

Motivation And The Manager

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Since the beginning of time, management and motivation have been inextricably bound together in a complex yet apparently direct relationship. Management, itself, is defined as a process of accomplishing predetermined objectives through the efforts of others and this definition most certainly indicates the necessity of moving people to action. It follows, then, that an objective of today's manager is one of understanding not only his own particular role but also of developing those particular skills which will enable him to successfully direct and control the behavior of others. Once more, the emphasis is placed upon moving others to action through meaningful understanding of self and one's employees.

With these comments serving as a point of departure, an attempt will be made to discuss motivation in the realistic and practical setting of organization, recognizing that motivation, to be understood and utilized, must be interpreted in the light of what is, rather than what ought to be.

Motivation and the Efficient Organization

The basic function or objective of the business organization is the realization of a profit. Profit is as important to

the business organization as food and water is to the individual. Without food, water, or oxygen the individual cannot survive. Without profit, the business enterprise is doomed. While there is nothing new about this concept, too many in recent years have apparently overlooked its basic logic. F. W. Taylor, the father of scientific management, put it this way: "The basic object of management is to secure maximum prosperity for the employer coupled with maximum prosperity for the employee." In contemporary behavioral science terms, Keith Davis refers to this as the double plus concept, a situation that is mutually beneficial to both the organization and the needs of the individual are successfully met.

A Word About Individual Differences

To properly motivate employees, positive recognition must be given to the fact that people are different. For example, imagine the shape, the configuration of your organization. Undoubtedly, it is triangular with the rank and file at the bottom or base, and management at the upper levels with ultimate authority *and* responsibility residing with the president at the apex. This functional hierarchy should, and does,

in fact, indicate that while all men are created equal, some tend to be more equal than others. (A truism more eloquently expressed by George Orwell in his "Animal Farm.") For the manager, or whatever you prefer to call those who must move others to action, this implies that a basic requisite to motivating others is the recognition that these individual differences do exist and that people, unlike machine parts, are usually *not* interchangeable.

If employees were all the same, the problems of motivation would be extremely simple since a universal stimulus could be applied to all people in all situations leading to uniform results. Fortunately, this is not the case. It would be a dull existence if it were. Our first step, then, in increasing our motivating skills, is recognizing that people are different and that there is no such thing as a total or complete solution to the manager's job of accomplishing predetermined objectives through the efforts of others.

Motivation: An Early Approach

Robert Owens, a highly successful Scotch textile manufacturer, gave much thought to the matter of motivation. Interestingly enough, Owen's concepts were expressed and implemented 150 years ago with the kind of success that would make many a plant superintendent turn green with envy. Owen was one of the first to recognize that man is more than another factor of production and that his behavior and output are

influenced by his psychological and social being and not merely his physical working surroundings. Owen, advocating the importance of profit, also believed strongly that his "living machinery," (or people), should receive as much attention as his "lifeless machines" since such attention to employees might very well bring a "100 per cent" return on investment. Putting his scheme of motivation into action, Owen commented that "Never, perhaps, in the history of the human race has so simple a device created in so short a period so much order, virtue, goodness, and happiness, out of so much ignorance, error, and misery." Owen's "miraculous" solution was a simple four-sided piece of wood, with each side colored and suspended near the work place of the employee. Each color represented worker behavior, i.e., black—bad, indifferent—blue, good—yellow, and white—excellent. Recognizing the importance of peer recognition and management recognition, Owen's "silent monitor" motivated employees to do better work which, in turn, helped both Owen and his employees to prosper. While the silent monitor might be completely out of place in contemporary organization, management recognition as a motivating factor is more important than ever.¹

The Causal Sequence: Key to Understanding Motivation

Norman R. F. Maier explains behavior by using the causal sequence:²

1. "The Silent Monitor," *The World of Business*, 1962, pp. 1350-1352.
2. Maier, Norman R. F., "Psychology in Industry," Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955, p. 21.

