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Manager's Quick Guide: Managing People
MOTIVATING YOUR TEAM

Contents

Introduction

In today's constantly changing and competitive environment, it is vitally important to organisations that their employees are motivated to work hard and use their talents and abilities to make the best contribution they can to the work of the organisation. Passive or disengaged employees are likely to do the minimum they feel is acceptable and unlikely to give employers the benefit of any discretionary efforts.

They may even become toxic, acting as a negative influence on others and damaging constructive working relationships. Ultimately, failure to pay attention to levels of motivation and engagement will result in a loss of competitiveness and profits.

Maintaining motivation is particularly important and challenging during times of rapid change and uncertainty. At such times morale can sink dramatically due to the insecurity that change can bring, particularly at times of organisational restructuring or downsizing. In addition, it may be difficult to stimulate the motivation of employees if they are on short term temporary contracts. In spite of the many theories and practical examples available to draw on, motivation is still often viewed as a difficult matter to handle.

Financial rewards have often been perceived as a generic cure for low levels of motivation, but this fails to take account of the fact that different people are motivated by different things, in different ways and at different stages of their careers. Monetary rewards can work very well for tasks that are routine and measurable, but are less successful when creativity and the ability to 'think outside the box' are required. Indeed, at times this approach can even be counter-productive.

Organisational culture has a key role to play in the motivation of employees. If they are to be genuinely motivated to do a good job, rather than simply to comply with organisational rules and regulations, a sense of common purpose needs to be developed and workers need to understand how their individual contributions 'fit' within wider organisational goals. Guidance on how organisations can engage their workforce is provided in a related checklist (See Additional resources below). This checklist focuses on how managers and team leaders can put sustainable motivational practices in place within the right supportive environment.

Definition

Motivation can be defined as an individual's will or desire to initiate action and sustain effort. Motivation is dependent on the existence of a 'motive' - a reason to do something. Motivation can be seen as 'intrinsic' where the reason for action comes from within the individual, for example from their personal values or beliefs, or 'extrinsic' where it arises from external factors such as rules to be obeyed or rewards to be earned.

Motivation is sometimes also sometimes defined as the process of creating incentives and contexts that prompt individuals to action. In a workplace context, this would involve employers giving employees incentives to perform their work to the best of their ability.

There is a fine distinction between employee motivation and employee engagement, with the latter focusing primarily on employees' engagement with and commitment to the achievement of organisational objectives.

Action checklist

1. Find out about motivational theory and practice

Psychologists and management thinkers have written a great deal about the factors which motivate human behaviour. Classic theories of motivation include Herzberg's hygiene theory, McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, Ouchi's Theory Z (which he argued achieves a balance between theories X and Y), and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These are all still popular, although they date back some years. They differ in nature but they all see change and motivation as a process. Contemporary thinking in this field includes the MacLeod and Clarke report 'Engaging for success', along with the study of values as personal drivers of motivation. Looking at some of these theories should stimulate your thinking and give you insights into the behaviour and attitudes of those you work with.

It should also be helpful to look at examples of good practice at other companies to gain some initial ideas about how to motivate your own people. You might identify examples via the media, by hearsay, or by reading management articles.

2. Be aware of the importance of your role as a manager

A fair and robust reward and recognition system is fundamental to the development of strong workforce relationships, but research surveys suggest that for many people money is quite low down the list of motivators. Fringe benefits can be effective in attracting new employees, but rarely motivate them to use their potential more effectively. At the same time, a manager's skill in supporting, guiding and relating to members of his or her team, is repeatedly found to be a central factor in employee engagement. Based on research by the Gallup Organization, Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman suggested in their book First Break all the Rules that when people leave their jobs is it mostly their managers they are leaving rather than their organisations.

More recently the McLeod report into employee engagement found that the role of "engaging managers" was one of the four key drivers of employee engagement Remember that, as a manager, you are the key motivating or de-motivating factor for people in your team. The team atmosphere you create and the relationships you build will be a main route to earning people's cooperation and discretionary effort.

3. Think about what motivates you and others

Which aspects of your working life that have been important to you? What has motivated you or de-motivated you in the past? Are you motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic stimuli? Do you find the same aspects of your current role motivate you in the same way as in your earlier career? Remember, motivators can change over time.

Money can be a strong motivator for some. But everyone is different, and for many others, powerful motivators may include being given more autonomy and responsibility in their work, positive support when things go wrong, meaningful work, status or influence, a sense of belonging, the ability to –develop their skills and abilities, or contributing to an organisation whose work they consider valuable or important. Don't underestimate the part played in motivation by the working environment itself. Factors such as up-to-date equipment, a clean and pleasant office or workspace and opportunities to work flexibly will engage workers far more than a dirty workplace, substandard facilities and rigid working hours.

Bear in mind that people from different cultural backgrounds may be motivated in different ways. The organisation's own culture is also a key factor to be aware of. Cultural factors influence the expectations that people hold and failing to meet those expectations can be very de-motivating.

4. Find out what people want most from their jobs

People may want more status, more pay, better working conditions, and a choice of fringe benefits. But find out what their main motivators are by asking what they want most from themselves and from the job. You might do this at performance appraisals, by carrying out an employee survey, or through informal discussions.

Answers people give may include:

- more interesting or meaningful work
- to work for a manager or a company they respect
- a sense of achievement and fulfilment
- greater participation in decision making
- greater recognition and appreciation
- a higher degree of challenge or 'stretch'
- more opportunities for development
- more responsibility and empowerment.

Pay particular attention to what energises individuals – those tasks or activities that appear to ignite and excite them. Remember that open and honest two-way communication is essential, especially during times of change.

