



Management: Unlocking Motivation

Motivation is a timeless challenge that emerges in all managers' careers. It's a particular challenge in the public and voluntary sectors where motivation is something managers can take for granted. In this article we explore the different theories of motivation – and outline what *you* can do as a manager to help encourage your people to choose to be motivated.

Motivation is a timeless challenge that emerges in all managers' careers. It's a particular challenge in the public and voluntary sectors where motivation is something managers can take for granted – assuming that their staff are inherently motivated simply because they choose to work in these sectors. In fact, motivation is something managers may not even think about until there is a 'problem': targets not being achieved, inter-departmental conflicts, and staff making mistakes, under-performing, or even leaving.

So if they've chosen to work in sector where commitment is key, why on earth, you might wonder, are some members of your team so apathetic? And why do some others drift around spending more time complaining and lowering morale than getting on with their work? What's wrong with them?!

The answers to these questions involve a wider understanding of what constitutes motivation and the role that managers have in it. This download explores the different theories put forward by researchers and academics to help explain how people are motivated – and what we can do as managers to help encourage people to choose to be motivated.

Managers can't *do* motivation

The first point to make is that managers can't motivate employees. Let's read that sentence again – don't managers have a responsibility to motivate their staff? The answer from the academics and from our experience is 'no!'

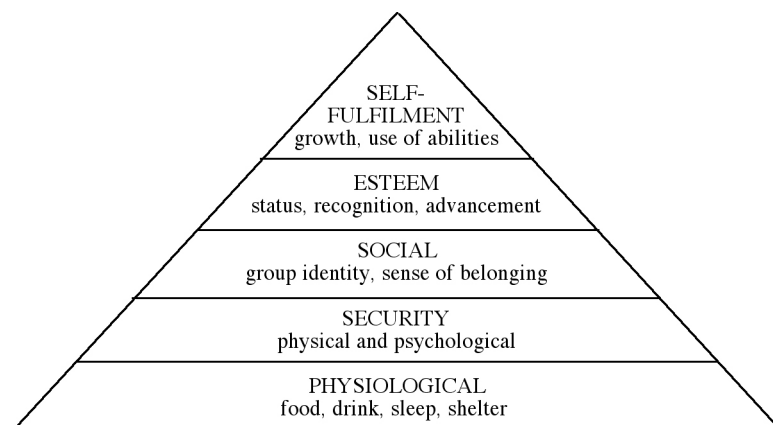
Put simply motivation is not something you can do to someone else. The function of managers is to provide an environment in which people can motivate themselves. Your job is to help people install their own generators, not to run around trying to hand crank the generators of others. So what is possible? Our experience, and a significant body of research by top academics from Maslow to Vroom, suggests the following:

- a manager can't motivate their staff, *but*
- a good manager can help unlock their staff's motivation

What we know about motivation comes from a diverse range of disciplines: behavioural sciences, education and management. Below we explore the thinking of two key academics – Maslow and Herzberg.

Back to basics

One of the most influential theories of motivation has been Maslow's theory of personality and motivation. Abraham Maslow was a clinical psychologist whose studies proposed that human motivation can be understood in terms of a person's desire to satisfy one or more of five basic kinds of needs: physiological; security and safety; social needs; egoistic needs; self fulfilment needs. It is how these needs can be satisfied that form the basis of motivation. These are laid out below in his classic hierarchy.



He found four important links between our needs and motivation:

1. Human needs are hierarchically ordered

Until a lower need is satisfied, an individual will not actively seek to satisfy a higher order need. For example, in an organisational restructuring, the threatened need for security and safety will have a greater effect on an employee's performance and behaviour than the promise of an all expenses paid team away-day.

2. A satisfied need is not a source of motivation

A need once satisfied no longer provides a source of motivation. What motivates is then the next higher order of need. When someone enjoys their work and has a sense of belonging in the organisation, providing additional social activities or just having team meetings are not in themselves motivating. The employee will be looking, instead, for career advancement and other forms of recognition of their work.

3. When lower level needs are threatened, they are again a source of motivation

Satisfied needs will re-emerge to direct and organise a person's energy when threatened. A talented, successful manager may take security of employment for granted until that security is threatened by a possibility of redundancy.

