Leadership and Motivation

12

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Abstract

Motivating employees is a crucial leadership task, as motivation translates employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities into effort and performance by determining the direction, intensity, and duration of work-related behaviors. This chapter summarizes the leadership implications of four core perspectives on motivation. It describes why motivating requires a "two-sided understanding" of motivation that in addition to the factors that increase motivation, also covers influences that can decrease motivation. A case from a leadership seminar serves to illustrate how the two-sided view on motivation can help leaders translate their goal to motivate into genuine support. The chapter concludes by discussing how leaders and their employees can cocreate a motivating work context and how they might benefit from a shift from *motivating* to *enabling motivation*.

Introduction

Leaders show the way and help employees pursue it by empowering and engaging those employees (see Gill, 2012) through the "the ability … to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization." (House et al., 1999, p. 184). In other words, motivating employees is a crucial leadership task, as motivation translates an employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities into actual work behavior and job performance. While the former enable workers to carry out their jobs as required, the level of motivation

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determines the amount of effort workers actually put into their jobs. Defined as "a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being," work motivation initiates work-related behavior and determines its "direction, intensity, and duration" (Pinder, 1998, p. 11). Pinder's general definition captures the essence of the broad range of theories work motivation research has produced in the past 70 or so years (for an overview, see Hertel & Wittchen, 2008). Differences in general assumptions and emphases notwithstanding, those theories converge in the aim to describe under which conditions employees invest effort in their work, which work activities they prefer, and what makes employees persist in their efforts over time.

From a leadership perspective, the multitude of established theories can in principle be a real asset as it allows for compiling a comprehensive set of "tools" to positively influence employee motivation. Using these tools effectively and responsibly requires a "two-sided understanding" of motivation that in addition to the factors that *increase* motivation, also covers influences that can *decrease* motivation. On this backdrop, this chapter summarizes in the first section the leadership implications of four major perspectives on motivation and emphasizes that intrinsic motivation should be the goal of motivating. In the second section, a case from our leadership development seminars serves to illustrate how the two-sided view on motivation can help leaders translate their goal to motivate into genuine support. The chapter concludes by discussing how both leaders and their employees might benefit from a shift toward *enabling motivation*.

Leadership Implications of Core Perspectives on Motivation

While no "grand unified theory" of work motivation has yet been proposed (see Locke & Latham, 2004), several core theoretical perspectives can be identified (see Grant & Shin, 2011) that in principle give leaders a sophisticated set of tools to promote their employees' motivation. As one of those core perspectives on motivation, goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990), focuses on the motivational effects of goals and emphasizes that difficult, specific goals motivate high performance by focusing attention and increasing effort and persistence. Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) is a second major perspective. It presumes that employees' investments of effort follow from three subjective beliefs. To be motivated, employees must believe that their effort will lead to performance (*expectancy*), that this performance will lead to outcomes (*instrumentality*), and these outcomes must be subjectively important (*valence*). The *Job Characteristics Model* (JCM; e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Oldham & Hackman, 2005) as the third major perspective is built on the assumption that certain structural characteristics of work tasks prompt psychological states that are the prerequisites to high levels of job satisfaction and work motivation. Skill variety, for instance, i.e., the degree to which a job requires employees to develop and use a variety of skills and talents, is positively linked to the experienced meaningfulness of that job. Together with *responsibility for outcomes* and *knowledge of results*, experienced meaningfulness is one of three psychological states that jobholders must experience to be motivated.

These theories suggest a number of leadership interventions to increase motivation. From a goal-setting perspective, together with difficult goals, feedback is seen as essential because it enables employees to gauge their progress and adjust effort, persistence, and task strategies accordingly. Therefore, systematic goal-setting and feedback are two essential motivation tools, and they are indeed used by superiors employing *Management by Objectives* (Drucker, 1954) principles. Rewards for good performance are perhaps the most obvious motivation tool that follows from expectancy theory. According to the theory, even an employee with high expectancy beliefs would not be motivated if he or she were not convinced that performance will lead to outcomes. A (monetary) incentive is supposed to be such an outcome and should therefore by definition increase motivation to the extent that the employee values the incentive. Finally, the job characteristics model implies that leaders can motivate through the way they arrange work. For instance, granting employees the freedom and discretion about when and how to complete their work increases experienced responsibility for outcomes. The conclusion seems tempting that to achieve the highest possible level of motivation, leaders should combine all those tools. In other words, they should set difficult goals, give regular feedback, promise attractive bonuses, and at the same time give their employees the latitude to do their work the way they want to achieve those goals. After all, the aforementioned theories are not meant to be alternatives; rather, each theory looks at *some* of the many conditions under which employees are motivated and each theory looks at a different set of conditions.

