



MAKING SENSE OF MOTIVATION

A 4-PART SUMMARY OF WHAT WORKS

By Tom Terez

SUMMARY:

This brief white paper is for busy people who want a quick course in what works when it comes to motivation.

It pulls together a variety of proven perspectives and practices, organizing the information along a four-part continuum that covers **satisfaction, motivation, engagement, and flow.**

You can use this white paper to deepen your understanding, to make discoveries with colleagues, and to determine what you and others can do to bring out the best in people.

This document is called a *working* white paper because it is meant to be used and not just read.

Feel free to circulate photocopies and/or the PDF file, which can be downloaded at BetterWorkplaceNow.com and TomTerez.com

Also ready for downloading is our white paper on “Power Over vs. Power With.”

When people gather to pursue common goals, talk invariably turns to motivation. Most everyone agrees that motivation is important, yet widely different theories abound. Ask five people to share their best ideas on how to motivate, and you’re likely to get five different answers.

There’s the reward theory: provide incentives that draw people toward desired objectives.

There’s the fairness theory: treat people fairly in terms of compensation, benefits, and other factors, and motivation will sort itself out.

There’s the empowerment theory: give people wide latitude in making decisions.

There’s the carrot-and-stick theory: strike a balance between perks and consequences.

There’s the forget-about-it theory: “I’m already paying them well. They should motivate themselves.”

And so on.

It’s easy to see how confusion can arise. When it does, people often agree to disagree – and move on to other things. In the process, they fail to reach consensus on one of the biggest opportunities for strengthening their workplace.

Many psychologists, sociologists, business practitioners, and organizational experts have made the study of motivation their life’s work. Their concepts have been tested over time through well-orchestrated studies and everyday practice. Some of these ideas have been rendered insufficient or outdated – while other concepts have proven their value time and again. In the latter category, the works of Abraham Maslow and Frederick Herzberg in particular come to mind.

As it turns out, to think strictly in terms of “motivation” is to oversimplify and potentially distort the topic. This one concept is on a continuum that includes satisfaction, engagement, and flow. *See the chart on the following page.*

TOM TEREZ WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS

Building great workplaces
one person at a time.

MAKING SENSE OF MOTIVATION: The terms **satisfaction**, **motivation**, and **engagement** are often used interchangeably — yet they are different in significant ways. These differences must be understood and acted upon as we strive to create workplaces that bring out the best in people. The following chart adds in the concept of **flow** and spells out the distinctions between these four crucial factors.

(DIS)SATISFACTION

Think of satisfaction as a minimally required baseline. At the very least, people should be satisfied with their work and workplace.

MOTIVATION

Motivation is the step between passive satisfaction and active engagement. Motivated people put their minds to work as a matter of course.

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement occurs when hearts and minds are fully at work — when people are committed to what they are doing and using their ample intelligence in the process.

FLOW

There are times when people get so absorbed in an activity that they become one with it. Time and ego fall away, focus and skill become everything.

WHAT IT REQUIRES

EXTRINSIC FACTORS

To achieve and maintain this baseline, it's essential to have certain extrinsic factors in place: fair compensation, reasonable benefits, adequate policies, good working conditions, job security, etc.

INTRINSIC FACTORS

Motivation is largely an inside-out proposition. It results from factors that are embodied in the work itself and how that work is carried out: responsibility, challenge, decision-making authority, collaboration, opportunities to grow, etc.

INTRINSIC FACTORS

Engagement combines the job-content factors of motivation with a compelling mission that lends significance to the work. Individual jobs and projects are valued because they contribute to a greater good.

INTRINSIC FACTORS

Flow, as it's called, results from a positive tension between challenge and ability — combined with a clear goal, focused concentration, immediate feedback, and a sense of control over the activity.

COUNTERINTUITIVE CONSIDERATIONS

Research shows that the adequate presence of these factors won't necessarily lead to job satisfaction, and an excess of these factors won't produce a lasting surge in satisfaction. **However, their absence will lead to dissatisfaction.** Their presence is a required foundation for every functioning workplace. (See the work of Frederick Herzberg.)

Extrinsic rewards — special incentives, perks, awards, and other finite carrots — are often used in an effort to motivate. Yet studies show that extrinsic rewards can foment internal competition, prompt people to court the award-giver rather than the customer, trivialize the work itself, and thus taint the intrinsic chemistry that gives rise to great performance.

Since the early 1990s, countless workplaces have cranked out mission statements. It turns out that the written statement is incidental; what matters most is the mission itself. The mission should be so meaningful and evocative, so relevant, and so much the focus of ongoing dialogue, that a written statement is unnecessary.

Though simple to understand (we've all experienced it at times), flow can be elusive. It certainly can't be turned on like a faucet. To maintain that tension between challenge and ability, individuals need to take matters into their own hands — dialing up the demands of their work while seizing opportunities to learn and develop new skills.

ORIENTATION

RECEIVER

Because these extrinsic factors (compensation, benefits, policies, working conditions, etc.) are shaped mainly by others in the organization, most people are on the receiving end.

PRODUCER (RECEIVER)

Motivated people tend to take an active stance as producers and creators of their work. (In cases where people have little control over job content, however, motivation can suffer.)

PRODUCER

Engagement is an inherently active proposition. It brings together the motion of motivation with the guidance system and added fuel of a meaningful mission.

SUPER-PRODUCER

Soccer great Pelé on flow: "I felt...euphoria. I felt I could run all day without tiring, that I could dribble through any or all of their team, that I could almost pass through them physically."

COMPENSATION

PHYSICAL COMPENSATION

Consider the word "satiated," a Latin relative of "satisfied." When you're full after a meal, you've canceled out your hunger. You basically go back to baseline. More food won't make you "more satiated."

MENTAL COMPENSATION

With its Latin roots, the word "motivation" relates to "motive" and "momentum." So motivation is fundamentally about movement — in marked contrast to the passive receiver nature of satisfaction.

EMOTIONAL COMPENSATION

Mission-driven people often speak of their work as a "vocation" — a word whose linguistic roots link to "a calling." This call to a higher purpose is the surest way to inspire higher performance over the long term.

TRANSCENDENT COMP.

Great athletes, musicians, writers, and craft people talk about getting "in the zone." Their choice of words conveys the intrinsic nature of flow, in which people erase the duality of self and object.

WORD ASSOCIATION

Consider the word "satiated," a Latin relative of "satisfied." When you're full after a meal, you've canceled out your hunger. You basically go back to baseline. More food won't make you "more satiated."

With its Latin roots, the word "motivation" relates to "motive" and "momentum." So motivation is fundamentally about movement — in marked contrast to the passive receiver nature of satisfaction.

Mission-driven people often speak of their work as a "vocation" — a word whose linguistic roots link to "a calling." This call to a higher purpose is the surest way to inspire higher performance over the long term.

Great athletes, musicians, writers, and craft people talk about getting "in the zone." Their choice of words conveys the intrinsic nature of flow, in which people erase the duality of self and object.

WHAT TO IMPROVE

WORK ENVIRONMENT

JOB CONTENT

MISSION

CHALLENGE & SKILLS

ESSENTIAL STUDY

Suggestions from Tom Terez

This chart is based on nearly 70 years of research, drawing in part from the works of Abraham Maslow (Hierarchy of Needs), Frederick Herzberg (Motivation-Hygiene Theory), Alfie Kohn (*Punished by Rewards*), Stephen Covey (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*), and my own interviews and field visits before and since the publication of *22 Keys to Creating a Meaningful Workplace* (BetterWorkplaceNow.com).