



What motivates people?

Overview

This is the question that all managers and leaders want to know the answer to. I will try to answer it drawing upon my experience from leading organisational change projects.

The key point to remember is that everyone is different. Whilst there are simple tools like the one introduced below to help explain what drives and motivates people, remember that these are powerful but general indicators of likely behaviour. Motivators will change over time too depending upon the context that the individual is in. So thinking about motivation is not a one off annual exercise (like some appraisal projects), but an ongoing task. The application of the tool described here – *Maslow's Hierarchy* – must be revisited too when major organisational change is anticipated.

Maslow's Hierarchy

Everybody has needs and Abraham Maslow set out to explain behaviour by looking at people's needs. He presented a "hierarchy" of needs. Typically, these are shown as a pyramid and one has to satisfy the needs at the bottom before moving upwards to satisfy further needs higher up the hierarchy. Very simply, a person won't really be motivated by needs at higher levels until the ones at lower levels are all satisfied.

Most illustrations show the needs hierarchy as a pyramid, but I will show it as a series of building blocks, that I have tried to show in a work context:



Most descriptions of Maslow's work simply refer to five levels or need groups, but I have expanded the illustration here to include some of his later additions.

As the arrow suggests, we start at the bottom. If you haven't got enough food to keep alive you're not going to concentrate upon higher level needs such as self-fulfilment. Similar arguments apply if the *Safety* level is threatened. If you are under threat of redundancy, getting a new job will be the primary focal point of effort – not probably helping others achieve their goals. So broadly we don't progress up the hierarchy until we have satisfied our needs at lower levels.

Sidebar: Everything in 60secs

Maslow's hierarchy is a simple tool to help answer the question "What motivates people?"

Maslow holds that there is a series of need groups that must be satisfied. Drawing on his later work, seven are identified here ranging from the basic need to keep alive and provide security through to fulfilling one's ultimate goals and helping others to do the same.

The theory is that the more basic needs have to be satisfied first – it's no good trying to help someone achieve their life long ambition if they're worried that their house could be repossessed.

Maslow's Hierarchy is a potentially powerful tool. If you're interested in trying to maximise motivation in your team think about these questions:

- "Do I communicate well enough with the team to find out about health and safety motivation level concerns?"*
- "Could changes or rumoured changes impact team members' health and safety need levels?"*
- "Is there anyone left out of work related groups?"*
- "Are we really good at recognising achievement?"*
- "How well are we developing team members' competences for tomorrow?"*
- "How well are development programmes matched to individual's own achievement needs?"*
- "Do we understand everyone's hierarchy?"*



Application

Understanding team members' "hierarchies" is therefore important if we are to attempt to increase motivation. So here I will look at each in a little more detail with work related questions and applications starting from the bottom up:

Level:	Description:	Work related questions and issues:
1. Health	The real absolute basics to stay alive – food, sleep, drink, shelter	Don't expect total commitment if there are health issues in the employee's family. <i>Do you communicate well enough with your team to find out about these issues?</i>
2. Safety	Stability and security	This really relates to confidence in income. The threat of house repossession is a topical issue now for many. <i>Consider how the employee will see planned (or rumoured) changes in the workplace from this perspective.</i>
3. The Group	Work and social group acceptance	People like to be accepted in both formal work groups and informal (social) work related groups. <i>What steps do you take to ensure there is an inclusive work group or team? Who feels left out?</i>
4. Recognition	Achievement, status, recognition	Recognition of effort is really important <i>but are there mechanisms to do this? How is out of the ordinary effort rewarded? Does anyone feel overlooked?</i>
5. Knowledge	To know, understand and explore	Getting the skills and knowledge or competences to proceed further. We now live in a rapidly changing world. Yesterday's core skills or competences may not be tomorrow's. <i>How well are we developing team members' competences for tomorrow? How well are development programmes matched to individuals' own achievement needs? Don't just apply "stretch" targets – think about providing the competences to achieve them!</i>
6. Self-fulfilment	Achievement – reaching the peak	Ensuring the employees get as far as they want to go. <i>Do you know what your employees' central life interests or personal goals are?</i>
7. Helping others	Helping others reach their own Level 6s	Some will want to go on the support and mentor their colleagues. <i>Do you know who these are? Are your team leaders motivated to this level?</i>

Remember that people don't rationally and consciously move up to the next level when the last is "full". Think about this as a tool to find out what is missing at each level and prioritise your motivation efforts accordingly.

This is a personalised view of Maslow's theory of motivation, but I hope that it will help to provide a checklist for use in your workplace. Whilst it is a simple approach, it is one that is so often over-looked in today's short-term, measurement based business world. People are people, not numbers and any organisation is only as good as its people.



Finally

I hope that you have enjoyed this Executive Briefing.

You can find more on the website or e-mail me using the link below. I enjoy personally helping businesses - some of the work I undertake includes:

- § Forward looking business scenarios – what are your future challenges?
- § Facilitating board level strategic reviews, with a particular emphasis upon the definition of tomorrow's competitive environment
- § Design and implementation of Balanced Scorecard performance measurement systems
- § Research to help identify what potential capital providers will look for in your business plan
- § Training: Strategic Thinking, Performance Measurement and Strategic Change Workshops.
- § Product portfolio assessment. Helping the business to define the optimal product portfolio – balancing future competitive conditions with the probability of achieving future planned performance
- § Communication programmes
- § Organisational audits – assessing the innovative capability of your organisation

Best regards,

Robert Davies