From a self-determination theory (SDT; for a review, see Gagné & Deci, 2005) point of view, however, that "more is better" approach might be a haphazardly compiled toolbox rather than the effective and responsible use of motivational interventions. As the fourth core perspective, SDT has expanded our understanding of intrinsic motivation and informed work motivation research in general (Grant & Shin, 2011). According to SDT, employees have the three basic needs of *autonomy* (a feeling of choice and discretion), *competence* (feeling capable and efficacious), and *relatedness* (a feeling of belongingness with others) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). If these three needs are met, employees are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and accept external goals and objectives as being "their own." Motivation is intrinsic in that it is driven by an interest in or enjoyment of the task itself, and evolves within the employee, rather than from external pressures or rewards. If these needs are not fully met, motivation will be of a more extrinsic nature. Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed four types of extrinsic motivation that vary in their degree of experienced autonomy. As the "most extrinsic" type, *external motivation* is exclusively based on outside reward and punishment contingencies, whereas employees in a state of *integrated motivation* have assimilated those contingencies into their system of goals and values.

It is the intrinsic, autonomous level of motivation that leaders are supposed to achieve in their employees, according to contemporary leadership models. As motivation cannot be fostered by "a simple swap of desired material and psychic payments from a superior in exchange for satisfactory services" (Bass, 1985, p. 9), leaders should aim at raising their employees' aspirations by articulating a

compelling vision and encouraging employees to go beyond their personal expectations in achieving this vision (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Such leadership requires, among other things, *individualized consideration*, i.e., a leader's capability to recognize differing characteristics among his or her employees, act as their mentor or coach, and pay special attention to individual needs of followers. This kind of leadership has been shown to promote employees' motivation and job satisfaction and to inspire employees to take greater ownership for their jobs (Zhu, Chew, & Spangler, 2005; Barroso Castro, Villegas Perinan, & Casillas Bueno, 2008; Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011; García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, & Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, 2012).

SDT helps understand why simply "throwing together" all possible motivators mentioned above is not guaranteed to work. Let us take rewards and incentives as an example. If they are promised in a way that threatens feelings of autonomy, competence, or relatedness, employees will most likely react negatively. For instance, explaining a reward system in a controlling rather than supportive manner can compromise employees' feelings of autonomy and relatedness (e.g., Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; see also Kramer, 1999). There is also evidence that other characteristics of compensation systems (e.g., variable vs. fixed pay ratios or the number of people whose performance determines the reward; Gagné & Forest, 2008; symbolic features of rewards—who distributes them, why, how, and to whom; Mickel & Barron, 2008) may affect self-determination and intrinsic motivation. The same rationale applies to the way goals are set and feedback is given. It is not goals and feedback alone that foster motivation, but also the way they are communicated. The following case from one of our leadership development seminars will serve to highlight the difference motivational communication can make.

Case Study 12.1: Motivational Communication—How Less Can Be More

In our leadership development seminars, most participants seem to be clear what motivation is and how employees can be motivated. Encouragement is regularly mentioned as a top motivator, together with support, and incentives. Furthermore, most leaders endorse that employees should be asked their views so they can participate in their own "motivation-making." There is, of course, nothing wrong with encouraging and supporting, and participation is certainly crucial. And incentives can be helpful, too, if they are introduced in a fashion that supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In that case, they can increase intrinsic motivation (see Grant & Shin, 2011). Still, even when they keep encouragement, support, and incentives in mind, leaders might end up in a conversation like the one below. In this excerpt, a participant of one of our leadership seminars—let's call him John Miller—describes how he went about motivating one of his employees in a specific situation.

John Miller, the Department Head, meets with his employee Jane Smith to discuss upcoming changes in Mrs. Smith's job. In the wake of recently implemented process standardization and streamlining measures, some of Mrs. Smith's tasks got comput-

erized and she is therefore supposed to take over other tasks that are new for her. Mr. Miller wants to support her and ensure she is really motivated.

John Miller: "Good morning, Jane, how are you? I am sure you know why I invited you to our today's meeting, don't you. I would like to discuss with you the upcoming changes to your work that follow from our recent standardization program. Do you feel well prepared?"

Jane Smith: "Well … Looks like I'll have to take on a host of new tasks … I haven't had that many tasks so far and I am not at all familiar with the new ones …"

John Miller: "You're absolutely right, Jane. We've accomplished quite a bit in the past 18 months. Most processes in our departments C3PO und R2D2 are now standardized across all sites. Many time-consuming micro tasks are carried out by computers now. That's good for you because there will be less of the boring routine work to do. So you work load has actually gone down, hasn't it."