Stimulus ↔ Organism → Behavior → Accomplishment

The *stimulus* includes light, sound, work routines, supervision, or any aspect of the environment to which an employee is sensitive.

The *organism* or employee represents a composite of hereditary and environmental factors.

The *behavior* would include bodily movements, talking, thinking, emotional responses, etc.

The *accomplishment* indicates actual changes, for example, higher production, fewer errors, etc.

Therefore, in motivating the employee it is essential that a stimulus perceived meaningful *by the employee* be provided if he is to respond in a desired manner. In other words, additional pay for overtime work may not be perceived as a meaningful stimulus to the employee who wants time off to pursue a hobby. Too often, management does not understand that the relationship between the employee and the stimulus is the trigger mechanism that can be the difference between the efficient and the inefficient operation. *Recognizing this, the effective manager makes a concerted attempt to understand what it is that makes his people tick.*

Empathy and Effective Communication

To employ and motivate the "whole" man, it is necessary that the manager develop the ability to empathize with his subordinates, i.e., to put himself in their shoes. While most managers are capable of sympathizing with employees, with expressing sorrow and com-

passion for them, very few are capable of actually *understanding* them. This understanding is requisite to motivation for without it, the proper stimulus remains an unknown quantity. Further, since motivation takes place through effective or goal attaining communication, and since this communication is dependent upon a proper understanding of individual needs, a very basic relationship becomes apparent.

Motivation: A Case Study

*Lithonia's Interviewing Program**

The mammoth business corporation of today often provides little opportunity for individual need satisfaction. The size of these structures when coupled with the application of our galloping technology has all but emasculated the formal work role of the operative employee. Caught in the web of bureaucracy, the average worker often has little opportunity to attain from his sterile work role the status, recognition, and security traditionally associated with work. Because of this bureaucratic blocking of worker needs, the informal organization and the union are often turned to as effective vehicles for enhancing both the individual's bargaining position and his feeling of importance.

It can hardly be questioned that the ideal situation in the business organization would be one in which no informal organization existed, assuming that the informal organization arises because worker needs cannot be satisfied within

*Mescon, Michael H., "The Lithonia Story," *Atlanta Economic Review*, March, 1959.

the framework of formal organization. In other words, it is quite possible that employer misunderstanding of employee needs might very well result in the employee's turning to the informal organization or the union for that type of satisfaction which management is unable to provide. It follows, then, that the goals of the formal and informal organization might very well be diametrically opposed—with the result that segmentation, departmental cleavages, and employee unrest become a normal part of the work environment.

Operating from the above hypothesis, the management of Lithonia Lighting became interested in a mass depth-interviewing program structured about the relationship between employee needs and management's understanding of the needs. The role of the author, then, was to structure and conduct interviews with employees from all levels of the organization structure. Included in these interviews were questions pertaining to the employee's understanding of his work role along with ample opportunity to comment, both favorably and unfavorably, about the company, work environment, management, co-workers, etc. The interviewees were told that all of this information would be confidential to the extent that no names would be used by the interviewer in apprising management of the results of this program. The interviews were conducted in the company conference room which is away from any external disturbances. Every attempt was made to keep the interviews as relaxed and unstructured as possible, providing the interviewee with as much opportunity as possible to talk in an unrestricted manner.

The Operative Employee

What is it that the "average" employee wants from work? Common sense tells us that money is the important thing and that, in effect, money and motivation are virtually synonymous. As far as Lithonia Lighting is concerned, this hypothesis appears to be completely out of touch with reality. Of the 114 operative employees who were interviewed, only eleven, less than ten per cent, placed financial compensation in the number one position. Far more important, in terms of frequency, were such factors as:

1. Job security
2. Recognition by co-workers
3. Interesting work
4. Fringe benefits
5. Opportunity for advancement

Wages, in terms of total frequency, did not appear in the top five. Neither job security nor opportunity for advancement should necessarily be thought of as indicative of the worker's desire for higher wages. Job security in some instances appeared to be related to the employee's understanding of what was going on in the company rather than any type of guaranteed annual employment.

