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## Thinking about motivation in the workplace

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# CHAPTER 8

## THINKING ABOUT MOTIVATION IN THE WORKPLACE

*Simon Rea*

### INTRODUCTION

James is a sports coach who runs after school sports sessions in a primary school. He notices that the same children are always ready first and always have the right training kit; these children also appear to show the most enthusiasm and have the most energy. He does become frustrated that the children always want to play football and don't put as much effort into other sports; so he ends up using football sessions as a bribe for the children who perform well in the other sessions.

Sammy is a fitness instructor who feels everyone should be as enthusiastic as she is about training in the gym. However, she finds that her customers will train hard for about six sessions and then start to make excuses about why they cannot come for their training sessions; she knows if they don't train in the gym they are probably not doing the exercises she asked them to do at home.

Kieran is the manager of a small sports centre and he finds that the same members of staff will volunteer to take on the challenging tasks he sets. They will always meet their objectives on time and to a high standard. He also has staff who will come in and do the work expected of them to a good standard but never put themselves out, or look for jobs which need to be done. Kieran finds that any changes he makes to motivate the staff will work for a short time but then start to lose their effect.

All of these professionals are aware that their issues are about motivating the people they work with and that developing and maintaining motivation is

essential for their own success and the success of their business. However, they may not understand the concept of motivation fully, what affects motivation, and how motivation can be developed. They probably possess the technical skills and knowledge needed to coach, instruct and manage but their improved ability to motivate people would make them stand out from the crowd and achieve better results for all the people they work with. This chapter introduces the concept of motivation and examines three different approaches to motivation and will continue to draw on these three illustrative examples.

Sage (1977) has provided a classic definition of motivation:

Motivation is the direction and intensity of effort  
(Weinberg and Gould, 2007: p. 52)

The direction of effort refers to the activities that we choose to direct our attention towards. For example, James (coach) finds that his primary school children direct their efforts towards football at the expense of other sports, whilst Kieran's staff are motivated to direct their effort into delivering their swimming lessons rather than scrubbing the poolside. The intensity of effort refers to how much effort the individual puts into each specific situation or towards a specific goal. Sammy (fitness instructor) finds that even her most committed customers will put different intensities of effort into their training and often this varies from day to day. While the direction and intensity of effort have been differentiated in this discussion you have probably experienced that those people who consistently attend their sessions and are well prepared (direction) will also expend most effort during the sessions (intensity). Conversely, those who often miss sessions, arrive late, and are poorly prepared will usually expend least effort. In reality the two, direction and intensity, tend to go together.

In our three differing exemplars each person has developed their own view of motivation and developed ways of motivating people accordingly. For example, Sammy (fitness instructor) feels that her enthusiasm should motivate other people and she shows enthusiasm because she is motivated herself. However, she finds it difficult to understand why other people are not as motivated to train like her and this does not fit in with her personal view of motivation and the factors which affect her motivation. Her understanding of motivation would be augmented by looking at different approaches that psychologists have taken to view motivation. This chapter will address three of the most accepted approaches to motivation: the trait centred view; the situation-centred view; and the interactional view.

## **THE TRAIT-CENTRED VIEW**

The trait-centred view asserts that motivation is the result of an individual's personality and their individual characteristics. This suggests that motivation comes from within the individual, rather than from external sources. In developing the trait-centred view further psychologists would agree that motivated behaviour is largely determined by the personality, needs, and goals of the athlete, exerciser or employee (Weinberg and Gould, 2007). This would explain why some sportspeople are described as being 'highly driven' or 'a real competitor' to show that they are the type of person who is so motivated that they will work hard to achieve their goals. Conversely we may hear another sports person being described as 'a bit of a loser' as they lack direction and just let things pass them by. Individual success in maintaining an exercise programme for an extended period of time can be attributed to their drive and determination (Berger *et al.*, 2007). Kieran (manager) can see that his highly motivated group of staff members have the personality attributes that predispose them towards this type of behaviour. However, contrary to the trait view he also knows that his other staff members rely on him and his leadership to motivate them and if he is having a bad day then this affects the motivation of these staff members. This suggests that the climate or environment we are operating within has an influence on our motivation and thus motivation may be situation specific.