Jane Smith: "Well…"

John Miller: "A reduced workload means that you'll have the capacities to take on new tasks. I've drafted a list with four new topics and next steps that I'd like you to familiarize yourself with."

Jane Smith: "Oh, wow, that's quite a bit of work …"

John Miller: "Don't worry, Jane, I know you've got what it takes. Moreover, I suggest you attend the Exwhyzed training, which will get you up to speed in less than two weeks. And finally, I'll grant you two extra days of leave as a bonus!"

Jane Smith: "Thank you. I've heard, though, Exwhyzed would be rather theoretical, not very hands-on. Will that really help me?"

John Miller: "That training has been well received by most of your colleagues so far. I don't think it'll be a problem—do you?"

Jane Smith: "Alright, alright …"

John Miller: "Jane, I'm glad we've agreed a good solution. Best of luck to you!"

John was aware that there might be room for improvement to his motivating skills. Still, he felt unable to specify why Jane did not leave the meeting very motivated and why she has repeatedly called in sick ever since, which he thinks is to do with the upcoming changes. After all, he had asked her if she felt well prepared and encouraged her by telling her that he believed she had what it takes to master the upcoming tasks. He supported her in two ways; first, to set goals, he compiled for her a list with topics and next steps and second, he "offered" (his words when explaining his rationale) her a training to facilitate getting into the new tasks. Together with his encouragement, this should have raised her expectancy beliefs. To make her transition more enjoyable and to raise her utility beliefs, John gave Jane two extra days of leave as an incentive. Finally, as an additional boost to Jane's utility beliefs, John emphasized as an advantage of the standardization program that Jane would be freed from what he called "microtasks," implying that she would from now on have a more stimulating, challenging job. In sum, therefore, from a motivation theory point of view, it seems he did everything right. Moreover, as that participant appeared to be of genuine friendliness, there were no grounds to assume he could have led the conversation in a demotivating way. What, then, was the problem?

As we shall see, the fact that he *led* the conversation was most problematic. In that seminar, we had another participant from the same company,

and she faced basically the same situation. Like John Miller, she was dealing with one of her employees who was concerned about the potential changes from the standardization program. Unlike John Miller, she did not *lead* the conversation in the usual way:

Joanna Miller: "Good morning, James, how are you? Today, I'd like to speak with you about our recent standardization program and what it means for you. In that regard, what have you got on your list that you would like to talk about?"

James Smith: "Well, I'm concerned about all the upcoming changes"

Joanna Miller: "Which changes exactly do you see for yourself?"

James Smith: "Suppose there'll be loads of new tasks for me…"

Joanna Miller: "James, you are right that the standardization initiative brought quite a few changes. In our C3PO und R2D2 departments, the majority of processes got standardized so that many routine tasks are now handled by computers. Have you for yourself gone through the implications yet of those changes for your work?"

James Smith: "No."

Joanna Miller: "What advantages do you see from many of the time-killing tiny tasks being handled by the computer from now on?"

James Smith: "Can't think of any."

Joanna Miller: "And what are you worried about?"

James Smith: "As I said, I'll have many new tasks to handle."

Joanna Miller: "Alright, got that. In your view, what's the problem with these new tasks?"

James Smith: "That I won't be up to them."

Joanna Miller: "What does that mean, 'not up to them'? How would you know you're not up to them?"

James Smith: "I might be doing everything wrong!"

Joanna Miller: "You might be doing everything wrong … In what other situation have you done everything, I repeat, everything wrong?"

James Smith: "Well …"

Joanna Miller: "You've been with us now for more than 15 years and you are indeed very experienced. In the past, when you had to learn the ropes, how was that? How did you manage in those cases?"

James Smith: "I always got along, somehow."

Joanna Miller: "And what might be different now? What might keep you from familiarizing yourself with those new tasks?"

James Smith: "I haven't got any younger, learning new things is not that easy anymore."

Joanna Miller: "How do you notice that learning isn't as easy for you as it used to be?"

James Smith: "It's just strenuous."

Joanna Miller: "And it used to be a piece of cake 10 or 15 years ago?"

James Smith: "Well, it's always a little strenuous."

Joanna Miller: "What could we—I mean our instructors, I, and you—do to make learning easier for you?"

John Smith: "Don't know."

Joanna Miller: "How much does learning put you under time pressure?"

John Smith: "Quite a bit."