Of special interest is the fact that recognition by co-workers was of basic concern to the interviewees, more important even than recognition by management. This might very well be indicative of the existence of a rather strong informal organization whose growth could be nurtured by management's misinterpretation of the true nature of worker needs.

The Office Worker

The office worker, who traditionally is more management-oriented than the factory, or "blue collar" worker, placed job security in the number five position and company teamwork in the number one. In all, twenty office workers were interviewed. In the opinion of this segment of the work force, the following factors were of major concern:

1. Company teamwork
2. Interesting work
3. Recognition by co-workers
4. Opportunity for advancement
5. Job security

For office workers, also, the economic aspects of work appear to be relegated to an inferior position. The phenomenon may, in part, be the result of a preponderance of woman office workers who often view work as a transitional period between school and marriage or simply as a means of supplementing the earnings of the family's chief breadwinner. However, even if the above statement were completely valid, it would not explain why wages appear to be of relatively little significance, in terms of frequency, to the male factory workers who were interviewed.

Management's Views

The interview pattern used in connection with members of management was somewhat different from the pattern utilized with office and factory workers. Office and factory workers were asked to rank factors according to their own needs. The thirty management interviewees were asked to rank factors according to the way they thought these

factors would be ranked by the people they supervised. Here, financial compensation is ranked one. The complete ranking is as follows:

1. Financial compensation
2. Opportunity for advancement
3. Job security
4. Working conditions
5. Recognition by management

Perhaps one of the basic causes of friction between management and the worker is the gap between worker needs and management's interpretation of these needs. Such a misunderstanding of the nature of what makes the average worker "tick" would quite naturally increase the social distance between these two groups, thereby strengthening feelings of ethnocentrism within each group, with the end result that empathy and understanding are replaced by suspicion and conflict. In this regard, notice that management makes no mention of the importance of recognition by co-workers, while the workers, both factory and office, are much concerned with peer recognition. Working conditions, while ranked number four by management, do not even appear as a factor of importance in terms of factory and office worker needs.

The critical significance of this attitudinal hiatus is well illustrated by the following statement:

Supervisors who have a great deal of influence within their organizations are usually regarded very favorably by their workers. That's what two University of Michigan researchers found in a study of supervision in a large electronics firm.

Their explanation for the findings: Supervisors who are influential and who understand what workers need may be

in a better position to do something about these needs than those who don't pull much weight in the organization.³

It appears quite possible that the popularity of certain supervisors might very well be the result of concerted attempts to find out what it is that their workers desire in terms of job satisfaction.

Understanding of Work Role

One of the major catastrophes that appear to accompany mass production seems to be a lack of pride in work accomplished. With the atomization of labor, the work role of the operative has been debauched in the name of technology. People no longer perform whole jobs, but rather segments or atoms of jobs. Certainly, in this type of work environment, which is perhaps inevitable in a society like ours, it is quite difficult to apply the psychologist Allport's concept of the functional autonomy of motives which describes that situation in which a thing that was formerly a means to an end might eventually become an end in itself. Certainly, if work were to become an end in itself, much of the ambivalence in terms of employees' feelings to work in general and their work roles in particular would be replaced by a more positive attitude toward the whole work process.

The lack of real identification with the formal work role was apparent in the employees' rather nebulous notions of what their jobs entailed. Many were not quite certain what they were supposed to do. Some were insecure about their formal work relationships in the

organization. Many of those who occupied supervisory positions were almost notorious in their omission of the human element from their work roles. This is especially paradoxical since the process of management is generally conceived of as a process of goal attainment through the efforts of others.

Employee Comments: A Cross-Section

The overwhelming proportion of worker comments, both positive and negative, were structured about the human element, e.g., getting along with others, the quality of supervision, fair treatment, etc. Only a fraction of the total number of comments pertained to working conditions, work load, work hours, or other areas in this "physical working environment" category that management often stresses as being the most important aspect of employer-employee relationships. The following comments should indicate the general tenor of employee attitudes toward the total work environment.