4. Higher order needs represent a development path

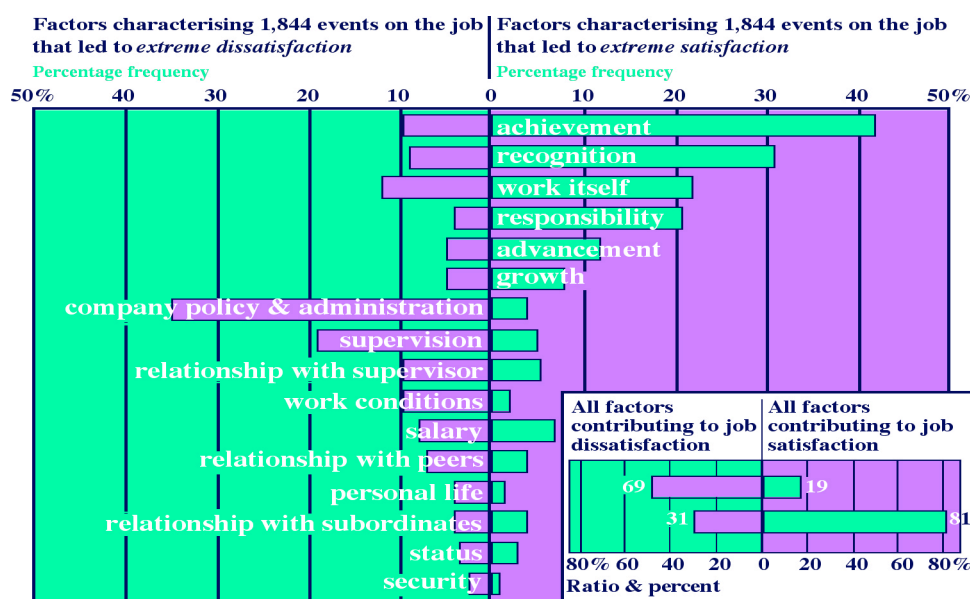
Maslow describes the path from lower to higher order need satisfaction as a growth in maturing and a movement from reactive to proactive patterns of behaviour. Offering opportunities in a work setting to experience achievement, gain the respect of others and learn, empowers people to grow into responsible, independent and flexible people.

Managers cannot deny staff those opportunities and still expect them to respond flexibly and responsibly to change. Maslow's thinking has been hugely influential in current thinking about motivation. To make use of this thinking you need to consider:

- Why is someone demotivated? At which level?
- Can you do anything to remove that demotivation?
- Or can you help them to aspire to the next level?

Motivation vs dissatisfaction

A management guru with a complementary theory to that of Maslow is Frederick Herzberg. He built on Maslow's theory of motivation and applied it to work settings internationally. His research essentially established that there were two distinct clusters that are important in motivation. He too has a famous diagram illustrating his theory:



Specifically Herzberg's research suggests that the sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are different. Sources of satisfaction appear to do with job content (for example, achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement and the work itself), and potential sources of dissatisfaction with job context (which might include company and policy administration, supervision, work conditions – even salary). So, although a pay increase or improvement in conditions might prevent dissatisfaction, they will not necessarily motivate good performance.

Instead, the factors that contribute to job satisfaction correspond to Maslow's higher order needs. Achievement, the work itself, the possibility of growth and responsibility represent needs for self fulfilment. Recognition and advancement reflect egoistic needs for self and social esteem. Herzberg called these motivators. When organisations have no system of goal setting or performance evaluation or staff development, people will not be motivated. So, they may continue to perform within their job description but not use initiative or respond easily to change.

The things that can de-motivate or cause dissatisfaction for people at work are perceived injustices over salary, conditions, company policy and administration and interpersonal relationships. Note that these relate to Maslow's social, security and physiological needs. Herzberg called them Hygiene factors. When reasonable pay and conditions or supervision arrangements are in place, they may prevent dissatisfaction. But, crucially, they will not serve to help motivate performance.

To help unlock performance you need to think about the *motivators*:

- Opportunities to develop
- Chances for recognition etc.

So how do you use this?

How might these theories apply to your work with your staff members? As indicated above, think about Maslow. At what levels are staff needs met, and at what level not met? What can you do about that? Remember that there are probably some needs – at the very bottom of the hierarchy that you as managers may be able to meet – for example physiological needs.

Herzberg can help, too. If groups of people don't appear to be motivated to perform well, how are you addressing this problem? Have you addressed the hygiene factors? If you have, are you offering purposeful changes in conditions? Are you finding ways to recognise those people's good performance, set attainable goals, and provide development opportunities?

Further help

If you want to find out more about theories, tools and techniques for unlocking motivation in your staff, then join us for =mc's three-day **Leadership Development Programme**. The programme is designed to boost your leadership performance, increase your awareness as a leader and help you lead your team to greater results in more empowering ways.

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