MIND TOOLS

Essential skills for an excellent career

Mind Tools on Motivation

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Mind Tools on Motivation

Introduced by Mind Tools CEO, James Manktelow

Motivation is something that fascinates many Mind Tools readers. It's an important subject for everyone who is in some way responsible for other people, and is also one that many find difficult and confusing.

This PDF brings together some of the most important thinking on motivation. Our coverage gives theories, tips and techniques that are sure to make a difference in motivating yourself, and in motivating others.

Motivation is a very broad topic, and one that reaches well beyond just pushing yourself to achieve more. High motivation is vitally important if you and your team are to achieve peak performance.

James Manktelow,
CEO, MindTools.com

However, it's also a topic littered with myths and misconceptions: This is why many managers find it so difficult to motivate people, and why so many well-meaning attempts to motivate go astray.

Because it's such a wide topic, we've split it up into three separate sections:

- What Really Motivates People? – Dispelling the myths about motivation;
- Motivational Theories – Exploring the Nuts and Bolts of Motivation; and
- Your Motivation Survival Guide.

We hope you enjoy this PDF and find it useful!

James Manktelow
CEO
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Mind Tools on Motivation

What Really Motivates People?
Dispelling the myths about motivation

Why do organizations, managers and team leaders want highly motivated employees? The answer is simple: To improve performance.

Better motivation leads to all sorts of positive behaviors: Motivated employees tend to work harder; be less stressed; take more care in their work; be less likely to leave their jobs; look for opportunities to improve the processes with which they work; and much more. But in the end, all of this adds up to one thing: Improved performance.

So, if you're a manager or you're in upper level administration, motivating your team is a must. And it can be one of the quickest ways to improve your "bottom line" too, whether your "bottom line" is financial or measured in another way such as customer satisfaction, production quality or reducing an inherited backlog.

So, just how can you increase motivation, improve employee performance and watch your "bottom line" grow, however it is measured?

Perhaps we should start with the old saying: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink". The same is true for people. To get the best from people, you have to inspire and motivate them to give their best.

While it seems that some people are born with higher levels of motivation than others, this is not always the case. In fact, it has been proven that motivating people is a skill, one that must be mastered to achieve success.

Motivation - A Key Contributor to Performance

You can think of performance as a simple equation:

Job performance = ability x motivation

Ability depends, to some degree, on education, experience and training. This makes improvement a continual, lengthy process. By contrast, motivation can be quickly improved.

There are a handful of very basic, broad strategies that you can use to improve it. These include:

- Positive reinforcement
- Effective discipline
- Treating people fairly
- Satisfying employee needs
- Setting attainable work-related goals
- Restructuring jobs when necessary
- Giving rewards that are based on performance

While motivation practices will vary widely from workplace to workplace, these are the areas you should focus on when you want to motivate people.

Frederick Herzberg's Findings

Now, it's worth going into a bit of theory here. To get a deeper understanding of motivation and job satisfaction, we can look to Frederick Herzberg, a well-respected researcher who closely studied the sources of employee motivation in the 1950s and 1960s. While Herzberg's studies were conducted some time ago, they are strongly respected and underpin much of our current view of motivation.

He found that the things that make people satisfied and motivated on the job are different in kind from the things that make them dissatisfied (or act as de-motivators.) This points to an approach which is exactly opposite of the motivators commonly put in place in the modern workplace, i.e. use of compensation and incentive packages.

For, as discussed in his classic article in the *Harvard Business Review* ("One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?", January - February 1968), Herzberg argued that spiraling wages may very well serve to motivate employees; however, the action they motivate is the seeking the next wage increase - and little more than that.

In fact, Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory suggests that the factors that determine job satisfaction and serve to motivate are "separate and distinct from the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction." Hence, the opposite of job satisfaction is not job dissatisfaction, but rather no job satisfaction. Conversely, the opposite of job dissatisfaction is not job satisfaction, but no job dissatisfaction.

According to Herzberg, the factors to consider when working to enhance job satisfaction and motivation include:

- Achievement
- Recognition for Achievement
- Work Itself
- Responsibility
- Growth
- Advancement

And the factors which cause most dissatisfaction (Herzberg's "hygiene factors", which we'll look at in more depth on page 11) include:

- Company Policy
- Administration
- Poor Supervision
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Working Conditions
- Salary
- Status
- Security

So managers should seek to motivate people by giving opportunities for achievement and celebrating this, and helping individuals enjoy and grow in their jobs. And they should actively minimize the bureaucracy and petty irritations that organizations often unthinkingly inflict on employees.