One supervisor who was favorably impressed with top management at Lithonia commented that there was a general lack of teamwork in the organization. Another supervisor remarked: "From my way of thinking . . . it's the best place I ever worked." This same individual also commented that "most everybody is interested in his wage." The interviewee making this comment indicated that this was not necessarily the way he felt, but he was relatively certain that this was the general feeling

3. *The Foreman's Letter*, November 17, 1958, published by the National Foreman's Institute, 635 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y.

of those he supervised. One office worker who felt that top management was very considerate also stated, "One person will tell you something to do, and then another person will tell you something to do." Another office worker voiced the same complaint when she complained about the general lack of organization in work routines. Still another member of the office staff remarked that there is a "lack of job security," and that it is "not fair to keep us hanging on a limb." In terms of employee attitudes toward the mass-interviewing program, one male office worker said, "the interview helps me to feel that the company wants to know how I feel." One factory worker who felt that Lithonia Lighting offered him good opportunities for growth and development felt that relations between the company and the union could be better. Another factory worker stated, "The supervisor tried to be good but doesn't want you to take the responsibility."

In reference to his relationships with his supervisor, one man commented, "The boss is good to you, ain't always hollering at you." Another employee felt that there are "too many men telling us what to do." A tool and die maker indicated that he felt that good teamwork existed in the organization. One high school graduate who was not completely certain what his job was felt that duties and responsibilities should be fixed. One welder who liked the friendly work atmosphere indicated that the supervisors could do a better job of handling employee mistakes. A woman, who liked her job otherwise, remarked that her supervisor "shows partiality between girls." Another woman, who worked in the same department as the above-quoted

interviewee, commented, "I really don't enjoy my work." She also remarked that too much partiality was shown by her supervisor. One painter felt that the foreman should be friendlier and more understanding. One supervisor who particularly liked her work felt that there was a lack of teamwork within the organization.

In providing a general over-all summary of employee comments, the following observations appear valid:

1. The majority of employees feel that Lithonia Lighting has a bright future and that it is a good place to work.
2. Much employee criticism centered about what was considered to be poor supervision at the lowest level of the supervisory hierarchy.
3. There were relatively few complaints about physical working conditions.

Comments on Employee Comments

An analysis of the result of the mass-interviewing program seems to indicate a need for a thorough reappraisal of some of management's pet stereotypes. These stereotypes are certainly not indigenous to Lithonia, but appear to be native to many business organizations. Unfortunately, many companies are not as interested as is Lithonia Lighting in the problem of how to create a truly positive work climate; and as a partial consequence of this apathy, many stereotypes tend to be nurtured and perpetuated. For example, management, in many instances, thinks of employee satisfaction in terms of high wages and good working conditions. Certainly the

significance of wages is recognized as being a vehicle for the satisfaction of certain basic human needs. Good physical working conditions are also helpful, but not necessarily essential in the creation of a positive working climate. This opinion is fairly commonly recognized by those who have been performing research in the area of worker motivation. Yet, management, in many instances, does not appear to want to be confused by the fact. Facts, it seems, tend to disturb the status quo, which, in turn, would probably lead to necessary revisions in attitudes and behavior, but more especially in behavior. One thing appears evident. The quality of employer-employee relationships is contingent upon management's understanding of the personality of the various seg-

ments of its work force. Generalizations, spurious principles of management, and judgments based on an "I know what the workers want" framework lead to chaos and conflict.

In Summary

While motivating the operative worker is essential to efficient organization, it poses no problems that are truly peculiar to this group. The real key to motivation rests with a management firmly convinced that it will have first-class, highly-trained supervisors who will put aside hunches, stereotypes, experience, and intuition when these prove fruitless, and will substitute for these a desire and ability to develop deep insights into the nature of human nature.



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