves and others, and establish meaningful relationships. Emotional intelligence and *ikigai* together help individuals adapt to changes brought about by technological advancements and find personal fulfillment and their own path in these changes (Werder, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

Based on our research questions, we can say that integrating ikigai principles into organizational strategy enhances employee motivation and productivity by aligning personal passions with organizational goals. Implementing human-centred hybrid work models offers benefits like greater flexibility and improved work-life balance but presents challenges in communication and maintaining culture. Leveraging artificial and emotional intelligence helps maintain the human dimension in technologically advanced workplaces by automating routine tasks and promoting empathy, self-awareness and effective communication. These strategies collectively contribute to creating productive, innovative, and fulfilling work environments that balance technological advancements with the well-being of employees.

As demonstrated in the article, ikigai can have a significant impact on human-centric workplaces and the use of artificial intelligence in both business and everyday life. By encouraging individuals to seek and fulfil their passions, values, and talents, ikigai contributes to more satisfied and meaningful professional paths. This not only improves the well-being and productivity of employees but also strengthens organizational culture and innovation.

In the context of the increasing role of artificial intelligence, ikigai helps maintain the human element in technologically advanced environments, ensuring that technology serves to enhance human experiences rather than replace human contact. The focus on human intelligence is crucial as artificial intelligence takes over more routine and analytical tasks. High emotional intelligence allows people to maintain their uniqueness and authenticity, which sets them apart from machines and enhances interpersonal relationships and teamwork.

Okinawa, known as one of the five Blue Zones in Japan, has the highest number of centenarians in the world. People in Okinawa live by the principle of ikigai, which includes a balanced diet, regular physical activity, strong social bonds, and a clear sense of purpose. This holistic way of life is associated with longevity and a high quality of life.

Integrating ikigai into business and personal lives offers a path to more fulfilling and productive work environments while preserving humanity in the age of digitalization. Designing workplaces and technologies with a human-centric approach and maintaining a high level of emotional intelligence is key to building a meaningful future where technology serves as a tool for enhancement, not a replacement for the human touch. Ikigai is not just a philosophy; it is a pathway to a more balanced, productive, and fulfilled life.

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