

Employee Motivations and Capabilities



How to best develop them.

By Mark Oliver



It is best to use different approaches for developing motivations (which can be thought of to do with the “heart”) and developing capabilities (which can be thought of to do with the “head”).

Developing Capabilities. If we take the second area first Capabilities can be split into knowledge (such as learning how to use Excel spreadsheets) and behavioral (such as developing leadership skills). Behavioral capabilities are usually more difficult to develop than knowledge based ones, and it is generally best to use both formal interventions (such as courses) and informal ones (such as learning on the job or work projects) to get the greatest development in either case. If seeking outside assistance it is important to go to training or consultancy organizations that have a very good understanding on human nature and learning, and that use instruments and processes which are validated.

Developing Motivation. The discussion on developing motivations is necessarily more involved than the one on capability. This may be surprising, as at first sight capability seems more important to success than motivation! But look more deeply and you realize that motivation is much more important than capability in the wider context of both professional and personal life. In short this is because:

1. Motivation determines what you do and in many ways it determines the path you take at work (and in life).
2. If you do not have the motivation then your capability becomes largely irrelevant. Not surprisingly then, motivation precedes capability and often underlies capability.

Given this, another question becomes very important: *what can we*

do to increase motivation? To answer this it is important to realize that, perhaps surprisingly again nothing, and no one else, can motivate anyone. The performance coach, Denis Waitley, highlighted;

But things can *help* someone be motivated and we can divide these into *internal* and *external* factors.

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Everything an individual does, whether positive or negative, intentional or unintentional, is the result of motivation. Everyone is self-motivated. For too long...it has been wrongly assumed that motivation is extraneous (externally driven).”

Internal Factors. The internal factors include a person’s personality (values and beliefs etc.) An important time to look at this is when selecting individuals and it is wise to use good psychometric instruments to help increase the accuracy of your decisions, such as *The Universal Hierarchy of Motivation Professional Report* (see www accuratesurveys.com/UHM), especially as they are so cost effective.

External Factors. A key external factor is the systems and structure of the organization. But to understand how human motivation is affected by these is often hard to predict. Consider the real-life example of a

day-care center that encountered tardy parents at closing time each day.

This situation led to anxious children and frustrated care takers. A solution put in place by ten day-care centers in Haifa, Israel, was to fine parents three dollars for those who were more than ten minutes late. Rather surprisingly, this solution had the opposite effect because the number of late parents more than doubled after the fine was introduced. It turned out that the guilt the parents felt in being late was motivating them to be on time, but now the payment of a small fine assuaged these feelings and they were less motivated to be punctual.

A good model on human motivation is so helpful because it helps you to better predict what the actual outcomes will be. *The Universal Hierarchy of Motivation (UHM)* provides the basis for a complete understanding of human motivation so that you can accurately predict what behaviours will result from system or structural changes. The model is shown in the table below:

UHM Level	UHM Drive	Focus
7	Meaning	Focus on Others
6	Wisdom	
5	Courage	
4	Compassion	
3	Power	Focus on Self
2	Pleasure	
1	Survival	

In this motivational model the higher the motivation the more impactful the drive. Superficially this model appears similar to needs based models such as *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* but it is fundamentally different in the way it works. Also it is better to deal at the level of motivation in the psyche rather than needs because needs are too deep to do much about and further away from actual behavior. So let's apply it to the day-care example above. The reason they got this "surprising" behavior from parents is that money is typically a Level One motivator whereas guilt is usually Level Two or Three. So the guilt was a stronger motivator to be on time and payment of a fine assuaged the guilt so only the lower motivation of money was driving parents to be punctual.

Intrinsic Motivation. Edward Deci, an American psychologist,¹ observed that tangible rewards inevitably reduce the intrinsic motivation of individuals. He stated, "The facts are absolutely clear, there is no question that in virtually all circumstances in which people are doing things in order to get rewards, external tangible rewards undermine intrinsic motivation."² This includes the "bonus myth". There is a lot of research that external rewards in the form of bonuses often do not improve productivity or results, and can lead to an individual focussing on trying to get a bonus even when it is at odds with what is best for the organization.³

The UHM helps you to understand human motivation comprehensively and so make the most accurate predictions on what people's motivation (and hence resulting behavior) will be given a set of system or structural changes. Remembering that the higher UHM level we are at then the more impact we have on our own and others' lives. The UHM levels are shown in the table below correlated with the relevant intrinsic motivator and extrinsic behaviour.

	Motivational Drive	Intrinsic Motivator	Extrinsic Behaviour
7	Meaning	Optimism	Grace (<i>courteous good will</i>)
6	Wisdom		Feedback (<i>not criticism</i>)
5	Courage	Empathy	Accountability
4	Compassion	Sympathy	Cooperation
3	Power	Praise (<i>genuine</i>)	Commitment
2	Pleasure	Humor	Involvement
1	Survival	Belief	Satisfaction

How much an employee is "engaged" (feels an emotional bond) to the organization has been shown in many studies across industries to have a direct correlation with productivity. International studies have found that employees who were fully engaged in their work, were almost fifty percent more productive in terms of revenue generation and three hundred percent better at delivering value than their disengaged (disaffected) colleagues. The "extrinsic behaviors" in the table above correspond to increasing levels of positive engagement, going up the table and starting with the lowest one: satisfaction at work.

So to get the best performance (or combination of people's motivation and capability) from those employees you currently have in the organization, it is critical that you provide the structures and systems which will help to motivate them at the higher levels. To be able to understand and predict what this is you have to have a very good model or framework describing human motivation.

Once you have set up the environment in your organization which achieves this, only then is it worth investing time and money in training your employees. If you do it the other way around the risk is that not only will the employees not use the new skills they acquired from their training but also they are more likely to leave the organization, which means someone else is likely to get all the investment you have made in them! **R&E**



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