Herzberg concluded that motivators are the primary cause of satisfaction, and hygiene factors are the primary cause of unhappiness in the workplace. Taking an example: People are often only temporarily motivated by an increase in salary, however they can become very demotivated if they think salaries are too low or if they're earning less than their peers.

Now, it's easy to pass over this information without absorbing its significance.

Instead, pause for a moment and put aside your current assumptions about other people's motivations. Reflect on how you feel yourself. Isn't this true for you? Don't you get your greatest satisfaction from doing a good job, being recognized for it, and from growing your capabilities? And aren't you most demotivated by the frustrations of bureaucracy, organizational stupidity, politics and being "taken advantage of"?

 As it is for you, so it is for most other people.

Summary

If you're a manager, you already know that motivating your team is an important part of your job. In so many cases, the level of motivation of your team is a huge factor in its performance.

The role of motivation or "job enrichment", as Herzberg called it, is more than a single project, instead calling on continuous efforts from management. In working to do this, managers should:

- Where possible, enrich jobs so that they offer a level of challenge equal to the skills of the person that occupies them;
- Work to ensure those with ability are able to demonstrate it, and can win promotion to higher-level jobs; and
- Understand that the very nature of motivators (as opposed to hygiene factors) is that they have a long-term effect on employees' attitudes.

Obviously, not all jobs can be enriched, nor do all jobs need to be enriched. But as Herzberg concluded, if a small percentage of the time and money that is dedicated to "hygiene" was instead allocated to his motivating factors, the return in employee satisfaction and motivation, as well as economic gain, would be one of "the largest dividends that industry and society have ever reaped."

It's now time to put this into practice! How are you going to motivate your team? How will you make good motivation a routine part of your approach to management?

Keep reading to learn more about motivation theories as well as tips and suggestions for making them work in reality.

Motivational Theories
The Nuts and Bolts of Motivation

This section reviews the best known theories of motivation. Why? Well, if we're to understand the current view of motivation, we need to understand its history because ideas have changed radically over the last 70 years. Approaches that might have been valid in the mid-20th Century have been turned on their head as society has changed and the workplace has become less paternalistic.

In the previous section, for example, we concluded that what were once hailed as the chief motivators – punishment and monetary reward – are no longer considered the most effective means of motivating people. Instead, people today want to work in organizations where they feel that their achievements are recognized and they are valued for their contribution.

By learning more about early motivational theories, you'll gain an in-depth understanding of how our current views on motivation have come about. This will help you to distinguish old and out-of-date motivational approaches from those needed for success in today's complex workplace.

As we take a closer look at the theories of motivation, bear in mind that several of the theories conflict, yet they all have some element of truth. The extent to which they are right often varies according to the situation.

Early Ideas

Early ideas owed much to animal experimentation. Researchers saw that rats would learn certain behaviors when rewarded with food, and would avoid other behaviors when punished. These experiments, and the success of this approach in animal training, led psychologists to extend these ideas to humans. This is why so much traditional motivational practice has focused on reward and punishment.

Now, we're not saying that these approaches are always wrong; however what we do say is that in most cases, humans are more sophisticated than this.

If we reflect on what has been true for ourselves in the past, we find that such approaches often seemed crude and sterile: Yes, money's important and we want to be well-rewarded. And yes, people don't like to be punished. But most of us are ultimately more motivated by the experience of achievement, the feeling of self-growth, and a passion for our work.

This old-fashioned reward/punishment approach started to lose ground in the 1950s with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and McGregor's Factor X/Y Theory. These were followed by two more theories that further changed our views: Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory and Expectancy Theory. We'll look at these now.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was significant in that it established that humans have a range of different needs that they seek to satisfy.

Importantly, Maslow grouped these needs together into levels. The most basic level starts with the physiological need for food, water and shelter. This is followed by security and social needs. Maslow believed that the higher level needs, such as self-esteem and self-fulfillment, could only be met after the lower level needs had been satisfied.

The diagram below shows Maslow's Hierarchy:

Level 5: "Self-Actualization"

Level 4: Self-Esteem, Ego

Level 3: Love, Belonging, Social

Level 2: Security

Level 1: Physiology, Body

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

These levels are explained below:

Level 1 - Body/Physiology:
This level represents the basic things you need to stay alive. It includes needs like having enough food, water and shelter to survive.

