

Motivation affects us all

Let me start with a story:

Once upon a time there was a small team. The people in this team were all highly motivated – they had a passion for what they did, and they always gave 100+% effort. They were very collaborative with each other, and always a pleasure to work with.

Then, one day, their company was restructured. Suddenly the team was disbanded – ‘displaced’ was the word. Almost immediately there was a huge change – the high **motivation** was gone, replaced by confusion and uncertainty.

For the team members, the challenge was to re-discover their ‘mojos’. But as they were now all split up, this was mainly a self-help situation, with a bit of help from some friends. The first need was to find the necessary **motivation** – that is the key to the recovery.

[This story is true – only names, places, dates, and a few other details have been omitted to protect the innocent!]

So, what exactly is **motivation**? The simplest definition that I have found is: “a reason for doing something” (Macmillan Dictionary). In other words, **motivation** is what causes us to act – to do what we do.

Because **motivation** – or the lack of it – can have an impact on everything that we do, it is important for each of us to have an understanding of how **motivation** works. This will allow us to get the best out of ourselves, in all parts of our lives. It will also help us when we are working with others, whether that is in our jobs, in recreational activities, at home, out and about, anywhere.

Motivation theories

However, while **motivation** may be easy to define, the reality is that **human motivation** is actually quite complex to understand – there is no ‘one size fits all’ theory that can be applied generally across all of humanity. During the mid-20th Century, two eminent psychologists developed (now) well known theories about human motivation:

- **Abraham Maslow** [≈1943] theorised that our actions are motivated in order to achieve certain needs. He organised these into a hierarchy of five stages or levels (physiological, safety, social, esteem, self-actualisation).
- **Frederick Herzberg’s** [≈1959] theory states that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction act independently of each other, with certain factors leading to satisfaction, while other factors cause dissatisfaction.



Word Cloud showing a selection of factors that may motivate us in any given situation

Ongoing research

As further research has been conducted by new waves of behavioural scientists, the theories of Maslow and Herzberg have both attracted criticism

for their research methods and their conclusions. In spite of this, both theories continue to be cited as sources in various management papers and articles.

Since Maslow and Herzberg’s respective works, quite a number of alternative theories about **human motivation** have been developed, including David McClelland’s Achievement Motivation theory [≈1965]. This model, like Herzberg’s, is particularly directed towards the workplace, addressing how peoples’ actions are affected by their needs for achievement, power, and affiliation.

Today, there is a global industry built around **motivation**. Practice psychologists offer specialist advice and guidance about **motivation**. There are also countless books, seminars, web sites, training courses, personal coaches and even TV programs covering **motivation**. Motivational speakers, such as performance guru Anthony Robbins, have made fortunes out of **motivation**.

A recent entrant into the discussion around **motivation** has been US author Daniel Pink, who in 2009 published ‘[Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us](#)’. In this book he argues that the current “carrot and stick” model for **motivation** does not work in today’s 21st Century (C21) economies.

So then, while ideas and theories about **motivation** abound, it seems that there is no definitive answer to “why do we do what we do?”

Motivation categories

Psychologists categorise **motivation** as being either ‘*intrinsic*’ or ‘*extrinsic*’:

- **Intrinsic** means that the **motivation** is based on purely personal reasons, such as self enjoyment, satisfaction, pleasure, and achievement. Examples include: listening to

music, watching a movie, running faster or further, eating an ice cream, creating something, learning something new, developing a skill, solving a problem.

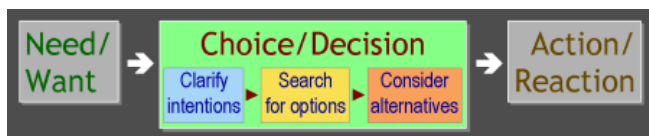
- **Extrinsic** means the **motivation** is influenced or even controlled by something external, such as a form of reward, or alternately, a form of consequence. Examples include: a prize, a bonus payment, a promotion; and at the other end of the scale: a loss of privileges, re-assignment or loss of a job, a punishment.

Actions – Decisions – Motivation

We do the things we do (act) to fulfil either a **'need'** or a **'want'**. Needs are things that are necessary for our survival, development, and ongoing well-being; wants are things that we can actually do without. Simplistically, a person walking across a stretch of arid desert **'needs'** adequate water to survive; the same person, feeling the heat of the sun, may **'want'** a drink of chilled water.

In some cases, our actions may be impulsive and spontaneous, completely unplanned. At other times, they may be deliberate, measured, and quite intentional. When we act impulsively, we are reacting to things like feelings, habits, conditioning (from training), fears, and pain. Deliberate actions are likely to be a result of thoughts, values, beliefs, and choices.

Our actions (or reactions) are actually the result of a decision-making process – either conscious or otherwise. In some situations the decision-making may be instantaneous, in others it may be considered and calculated. A simplification of the decision-making process is illustrated in the graphic below.



Our decision-making is invariably affected by the things that motivate us. But these motivating factors can change, according to our situation and circumstances. Consequently, behind our actions there can be a diverse range of factors. A selection of these is shown in the word cloud graphic: “Motivation – Why do we do what we do?” (above).

The Pink Solution

Although he is not a psychologist, Daniel Pink has brought a fresh, **C21** perspective to the discussion. In writing his book, he studied available material from some 50 years of research. This research shows that “carrot and stick” (*extrinsic*) **motivation** is not effective for tasks that are complex, conceptual, and self-directed.

Pink’s proposition is for a new model based on **intrinsic motivation** and involving autonomy, mastery, and purpose:

- autonomy – a sense of self-direction, having control over your work
- mastery – getting better at something, making progress
- purpose – contributing to something bigger than yourself

Pink calls this “**Motivation 3.0**”. He argues that this is more suited to **C21** workplaces and citizens, rather than the “carrot and stick” (*extrinsic*) **motivation** practices of the previous century. While not everyone agrees with his work, I have yet to find a well-reasoned rebuttal.

Adopting Motivation 3.0

While I find Pink’s arguments to be quite persuasive, the reservation I do have is about the demands of the **C21** workplace, and the readiness of the workforce:

- Workplaces and work are changing rapidly, with many companies shedding jobs through automation, outsourcing, and off-shoring; jobs that remain are of a ‘non-routine’, conceptual,

and creative nature [see [Creativity – and why it is important](#)].

- Creativity itself is a **C21** ‘key skill’ [see [Learning – 21st Century style](#)]; however for most countries, education systems have not fostered the development of creativity amongst students.

I can see that adoption of Motivation 3.0 will be easier for smaller, more ‘agile’ businesses than it will be for larger organisations. Where ‘incentivisation’ is entrenched within organisational cultures, a transition to Motivation 3.0 will bring its share of challenges. That said, **imho**, those who choose to ignore Pink’s message do so at their peril.

Self-motivation

The team in our opening story had operated in an environment of **autonomy, mastery, and purpose**. This was abruptly ended when they were disbanded, leaving each of the team members needing some self-**motivation** to begin their recovery.

Under these circumstances, self-**motivation** is now both more difficult and also more important for our team members than it was previously. They must each win the battle of the mind – they need to restore their self-confidence and re-develop a sense of purpose.

Worth a look

Our first free nugget for this Post is the Washington Post article: [Daniel Pink on motivation](#) [January 9, 2011] – approx 4 minute read.

Our second free nugget is the video: [Daniel Pink - Autonomy, Mastery & Purpose](#) [Jan 4, 2012] – this is an animated extract from a TED talk (5min:11sec).

Coming next: Unlearning – the new survival skill <http://freezapnuggets.com/wordpress/?p=906>