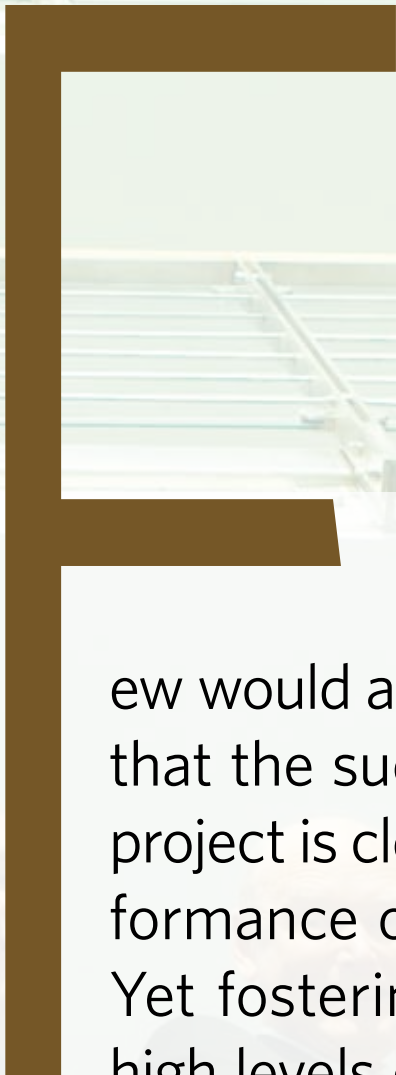# The Motivated Project Team

Brad Hierstetter

Few would argue with the notion that the success or failure of a project is closely tied to the performance of the project team. Yet fostering and maintaining high levels of motivation within team members has been—and remains—one of the foremost challenges confronting project managers. Much has been written regarding motivational

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theory. To further complicate matters, some motivational theories clearly contradict others, and a manager's ability to motivate is, to no small degree, related to his or her leadership approach and interpersonal skills. One thing is certain, though: workforce and workplace dynamics are such that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to motivating team members.

It is very important to recognize that motivation is an intrinsic phenomenon. According to noted industrial psychologist Frederick Herzberg, "Extrinsic satisfaction only leads to movements, not motivation." Motivated team members, on the other hand, possess an internal drive that causes them to consistently direct high levels of effort toward completing their project assignments.

Getting to Know You

Obviously then, it behooves us, as project managers, to do everything in our power to foster as much motivation as possible within each of our team members. The challenge, of course, is how to accomplish this. My suggestions are to make a sincere attempt to get to know each of your team members; create a comfortable working environment; familiarize yourself with the key motivators suggested by common motivational theories; and then attempt to apply the proper theory (or theories) when working with individual team members.

A common mistake that many new, and some veteran, project managers make is to obtain much of their information about their team from sources other than the team members themselves. Worse yet, many formulate opinions of team members based exclusively on these secondary sources. Do not make this error! The result will be that your team members will perceive you as being aloof or apathetic. Besides, the information you are given may be inaccurate or incomplete. After being assigned to a new project, communicate directly with each of your team members early and often. Do not be afraid to ask what motivates them. This initial communication will help you develop a general understanding of their responsibilities, their workload, and the manner in which they approach their work.

Maintaining Contact

After you have made initial contact with your team members, continue working to create a comfortable project environment. Always maintain an open-door policy. Encourage team members to communicate with you. Visit their

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workspaces on a regular basis, and talk to them about whatever seems appropriate at the time. Remember, the topic of discussion does not always have to be business-related. The point is to maintain open and honest lines of communication. Share your visions with them frequently. Seek input from your team members. Hear them out, and do not belittle their concerns.

As your knowledge of your team increases, you will naturally uncover factors that may be impacting both their motivation levels and the manner in which they respond to your attempts to motivate them. It will become clear to you that individual motivation levels are affected by many factors, professional and personal. Some team members intrinsically lack motivation. Others may have been highly motivated at one time but are no longer. Remember, team members are likely to respond differently to different motivational techniques. Some may not respond at all. You will be able to address some factors; others will far exceed your sphere of influence.

