

One of the key skills required by project managers, in fact all managers, is the ability to motivate team members and the wider stakeholder community. Great leaders are great motivators¹. However as a motivator, traditional rewards aren't always as effective as we think. Essentially there are two types of motivator; extrinsic motivators are based on an 'if-then' transaction, if you do something we want, you will get a reward. Intrinsic motivators are internal to the person based on 'feeling good' or happy as a consequence of something.

Motivation Theory

Extrinsic Motivators

Management scientists way back to Henry Gantt in the early part of the 20th century had established that in the 'carrot-and-stick' approach to motivation, fear and the 'stick' had little effect, the 'carrot' and reward had measureable effect. Based on these findings, most business approaches to motivation are based on extrinsic motivators:

- If you achieve 'A' we will reward you with 'B' and
- If you are really good and make '2A' we will give you '2B'.

The theory used by business is based on the assumption that provided the reward is commensurate with the effort needed and expectations of the person; the larger the reward the greater the motivation. It is assumed that as long as basic principles such as fairness are applied the increase in motivation will flow through to increased performance. More motivation = better performance.

More recent studies have consistently demonstrated this approach only applies to manual workers. As soon as a degree of creativity is required, traditional rewards aren't as effective as most organisations think.

Intrinsic Motivators

More recent work by researchers has suggested other factors are needed to motivate knowledge workers and managers involved in creative activities. Some of the key theories are:

- Herzberg's Hygiene Theory (1959) – wages are a hygiene factor lack of adequate compensation is a demotivator.
- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) – Physiological needs (food) is at the lowest level.
- McGregor's Theory X, Theory Y (1960) – Theory X assumes management's role is to coerce and control employees. Theory Y assumes, management's role is to develop the potential in employees and help them to release that potential towards common goals.

The higher level motivators in Herzberg and Maslow's theory's that support McGregor's Theory Y are internal to the person and centred around self actualisation. They include:

- Autonomy: control and self-direction over the work to be done.
- Mastery: the ability to excel at the work by getting better and better at difficult tasks.
- Purpose: the work is in the service of something larger and contributes value to the organisation and others.

Tapping into a person's intrinsic motivations requires a completely different approach to the 'old school' command and control ideas of management:

¹ For more on leadership see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1014_Leadership.pdf

Intellectual creativity cannot be 'programmed' and directed the way we program and direct an assembly line or an accounting department. This kind of intellectual contribution to the enterprise cannot be obtained by giving orders, by traditional supervisory practices, or by close systems of control. Even conventional notions of productivity are meaningless with reference to the creative intellectual effort. Management has not yet considered in any depth what is involved in managing an organization heavily populated with people whose prime contribution consists of creative intellectual effort.

Douglas McGregor essay, "New Concepts of Management"

Motivation - Summary

Traditional reward will work for simple manual tasks as can 'Theory X'. However, as soon as creative thinking is needed extrinsic rewards have repeatedly been shown to have the opposite effect by focusing effort in a narrow band and stopping the more creative thinking needed to solve the problem. The results are measurable negative performance, increasing as the reward increases. What's fascinating is most organisations reward their senior decision makers with huge pay bonuses to solve some of society's most difficult problems (and wonder why they fail so often...).

Command or Control?

The military doctrine of 'command and control' heavily influenced the structural approach to management characterised as 'Scientific Management' and the works of Taylor (1911). Scientific management assumes, amongst other things, that 'supervision must be achieved through a clear chain of command and through the application of impersonal rules' and that 'only those at the top have the capacity and opportunity to direct the enterprise'. This philosophy has strongly influenced the development of project management². But does this represent effective military management?

Following the defeat of the Prussian armies by Napoleon at the battles of Jena and Auerstedt in 1806, the concept of ridged process-oriented command and control structures has been progressively replaced by the concept of 'auftragstaktik', or directive command. These ideas were originally championed by Major General Gerhard von Scharnhorst and were formalised by German Generalfeldmarschall Helmuth von Moltke who was the chief of staff of the Prussian Army for thirty years from 1857.