Level 2 – Security:
Level 2 represents safety and security – the need to be safe from physical and psychological harm in the present and future. This includes the need to feel secure in your job.

Level 3 – Belonging/Social:
Level 3 is about the need to feel a valued member of your team, and the need to enjoy good relationships with the people around you.

Level 4 - Self-Esteem:
Level 4 corresponds to a feeling of self-respect and self-acceptance, and encompasses the need for recognition and the desire to feel important.

Level 5 – "Self-Actualization":
Level 5 represents the idea of "Self-Actualization" – an unhelpful term that Maslow used to describe doing the thing you feel you were born to do. This represents the need for self-fulfillment, and the desire to realize your full potential and become the best you can be.

The idea with Maslow's Hierarchy is that people progress from level to level: Once someone's needs for security are met, they are then motivated by the search for belonging. And once they feel they belong, they are motivated by self-esteem.

Now this has strong intuitive appeal, and some element of truth within it. And as a general approach, it reminds us that if we want to motivate people, we have to address all these different levels of need.

However, do not stick too rigidly to this hierarchy:

- In reality, people don't work through these levels one-at-a-time - they are much less structured in the way they satisfy their needs;
- Different people with different cultural backgrounds and in different situations may have different hierarchies of need; and
- Other researchers believe that other needs are more significant (for example, David McClelland identified needs for achievement, affiliation and power, which he noted were of different importance to different people.)

McGregor's Factor X/Y Theory

Shortly after Maslow published his hierarchy of needs, Douglas McGregor published his Factor X/Y Theory. McGregor noted that managers generally had two beliefs about employees and their attitudes toward their job:

- Theory X, by which managers assume that the majority of employees dislike work, and would be idle if they could be. Because of this, employees need to be closely managed; and
- Theory Y, which assumes that happy employees will work hard, seek responsibility and show initiative without the need for much supervision.

McGregor's Factor X/Y Theory taps into the age-old wisdom that a happy employee is a better performer and will be more motivated, concluding that a constructive working environment is key to motivational success.

While Theory Y will be truer in some cases than others, in many cases Theory X management destroys motivation, while Theory Y management unlocks strong performance. In saying this, we return to the "equation" we used in the first section:

Job Performance = Ability x Motivation

Now, stop and ask yourself how you think about your co-workers and your team. When you think about them as individuals, one-by-one, which of the two approaches would you use to manage each one?

Most likely you'll end up with a mixture of approaches, and probably a few people who sit in between the two extremes. However, if you find you tend more towards Theory X than Theory Y, then you probably need to take ideas of motivation much more seriously: Think of it as a great opportunity to improve the productivity of your team.

McGregor's broad approach was taken much further by Frederick Herzberg, who we mentioned in the previous section.

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Frederick Herzberg, a well-respected researcher who closely studied the sources of employee motivation in the 1950s and 1960s, produced great work on job satisfaction and employee satisfaction. This work forms a large part of the foundation on which most successful motivation approaches are now built.

As Herzberg determined, the factors that contribute to job satisfaction and motivation are different from those that contribute to dissatisfaction.

You may remember Herzberg's argument that increasing wages does little more than motivate employees to seek the next wage increase. His works showed that the factors that determine job satisfaction (and serve to motivate) are "separate and distinct from the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction." Hence, the opposite of job satisfaction is not job dissatisfaction, but rather no job satisfaction. Conversely, the opposite of job dissatisfaction is not job satisfaction, but no job dissatisfaction. This is a bit of a mouthful!

Herzberg's "Hygiene Factors" (the things that make us unhappy and de-motivated) are obstructive company policy, unhelpful administration, intrusive supervision, bad working relationships, poor conditions, uncompetitive salaries, low status and job insecurity. By fixing these problems you can get rid of much de-motivation and unhappiness, but you will not build high motivation.

To start motivating people, these de-motivating factors need first to be controlled. But to build real motivation, you need to give opportunities for and recognize achievement; provide intrinsically rewarding work; and give opportunities for responsibility, growth and advancement.

Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory is the other major pillar of the modern approach to motivation. This focuses on building a strong link between the effort that people put in, and the achievement of goals and outcomes that are desirable for both the individual and the organization. The belief here is that where employees are confident that hard work will generate good outcomes, employees will want to work hard.

Building this link between effort and outcome is a two-stage process:

1. Firstly, a link needs to be made between high effort and high performance. In some cases this will be easy and self-evident, but in others it will involve training and coaching while someone is brought "up to speed";
2. Secondly, managers need to build a link between high performance and good outcomes.