## **SITUATION-CENTRED VIEW**

The situation-centred view proposes that it is the situation which is the primary determinant of motivation in an individual (Weinberg and Gould, 2007). This could explain why an individual is highly motivated on the sports field but less so in the workplace. In sporting environments it is often assumed that the coach (or teacher) plays a significant role in developing a motivational climate (Ames and Archer, 1988; Ames, 1992); however, athletes also consider that their team members' behaviour and how they worked as a group was of major importance (Pensgaard and Roberts, 2002).

Kieran (manager) believes that some of his staff members will be highly motivated irrespective of the situation or environment because their own motives are so strong. Likewise, Sammy (fitness instructor) sees a wide variation in motivation levels from her training customers in identical environments. While the environment and the climate created do play a role in motivation it would appear that the situation is not the only factor and thus sport and exercise

## **BOX 8.1: MYTHS ABOUT MOTIVATION**

### **1. People are either motivated or not motivated**

As described in the trait-centred view, some coaches and leaders believe that motivation is a stable personality characteristic and that an individual will either be motivated or not. They would say that motivation cannot be developed so would choose members for a team based on their personality. While some individuals will be more motivated than others the leader/coach can be influential in facilitating the development of goals and other measures of motivation (Weigand *et al.*, 2001).

### **2. Leaders give people motivation**

Other coaches and leaders regard motivation as a quality they can instil into individuals as and when they need it; the situation-centred view would suggest this behaviour is part of developing a motivational climate. To give people motivation a leader would use motivational talks, quotes, slogans and images to fire people up. These techniques have a role to play but they may not be long-term strategies and will only address a small piece of the motivational jigsaw. Leaders cannot simply give motivation to individuals.

### **3. Motivation means sticks and carrots**

A commonly held view of influencing motivation is that it involves using carrots (rewards) and sticks (punishments) to drive individuals on to achieve things they would not achieve on their own. This view suggests that individuals don't want to do something and that the leader will coerce them into it by punishing or rewarding them. Leaders who scream, shout, castigate and criticise often expend a lot of energy, meet resistance and negativity, and take the enjoyment out of the activity. Continually offering a carrot (reward) to an individual will eventually lose its power as well. To be effective as a coach or a leader you need to understand the needs of an individual and create an environment or culture which will allow motivation to thrive.

Source: Adapted from Burton and Raedeke (2008), pp. 124–125.

psychologists do not recommend the situation-centred view of motivation as being reliable for directing your practice (Weinberg and Gould, 2007). Box 8.1 looks at the issues associated with trait and situation-centred views in more depth.

## **INTERACTIONAL VIEW**

The interactional view takes the perspective that personality traits, in this case drive and motivation, and the situation itself are individually weak predictors of performance (Cox, 2007). However, when they both interact they provide a much stronger predictor of performance and behaviour. This broader view of motivation, called the interactional view, suggests that you need to consider both the individual's personality and the situation they are operating within if you want to get the best performances out of people. This is important in both sport and workplace settings to get the right fit between the individual and the situation you are putting them in. Sammy (fitness instructor) may realise that the issue she has with her training customers is that their motivation may be affected by her style of leadership or by the activities she is making her customers take part in. Maybe one size does not fit all and she needs to vary activities to meet the personality and needs of her customers. James (coach) could look at his most successful coaching sessions, the sessions that create the highest motivation levels in his young players and transfer these qualities to the coaching of other sessions so that the group are more motivated to do other activities. Kieran (manager) may realise that some of his staff are not particularly motivated because of the way that he leads them and the motivational strategies he employs; in his case the situation they are operating in does not vary but their individual personality, values, interests and goals do vary.

## **CONCLUSION**

Motivation is a difficult area for many managers, leaders, instructors or coaches to deal with because it is not a personality characteristic which remains stable in an individual and it is influenced by many factors. The customers, staff or young participants they deal with will experience fluctuations in motivation level dependent upon their mood, level of energy and their daily experiences and situation. However, by understanding that motivation is predominantly influenced by the interaction of the individual's personality and the situation

they find themselves in, you can start to influence the motivation of an individual in a positive way.

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