

WHY YOU NEED MOTIVATED AND CAPABLE EMPLOYEES

Mark Oliver explains why businesses need to understand the basics of human motivation in order to increase employee satisfaction and productivity in the workplace

Motivation combined with capability tends to lead to effective behaviours, and behaviour underpins performance. To get the right answer to the question above it helps to ask the right question and the question in this case would be: how do we get our employees to perform better? If someone has the capability but not the motivation to do something required to perform, then the necessary behaviour is very unlikely to arise and they will not perform; similarly, if someone has the motiva-

tion but not the capability. You need both motivation and capability for performance.

WHY MOTIVATION IS KEY

The second question that follows on from this is: which is most important with regard to performance – motivation or capability? At first sight it would seem that the more important of the two is capability, and there is often a great emphasis on training in the workplace to enhance that. The appropriate training is important and, after all, motivation is not trainable, so one might wonder what is the use in focusing on human motivation? But look more deeply and you will realise that motivation is much more important than capability in the wider context of both professional and personal life. In short this is because of two facts:

1. Motivation determines what you do; 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 leads to capability.

Given all this, the third question becomes very important: what can we do to increase motivation? To answer this you can split the factors affecting motivation into two parts: internal and external to the individual.

Internal factors: The internal factors include a person's personality (values, beliefs, etc.). An important time to look at this is when recruiting 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 accuratesurveys.com), especially as they are so cost effective.

External factors: Key external factors are the systems and structure of the organisation. But it is often difficult to predict how these affect human motivation. Consider the real-life example of a day-care centre that encountered tardy parents at closing time each day. This situation led to

If you do not have the motivation then your capability becomes largely irrelevant. Not surprisingly then, motivation precedes capability and often leads to capability

anxious children and frustrated carers. A solution put in place by several day-care centres in Haifa, Israel, was to fine parents three dollars if they were more than 10 minutes late. Rather surprisingly, this solution had the opposite effect and 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 helpful because it helps you to predict better 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. For instance, many people still believe that bonuses make employees work harder and more effectively. Alfie Kohn, a teacher-turned-writer found that the more you reward a person with grades or incentives, then the lower the person's productivity. In this context, individuals become less intrinsically motivated. Bonuses (extrinsic motivators) actually reduce people's performance on complex tasks because they limit individuals' capacity to fulfil the task by changing their focus to how to get the best bonus.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

American psychologist Edward Deci 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

How much an employee is 'engaged' to the organisation has been shown in many studies to have a direct correlation with productivity

doing things in order to get rewards, external tangible rewards undermine intrinsic motivation".¹ (There is one exception to this observation. This involves jobs where there is little intrinsic motivation, such as simple repetitive manual tasks, and in that case, rewards do tend to increase output or productivity.)

The UHM helps you to understand human motivation comprehensively and so makes the most accurate predictions on what people's motivation (and hence resulting behaviour) will be, given a set of system or structural changes. 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.


How much an employee is 'engaged' (feels an emotional bond) to the organisation 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 50% more

productive in terms of revenue generation and 300% better at delivering value than their disengaged (disaffected) colleagues. The 'extrinsic behaviours' in the table correspond to increasing levels of positive engagement, going up the table and starting with the lowest one: satisfaction at work.

The UHM theory explains the observations that paid bonuses at work are poor motivators because they only move employees' motivation to the level of pleasure, which renders them less able to deal with greater and more complex challenges which are best dealt with at a higher level.

CONCLUSION

So to get the best performance (or combination of people's motivation and capability) from those employees you currently have in the organisation, it is critical that you provide the structures and systems (including pay systems) that 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 organisation that 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 acquire in their training but also they are more likely to leave the organisation, which means someone else is likely to get all the investment you have made in them! 

Note:

1. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 125, pg 627

UHM LEVEL	MOTIVATIONAL DRIVE	INTRINSIC MOTIVATOR	EXTRINSIC BEHAVIOUR
7	MEANING	OPTIMISM	GRACE (COURTEOUS GOOD WILL)
6	WISDOM	UNDERSTANDING (LISTENING)	FEEDBACK (NOT CRITICISM)
5	COURAGE	EMPATHY	ACCOUNTABILITY
4	COMPASSION	SYMPATHY	COOPERATION
3	POWER	PRAISE (GENUINE)	COMMITMENT
2	PLEASURE	HUMOUR	INVOLVEMENT
1	SURVIVAL	BELIEF	SATISFACTION

Mark Oliver is managing director and CEO of MarkTwo Consulting, and author of 'The Seven Motivators of Life'. Visit marktwoconsulting.com or lulu.com