5. Decide on actions to improve motivation

Having gained some understanding of what motivates members of your team, you are now in a better position to work with them to create more scope for them to do their best and to improve levels of motivation and performance across the team.

Empowerment can be a powerful motivator for many people, but be clear in setting the boundaries within which team members can work, and be sure to give them your full support, as long as they operate within the limits set. A related checklist gives more information on Empowerment. (See Additional resources below.)

At an organisational level policies designed to improve motivation may include:

- opportunities for training and development and/or promotion
- flexible working hours
- greater employee involvement and participation
- incentives, such as recognition or award schemes, vouchers, paid time off for voluntary activities, discounted goods, or tickets to the theatre or other events
- employee benefits schemes, such as healthcare, childcare assistance, low-interest loans, help with travel or transport, sabbaticals, or special leave concessions such as study leave.

Junior or middle manager will not have authority in these areas but may be able to influence senior managers and pass on feedback about the policies and choices which would be most appreciated by their teams.

6. Demonstrate support

Your organisation's culture matters. Working in an organisation whose culture isn't conducive to motivation and engagement will be challenging for any manager seeking to improve levels of motivation within their team. Nonetheless, look for ways to work within the prevailing culture and keep your team motivated despite workplace hindrances. Always do your best to honour any assurances you give people. If, for any reason you are unable to do so, be sure to explain what happened and how it affected your actions.

The culture of your organisation may be a demanding one where errors are not tolerated. Or it may be a more tolerant one where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, or indicators of development needs. Either way, people need to know where they stand and what level of support they can expect from you. For example: Is there any flexibility in relation to existing rules and procedures? Is it acceptable for employees to use their initiative or adapt the rules when necessary?

7. Express thanks and appreciation

On a daily basis look to find someone doing something well and tell them so. Say 'thank you' and give credit where it is due. Show a genuine interest, but don't go overboard. Avoid appearing to be peering over people's shoulders to keep tabs on them. If you have ideas for improvements, don't dictate them. Instead, help jobholders to find their own ways to improve their work. You don't need to be able do everything better than your team - in fact the opposite is likely to be the case. But set a good example, and make it clear what levels of support you will give to others. The visibility and trust of managers is vital, especially in times of change. Be prepared to give time to listen to people's ideas and weigh the viability of each one carefully before making a decision.

Share information about team members' achievements with senior managers, and then cascade their praise back to the team. It is always encouraging to learn that our manager has given a good report of our work to others.

8. Provide developmental feedback

Feedback can fuel the motivation cycle if it is given positively and effectively. Overcome any reluctance to engage employees in discussions about their progress and achievements. Offer thoughtful comments on areas for development or improvement, and discuss the next steps or future targets. Performance appraisals and development reviews provide ideal opportunities to develop your skills in encouraging and motivating team members. At the same time, make sure that constructive feedback is given regularly and in a timely manner and that employees are also given opportunities to voice their own views on how things are going and what needs to change.

9. Remove de-motivators

Identify factors that de-motivate staff. These may be psychological (boredom, perceived unfairness, barriers to promotion, lack of recognition, lack of confidence in the company or senior management); or they may be physical (buildings, equipment, noise levels). You will find that some issues can be dealt with quickly and easily, while others may require negotiation with colleagues and will take time to work through. Demonstrating your desire to find out what is wrong, and do something about it, should in itself help to boast morale. Never keep employees in the dark about what is happening, as this will make them feel insecure and nervous about changes that may be afoot and this will be instantly de-motivating. It is also important to recognise and manage any individuals who are exercising a negative influence over other team members.

10. Manage change with care

Good communications is vital when introducing changes in policies and working practices. Many people have an instinctive resistance to change imposed on them by others, so it is important for employees to be involved in, and contribute to, the process of change. Resistance to change is often due to the fact that people don't understand the reasons for it, so be sure to give clear explanations. Focus on winning people's ownership of and commitment to change. Communicate as much as you can and as often as possible about what is going on and why. Seek feedback at various stages as new policies are implemented, and, where feasible, make adjustments accordingly. Ensure that everyone feels free to air their feelings and opinions honestly, so that any widespread problems or issues are identified without delay.

Potential pitfalls

Managers should avoid:

- making assumptions about what drives others
- failing to engage in regular two-way communicating with employees
- forcing people into things that (you think) will be 'good for them'

- forgetting about the need for inspiration and excitement in the workplace
- making empty promises

- failing to explain the 'why' of change clearly and repeatedly
- failing to make time to offer regular praise and encouragement

Additional resources

Books

Designing the purposeful organization: how to inspire business performance beyond boundaries, Clive Wilson
London: Kogan Page, 2015

The business of people: how to nurture potential and performance, Shirley Soodeen
Panoma Press, 2015

Beyond the call: why some of your team go the extra mile and others don't show, Marc Woods and Steve Coomber
Chichester: Wiley, 2013
This book is available as an e-book.

The happy manifesto: make your organization a great workplace, Henry Stewart
London: Kogan Page, 2013

Journal articles

The power of 'thank you', David Sturt Trainining Journal, April 2015, pp 57-59

Revolutionising motivation, John Berry
Training Journal, October 2014, pp 10-13

Engagement and motivation, John Sylvester and Ruth Patel
Training Journal, April 2013, pp 61-64

Related Thinkers

- 01 Frederick Hertzberg – the hygiene-motivation theory
- 09 Abraham Maslow – the hierarchy of needs
- 026 Douglas McGregor – theory X and theory Y

Related Models

Forcefield analysis

Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation

McGregor's theory X and theory Y

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Vroom's expectancy theory

Notes

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