Where both of these hold true, then the hard work, good outcome link is created.

Unfortunately, the reality is that the world is not always like this – factors outside hard work (such as inferior resources and plain bad luck) can break this link.

Expectancy theory implies that where this happens, managers must be careful to nurture the linkage. Where an employee has failed despite intense hard work, the manager must take care to explain the external factors that caused failure, and should absolve the employee of any serious blame. Conversely, where an employee has been successful while still being idle, the manager reinforces the link either by showing that other factors contributed to the positive outcome, or by pointing out how much more successful things would have been if the employee had worked harder.

At one level, this can be seen as manipulative.

However at another level, it speaks to very fundamental human drives for order and predictability and for fair reward to be expected for fair effort.

Different Approaches Work for Different People

While this was no more than a whistle stop tour through the history of motivation theories, it should have given you a better understanding of some of the most important ideas in motivation. We hope we've also helped you to see both the value of these ideas and their limitations.

Perhaps the most important thing to take away from these theories is that different approaches to motivation are necessary for different people.

Your Motivation Survival Guide

In the previous two sections, we looked at the key theories behind motivation. Amongst other points, we have demonstrated the importance for motivation of treating people fairly, providing a good working environment, recognizing achievement and helping people grow. Unfortunately, getting this right is no simple task!

As we have seen, both the psychology of motivating and the history of motivational ideas are quite complex. Yet, as varied as they are complex, they serve as a catalyst for motivational success, when applied appropriately and with the right knowledge.

But it would be a mistake to say that this motivational success can be achieved by applying just one theory, or just one approach. Different people in different situations in different cultures think and behave in different ways. For when it comes to motivating, what leads to success can be as wide-ranging as the theories that make up this important managerial tool.

The Simple Answer for Motivational Success

So how can you better motivate your team members to achieve the success you desire? As simple as it may seem, the answer may lie in talking with them.

The importance of this cannot be overstated: If you don't make a point of listening to your team, you can miss huge opportunities both for removing de-motivators and for motivation. Team members may be upset by tiny points of bureaucracy of which you're not even aware. Or there may be simple actions that you could take that would have a huge impact on people's morale.

But what questions should you ask?

Ask questions that will help you learn more about their individual goals and their views in terms of their job. (For large groups, gather everyone and distribute a questionnaire that asks these questions in the simplest, most direct way possible).

Keep in mind that achievement, recognition, growth, meaningful work, equity and camaraderie and likely to be high on most people's list. This, of course, is aside from the obvious, which is that employees must have a safe working environment, a practical workload, comfortable working conditions, a reasonable degree of job security, satisfactory compensation and benefits, respectful treatment, credible and consistent management, and the opportunity to voice their concerns, if you're to achieve even minimal motivation. After all, these are the basics and should be considered not so much as motivational factors, but as basic necessities.

You should also ask team members if they feel challenged at work and if they feel they are able to use their skills and apply their knowledge. Is there adequate room for growth for your employees? Do they have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and learn new skills?

Do they perceive their job to be important? Do they receive recognition for their performance? And, are they proud to work for the company and proud of their individual contribution?

Also, strive to learn more about their relationships within the workplace. Do your best to ensure your employees have consistently positive interactions with you, as well as with other members of the team. By having regular one-to-one chats with team members, you can quickly pick up and resolve issues before they become significant, as well as taking the opportunity to praise achievement.

From Theory to Successful Practice...

Remember, your goal here is to learn what will build higher morale, generate enthusiasm, and increase productivity. And just look at companies when they're performing at their best: What you'll most often find as a common denominator is the high morale of the workers.

Simply put, to motivate team members, help them be productive and be the best they can be, let them know how they are doing, make an investment in them and help them grow.

Considering that employee enthusiasm is directly related to employee performance, this becomes a never-ending cycle, one that when spun the right way, will yield unmatched results for you, your employees and the organization.

The bottom line is this: When it comes to motivating your team, perhaps you should start by considering what would motivate you. Then talk to your team members to find out what they want and need. And then work diligently to provide them with it.

Moving On…

We hope you've enjoyed this Mind Tools PDF guide to motivation.

We have put a great deal of effort into developing this and our other material. If you have any suggestions on how we can improve it for the future, then please let us know at customer.helpdesk@mindtools.com or through the Mind Tools web site at www.mindtools.com. Alternatively, if you have enjoyed this guide and found it useful, please let us know!

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Best wishes, and enjoy using Mind Tools!

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