The core concept of auftragstaktik is 'bounded initiative'. Provided people within the organisation hierarchy have proper training and the organisational culture is strong, the leader's role is to clearly outline his/her intentions and rationale. Once this is understood, subordinate personnel can formulate their own plan of action for the tasks they are allocated and design appropriate responses to achieve the objectives based on their understanding of the actual situation, exploit opportunities and mitigate problems.

The investment necessary to achieve this capability is not simply a question of financial and material resources – time is critical both for the training of individuals and the development organisations. In von Moltke's army, a junior Prussian commander exercising his initiative on the battlefield was most likely drawing upon a variety of resources at his disposal including:

1. His understanding of his commander's explicitly stated directive that would have provided him with an appreciation of the situation, a specific task, and a description of the commander's intentions.
2. His beliefs about his organisation, his role within that organisation, and the degrees of freedom available to him in the exercise of that role.
3. His expertise in the technical aspects of the military profession.
4. His understanding of his commander and his peers.

These latter aspects are captured in the notion of 'implicit intent', would provide him with the basis for his course of action and bound the solution space available to him.

² See *The Origins of Modern Project Management*: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers_050.html

A General may wish to defend a city, a Brigade Commander defend his designated sector and within the sector, a Platoon Commander may be tasked with establishing a road block which involves one of his NCOs establishing a strongpoint. The General does not need to instruct the NCO on how to site the strong point, camouflage it or man it. At each level, good leaders will think ‘two levels up’ and provide oversight ‘one level down’. The process is not random, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) define how specific tasks should be accomplished and ‘bounded initiative’ allows the individual leader to optimise the SOP for the specific circumstances he or she encounters to best support the overall intent of the commander. Von Moltke emphasised that he wanted to ‘steer’ initiative in the right direction.

These concepts are closely aligned with the human resources approach to management, which developed in the 1950s and 60s and emphasise a symbiotic relationship between individuals and organisations where ‘democratic leadership is the most effective means of managing’ and ‘openness and participation are the most effective means of demonstrating democratic leadership’.

On very small projects, a project manager may be capable of directing and controlling the work of everyone in the team. However, as soon as the team or the technology grows beyond a relatively simple system direct ‘command and control’ becomes impossible and attempting to impose a ridged hierarchy based on formal instructions will lead to inefficiencies. Effective leaders establish clear guidelines and a system of protocols and standard operating procedures, within a chain of command, so that everyone in the project team knows what they to do and who is accountable.

The overall action of the team is unified by the leader’s intent; within this space sub-teams and smaller work groups are allocated their individual missions and tasks within that higher intent. Once this framework is in place, properly trained team members have autonomy over their work and the opportunity to achieve mastery, but at the same time can see how their efforts contribute to the overall objectives. All intrinsic motivators!

Auftragstaktik is not an easy option, the team needs better leadership, better training and the willingness to engage in taking ‘bounded initiatives’ but overall it offers a much better way of achieving the project’s objectives.

Applying these concepts does not reduce the importance of the normal project management artefacts such as the schedule and cost plan; what changes is the way these artefacts are used. In a decentralised management structure, the Project Plan defines the guidelines and framework the team will work within rather than attempting to prescribe how they will work³.

The Role of Happiness

Research has shown emotional intelligence (EI⁴) is a key component of exceptional performance and how our emotions can affect our thoughts, language and behaviours which, in turn, affects performance, productivity and morale. Intrinsically motivated people tend to be happy in their work, but interestingly, it is the happiness that leads to success rather than success leading to happiness.

Leaders need to create a place where people can be happy and then work to achieve success. Achieving this is partly creating the right environment and partly engaging the right people. External or internal negativity is one of the primary threats to happiness. We often get in our own way and start out with the words ‘I can’t’ (or as a manager, ‘you can’t’).

³ For more on this see **Project Controls in the C21 – What works / What’s fiction:**
http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Resources_Papers_083.html

⁴ For more see **Social and Emotional Intelligence:**
[http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1008_Emotional%20 Intellegence.pdf](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1008_Emotional%20Intellegence.pdf)

Negativity can be removed by regarding this phrase as simply a statement of fact that is valid for the present moment only. For example, *I can't juggle* simply means *I can [not juggle]*. It is very easy not to juggle - anyone can do it.