Joanna Miller: "And how much would it help if we took that pressure down?"

John Smith: "That would be quite a relief!"

Joanna Miller: "The Exwhyzed training might be helpful to prepare you for your new tasks. Do you know that one?"

John Smith: "I've heard it's quite theoretical…"

Joanna Miller: "What do you think if we ask Jack Doe, the instructor, to let us have the training materials in advance? You could go through them and flag the topics and exercises that you think aren't hands-on enough."

James Smith: "And what would that be good for?"

Joanna Miller: "Thanks to your experience, you might be able to give us ideas how we might make our trainings better, you might be able to suggest different exercises and cases, for instance. This might be of great help to your colleagues, too."

James Smith: "Ok, why not."

Joanna Miller: "Great, thank you. Are you going to speak to Jack, or would you like me to do that?"

James Smith: "I'll get in touch with him after we speak."

Joanna Miller: "The training will be in two weeks. Please can you let me know what suggestions you've got by Tuesday next week? We could then get back to Jack, he might be able to incorporate some changes already in the next training."

James Smith: "Ok, sounds good."

Joanna Miller: "What else would like to talk about standardization-wise?"

James Smith: "I'm sorted at this point, thank you."

Compared to John in the first conversation, Joanna may seem to have done much less in terms of motivating. Like John, she suggested a specific training to support her employee James's getting started on the new tasks. However, neither did she promise an extrinsic motivator to increase his motivation for that training, nor did she mention any intrinsic rewards that might result from the standardization. And although like John she was convinced her employee James did have what it takes to master the change, she did not encourage James by telling him so. Even when he did not come up with any benefits the standardization might have for him, Joanna did not mention such benefits herself. Quite to contrary, she explored his potential apprehensions by asking what might worry him about the new tasks. What was Joanna's rationale?

In essence, she focused on two principles. First, she started from the assumption that motivating others is not always synonymous to *increasing motivation*, but sometimes to *removing barriers* to motivation. As we have seen in the previous section, employees have got the need for feeling competent, for believing that their efforts will lead to performance. If they lack such efficacy beliefs, motivation will most likely be minimal; any attempts to fuel utility beliefs will not compensate for insufficient expectancy beliefs. Therefore, Joanna dealt with James's fears, which might have reduced his efficacy beliefs. In other words, her approach reflected a "double-sided" understanding of motivation. John Miller, on the other hand, showed a "single-sided" understanding that focuses on "pushing" motivation only. Second, rather than telling James she knew he had what it takes, Joanna tried to let him discover that for himself by having him realize that his fears of failure are overblown. To that end, she had him specify exactly how he knew he would not be up to the new tasks and that having to learn new skills would be a problem for him. Importantly, she made him connect to his strengths in previous situations ("In the past … How did you manage…?") of change to make the current situation look even less threatening. At the end of their conversation, James was prepared to try Joanna's suggestion of preparing himself for the training by revising the training materials and perhaps coming up with suggestions for improvement.

From Motivating to Enabling Motivation

Motivating others is by no means an easy task. Goals and feedback, expectancy beliefs and incentives, work design and autonomy—all these and many more person factors and job factors play a substantial role in motivating employees. As employees may differ in the relative importance they attach to each of these factors, what motivates one employee might not motivate another employee the same way. At the same time, according to contemporary leadership models, leaders are supposed to show individualized consideration of their employees to motivate them the best possible way. Can leaders realistically be expected to master that challenge, particularly if they lead a large number of employees?

If leaders like John Miller feel they have to "make" their employees' motivation and if they endorse a "push" view on motivation with encouragement, feedback, praise, and rewards as their sole motivation tools, then leaders might indeed falter. However, if leaders like Joanna Miller see as their job to create a work context in which employee motivation can unfold and to help employees surmount obstacles to high motivation, then motivating becomes a much easier goal to attain. Adopting an expectancy theory perspective, we portray in our leadership seminars motivation as a "decision[1]"; if certain conditions are met, employees "decide" to be motivated. Only employees can make that decision, not their leaders. Accordingly, the focus of leaders' motivational interventions shifts from *motivating* to *enabling* employees' motivation, building on the assumption that employees know best what drives their motivation and what stifles it. That knowledge puts them in a position to cocreate with their leaders a motivating work context. What would it take to make the enabling of motivation a standard motivational intervention of leaders? Basically, we believe the tools are available already.