Motivational Theories

Motivational theories are generally categorized as "content" and "process." Content theories examine factors within individuals that stimulate, inspire, and stop behavior. Process theories, on the other hand, consider how individuals make decisions and how rewards influence future performance. What follow are some key motivators stemming from common content theories and common process theories (derived from *The Human Aspects of Project Management: Human Resource Skills for the Project Manager, Volume Two,* by Vijay Verma).

Content Theories of Motivation

Content theories of motivation examine factors within individuals that stimulate, inspire, and stop behavior.

Achievement Theory (David C. McClelland)

Team members can be motivated by:
- Suitable role models
- Empowerment
- Financial incentives that match level of achievement
- Regular, constructive feedback.

Hierarchy of Needs (Abraham H. Maslow)

Team members can be motivated by:

- A comfortable, participative, and safe project environment
- Challenging assignments
- Recognition for exceptional performance.

Motivator/Hygiene Theory (Frederick Herzberg)

Herzberg believed that motivators such as the following can increase job satisfaction:
- Challenging assignments
- Increased responsibility
- The possibility of achievement, advancement, personal growth, or recognition.

Herzberg also believed that factors such as compensation, level of supervision, relationships with coworkers and superiors, and working conditions do not always foster motivation; however, not providing them can create job dissatisfaction.

Process Theories of Motivation

Process theories of motivation consider how individuals make decisions and how rewards influence future performance.

Contingency Theory (John J. Morse and Jay W. Lorsch)

Team members can be motivated when:
- The tasks they are expected to perform align well to their individual skills
- The degree of freedom granted them by management, as characterized by the formality of their work environment, and the degree to which they are empowered matches the type of work being done.

When team members' skill sets are not sufficient for the job-at-hand, they should be provided training that will enhance their overall competence.

Equity Theory (John S. Adams)

Team members' motivation can be influenced by the perception of how fairly rewards are distributed throughout the organization. Unfair allocation of rewards, whether actual or perceived, can negatively impact team member motivation.

Expectancy Theory (Victor H. Vroom)

Team members may exhibit greater effort when they feel that this effort will result in a favorable outcome or a desired reward. Implicit, here, is the notion that people give serious thought to how much effort they wish to expend before performing a task.

Goal-Setting Theory (Gary P. Latham and Edwin A. Locke)

Team members can be motivated by goals that are both precise and challenging. A participative approach to goal

> **Individual motivation levels are affected by many factors, professional and personal.**

formulation that includes project team members can foster greater team member commitment toward achieving goals.

Reinforcement Theory (based on B. F. Skinner's behavior modification theories)

Team members can be motivated when desirable behaviors are encouraged (using positive reinforcements) by providing them with incentives that they value. Examples of incentives include:
- Access to better equipment
- Challenging assignments
- Increased independence
- Job promotions
- Sincere praise.

Undesirable behaviors can be discouraged by punishment.

Theory X and Theory Y (Douglas McGregor)

Theory X promulgates the notion that team members will follow the path of least resistance and are largely motivated by money, punishment, or station.

Theory Y, on the other, generally assumes that team members are committed to organizational goals, are self-disciplined, desire increased responsibility, and will meet expectations if properly motivated and afforded a supportive work environment.

Most project team members fit Theory Y assumptions.

Theory Z (William G. Ouchi)

Similar to the Theory Y managers described by McGregor, Theory Z managers generally trust their team members. Managers can foster increased levels of motivation and productivity by exhibiting high levels of confidence, commitment, and trust in project team members.

Preventing Human Failure

Motivating project team members can be challenging. After all, team members work and live in a dynamic environment. Always remember, though, that most project failures are rooted in human failure. For this reason, people (including team members) should be the single most important concern of project managers. While motivation is just one factor in the human side of project management, it is an important factor. I hope, this article has provided practical advice that you, the project manager, can use to foster and maintain high levels of motivation within your team members.