Believing that *I can't* is a description of your potential capability, instead of being a description of your current behaviour, programs your brain to fail; this prevents you from finding out your true capability. To quote Henry Ford: *Whether you believe you can do a thing or believe you cannot, you are most probably right.*

Engagement

Employee engagement is a condition, manifested by the inspiration an employee unleashes in his or her work when he or she is deeply connected to a mission, purpose, and the values that connect the project team. The leader cannot 'motivate' engagement (or innovation, growth, or succession for that matter); instead, he or she must inspire the kind of outcomes needed by living a set of values, being in the grip of an idea worthy of dedication and commitment, connecting the team around a meaningful and shared purpose, and aligning everyone around a common, deep, and sustainable set of human, societal, and environmental values⁵.

Achieving this needs the organisation to work in a systemic manner to ensure alignment of its purpose and mission to its business strategies and vision, and then cascade this inspiration through its core values into specific leadership behaviours. Only when observable leadership behaviours are identified, communicated, measured, tracked, managed, and integrated into the project management processes will the conditions be right for engagement to flourish.

Leaders can create engagement and enhance motivation by:

Communicating effectively. Communicate with transparency, authenticity and clarity and make it a priority to make time to talk to each and every member of your team on a regular basis. You may be busy, but you really can't afford to allow communication black holes to develop.

Uncertainty creates a void. Unless you, the project manager, fill that void with clear and positive communication, people will assume the worst and act accordingly. Fear and negativity will creep in and dominate their thoughts, behaviours, and actions.

Building trust and empathy. Travelling to meet with team members in person is an investment in building trust as is asking questions. When you show an interest people's culture, families and personal lives, often they will open up and by expressing interest, you can establish a much deeper connection that leads to a much deeper level of trust

Building relationships. Relationships are the foundation upon which winning teams and organisations are built. It's much easier to motivate someone if you know them and they know and trust you.

Creating a shared vision. Create a vision statement that inspires and rallies your team and organization; a short, simple, rallying cry that means something to the each person on the team. This vision statement must come to life in the hearts and minds of team members. Share it, reinforce it, and inspire your people to live and breathe it every day. A positive vision for the future leads to powerful actions today.

Leading with optimism. Transfer your optimism and vision to others. This inspires others to think and act in ways that drive results. Great leaders inspire their teams to believe they can succeed. As a leader and manager, you are not just leading and managing people, but you are also leading and managing their beliefs and you must utilise every opportunity to transfer your optimism to the team. Both optimism and pessimism are contagious, make sure everyone catches the optimistic bug.

⁵ For more on leadership see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1014_Leadership.pdf

Creating purpose-driven goals. Break the vision down into practical, purpose-driven goals. Real motivation is driven by a desire to make a difference; people are most energized when they are using their strengths for a purpose beyond themselves. When team members feel as though the work they do is playing an integral role in the overall success of the company, they are motivated to work harder.

When they feel as though they are working for something more than just the bottom line, and the overall purpose of the project is aligned their personal goals with they feel good about the work they are doing.

Staffing the team thoughtfully and nourishing their team. Belief plus action equals results. If you don't believe that something can happen, then you won't take the actions necessary to create it. If you believe that your team can do big things, they will believe it, too. And that belief will fuel the fires of action and provide you with the results you're looking for. Surveys consistently demonstrate that employees who think their managers care about them are more loyal and productive than those who do not. If you nourish your team and take the time to invest in them, they will pay you back in productivity, creativity and loyalty. If your team members know that you care about them, they will want to do good work for you. It's the greatest motivator of all.

Summary

The challenge for leaders seeking to develop an engaged and motivated workforce is to shift the belief structures to a positive view and provide the 'bounded freedom' to allow their team to use their intrinsic capabilities to the full. Achieving this needs the right people, training and support within an aligned organisation. It's not an easy option but can be highly effective in driving improved performance and innovation.