As the case example suggested, asking employees the right questions is one essential tool. Motivational interviewing (MI) research and practice (see Miller & Rollnick, 2002) has developed and validated a system of conversational techniques that are helpful in raising people's motivation and lowering resistance to change. As far as we can see, MI techniques are not yet widely used in leadership contexts. We are optimistic this will change, however, given that motivational interviewing skills are quite straightforward to acquire. Of course, working with MI techniques and a double-sided concept of motivation can involve dealing with employees' negative emotions such as fear or anger. Leaders might be hesitant to go there if they want to "let sleeping dogs lie" and not put their employees' motivation on the line. Although we understand such concerns, we do not share them. The simple question is: what is the alternative? If negative emotions are "there," they need dealing with because this will be the only way of managing them. On the other hand, simply ignoring negative affect is more than likely to increase its adverse impact.

A solid understanding of the role of personal and job resources play for motivation is a second important tool. Job resources are those physical,

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[1] Please note that this is meant as a metaphor, rather than a theoretically accurate description.

psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that help workers achieve their work goals and that reduce job demands (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Job resources may motivate intrinsically by facilitating learning or personal development and extrinsically by providing instrumental help or specific information for goal achievement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job resources such as social support, autonomy, performance feedback, supervisory coaching, and opportunities for development have been recognized as crucial for the majority of occupations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Personal resources are positive self-evaluations that facilitate goal achievement and protect individuals against the physical and emotional costs of work-related demands (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Personal resources refer to one's sense of the ability to control and impact successfully on one's environment. An example of a personal resource is learning-related self-efficacy (Kyndt & Baert, 2013).

Important from a leadership point of view, job and personal resources interact with job demands. Only if their resources match job demands will employees make full use of their competencies and maintain their productivity and well-being. Job resources might buffer the impact of job demands such as work pressure and emotional demands, including burnout, on work-related strain (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). Interactions of resources with demands may have longer term effects in the form of *resource cycles*. According to Hobfoll (1998, 2001), people who possess resources are more likely to acquire further resources. As initial gains beget future gain, employees with resource surpluses are less vulnerable to job demands (Hobfoll, 1998). Conversely to this *gain spiral*, those who lack resources are more vulnerable to further losses, potentially initiating *loss spirals*.

According to our experiences, the job resources concept can help leaders and their employees see which parts they play in cocreating a motivating work context. Certain resources serve as key resources that "unlock" the power of other resources. If key resources are missing, the beneficial effects of other resources might be limited. For instance, a company might have a positive learning and training climate and job design might be geared toward work-related learning. However, if leaders fail to support and encourage learning, they may stifle their workers' learning activities. From an exploration of the available job and personal resources, leaders gain a detailed insight into the key job resources they should arrange for. Employees get a sense of their personal resources that need building and to what extent those personal resources depend on job resources; this enables them to request from their leaders' job resources in a much more targeted fashion. Ultimately, such co-creation benefits both leaders and employees. Leaders' job of motivating becomes more manageable as they share it with their employees. For employees, co-creation involves a high degree of autonomy, (self-)competence, and connectedness (with their leader), fulfilling the central needs that promote intrinsic motivation.

Discussion Questions

1. In the second conversation, although James was prepared to try Joanna's suggestion, he did not appear to be totally enthusiastic and bursting with energy to get started. Why might Joanna not have tried to achieve such "high-energy motivation" right away? What pros and cons do you see to Joanna's going for a "lower level" of motivation?
2. Why might employees sometimes seem to be very "motivated to not be motivated"?
3. What might have made one of our participants say "If I enable my employees to be motivated, rather than motivating them myself, I give away a great deal of my influence"?
4. Which (groups of) employees might the approach of enabling motivation not be suitable for?

Chapter Summary

- Leaders motivate and enable employees as a part of their endeavors to secure the effectiveness and success of the organization.
- Motivation translates an employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities into performance by determining the direction, intensity, and duration of work-related behaviors.
- The theories of goal-setting, expectancy, job characteristics, and self-determination have emerged from a broad range of theories as four major perspectives on motivation, providing a comprehensive set of motivating factors.
- Self-determination theory suggests that
  (a) Leaders should target intrinsic motivation that is driven by an interest or enjoyment in the task itself, and that is strongly related to job satisfaction, ownership of one's job, and job-related well-being.
  (b) The way motivators are introduced and communicated in leader–employee conversations is critical to their effectiveness.
- Rather than trying to directly motivate, leaders might benefit from enabling their employees' motivation through structured questioning using insights from motivational interviewing.
- In that approach, leaders and employees cocreate a motivating work context. Leaders benefit from sharing their task of motivating with employees; employees benefit from the autonomy and connectedness that comes with such co-creation.

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