Can we really motivate people?

In a nutshell

Most companies admit that they have an employee engagement problem; most companies feel they don't have engaging work or an engaging brand; and most companies have no idea how to change this. Business leaders and human resource managers understand this. There is no production without motivation. But a motivated worker is not necessarily an engaged worker.

The bigger picture

The innate goal of an organization is to get people to produce things collaboratively. Together they make products and services that they otherwise wouldn't create by themselves. This means that *motivating people to be productive* together is a built-in property of every organization. Without motivation, nothing would be produced.

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Payment is the traditional way organizations motivate their employees. And it works (quite well, actually). But managers get even higher productivity when, besides the money, people also feel motivated by something that is more meaningful to them. We call that engagement. And in most organizations, it's lacking. The challenge of leaders and managers is to try to turn mere motivation into true engagement, even when the mundane reason is higher productivity. The big question then is, "How do we make engagement (or meaningful motivation) a built-in property of the organization?" This is what we're going to explore in this course.

Sometimes, I hear consultants or coaches say, "You cannot really motivate people; they can only motivate themselves." This often annoys me. What nonsense! Do these coaches and consultants also believe that we cannot really make people laugh? That people can only decide for themselves to start laughing?

Yes, yes, I know. Technically, it is incorrect to say that "someone is making people laugh." All that comedians can do is set up the right conditions that maximize the probability of audience members laughing. Some are so good at maximizing those probabilities that they get paid for it. Success, however, is not guaranteed.

With motivation, it is the same. Technically, we cannot make people feel motivated. But we can certainly set up the right conditions that maximize the probability that it will happen, even though success is never certain. Managers should manage the system, not the people. This means that managers are responsible for making motivation a built-in property of the organization. Some managers are good at that. Many are not. But they can learn!

Issue 2 of [Moving Motivators](#)

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Do we really need to make a binary distinction?

In a nutshell

Social scientists have come up with various ideas to divide motivation into different categories and dimensions. The most well-known way to categorize

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motivation is binary: employees are either intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated.

The bigger picture

Intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to do something because of an interest in the topic or enjoyment in the task itself. It exists within the individual and can be validated by studying both animal and human behaviors. We can recognize that organisms spontaneously engage in playful and curious behaviors without others asking or telling them to do so. It is why we say that intrinsic motivation is a natural tendency.

Extrinsic motivation refers to the need to do something to achieve an outcome that is desired by something or someone outside of the individual and obtained by offering rewards (for showing the desired behavior) or dealing out punishments (for lack of the desired behavior). Quite often, extrinsic motivation is used to incentivize behavior that one wouldn't normally get from their intrinsic motivation. Money, grades, and trophies are examples of extrinsic rewards.

I find that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is useful but rather simplistic. It would be a bit naïve to believe that the complexity of human psychology and sociology can be reduced to just two simple categories of motivation.

In fact, I believe that reality works the other way around: There is intrinsic motivation among humans to make phenomena much simpler than they really are. We have created the mutually exclusive categories of intrinsic and extrinsic desires because our brains have a strong need for simplification, abstraction, and reduction.

It won't surprise you that, according to some researchers, the diverse range of human motivations cannot be forced into just two categories. For example, many people would say that I am intrinsically motivated to research literature and creatively transform the things I learned into presentations and books because these activities bring me joy. However, I also experience enjoyment when I receive compliments, awards, and money for the products that I offer to the market. Granted, I often started these projects without anyone's suggestions or incentives, which indeed hints at intrinsic motivation. But I

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certainly imagined the incentives, and I have also stopped many creative experiments due to a lack of interest and encouragement from the environment, which would suggest extrinsic motivation. So, am I intrinsically or extrinsically motivated? And do we really need to make a binary distinction?

Issue 3 of [Moving Motivators](#)

The CHAMPFROGS Model

In a nutshell

I offer my own CHAMPFROGS model to anyone who wants to dive a bit deeper into the topic of worker motivation. This model draws from several other models. However, CHAMPFROGS limits itself to motivational factors in a business context.

The bigger picture

In this model, I choose to ignore intrinsic motivators such as food, love, and vengeance. Obviously, we should not ignore such needs permanently, but—with some exceptions—I find the following 10 motivators more relevant in my discussions with managers and workers around the world. Before we have a look at each of the 10 motivators, remember that we are looking for meaningful motivation and true worker engagement—not only because an engaged worker is more productive than someone who is merely motivated by payment, but also because meaningful motivation is the right thing to strive for. You'll see.

- Curiosity. People have a variety of things to investigate and to think about.

- Honor. People feel proud that their values are reflected in how they work.

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- Acceptance. Colleagues approve of what they do and who they are.

- Mastery. Their work challenges their competence, but it is within their abilities.

- Power. There's enough room for them to influence what happens in the world.

- Freedom. People are independent of others with their work and responsibilities.

- Relatedness. People have fulfilling social contacts with others in their work.

- Order. There are enough rules and policies for a stable environment.

- Goal. Their purpose in life or need for direction is reflected in the work.

- Status. Their position is good and is recognized by the people they work with.

Don't take the labeling and naming too seriously. Many scientists have researched human needs and desires, and every time, they come up with different categories, believing that their model is the best. The only thing we

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know for sure is that nobody can come up with a model that everyone else agrees on. Allowing multiple viewpoints is often the safest approach, and taking the average perspective across different observers usually gives you a decent approximation. That's what I have tried to accomplish with the CHAMPFROGS model. Use it as you see fit.

I realize that the word influence might be less controversial than the word power. Likewise, people might prefer autonomy over freedom, purpose over goal, or competence over mastery. However, it is important to realize that words matter less than meaning, and people should have the freedom/autonomy to construct their own mental models of motivation. Besides, CHACIAROPS doesn't resonate as well as CHAMPFROGS.

Issue 4 of [Moving Motivators](#)

The CHAMPFROGS Model: Curiosity and Honor

Curiosity

This is the first of 10 meaningful motivators that can help you take your workers from merely (extrinsically) motivated to (intrinsically) engaged by the work, the people, and the organization. Curiosity is about the joy of learning what is true or false and understanding how things work.

Laboratories, research centers, and universities are the kinds of organizations that thrive on people's innate drive for exploration. For such organizations, curiosity is the reason they exist.

Human beings are inquisitive creatures. Invention and exploration are wired into our brains. Curious workers will show up at work to learn stuff, no matter whether they are rewarded for it or not. The knowledge they acquire is their reward.

As a manager, you can use this motivator by ensuring that discovery and invention are an essential part of everyone's job. Get people to try new tools, experiment with different processes, and invent their own solutions to their team's problems. Granted, this could be harder to achieve for an accountancy firm than for a laboratory group, and some people are by nature more curious than others. Nevertheless, I believe that any organization can become a research center for its own products and services.

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Honor

Honor is about loyalty to a group of people and integrity of one's behaviors according to a moral code or a system of values.

We all have stories of conflicting priorities in our personal lives, where we have to balance values such as honesty and friendship, rationality and kindness, or ambition and tranquility. Self-discipline is often mentioned as a requirement for a person to keep a sense of honor. For example, I never negotiate individual discounts with customers for my services because my sense of fairness says that any discount I offer to one customer should also be offered to others in similar circumstances. Therefore, my honor and self-discipline require me to have rules for discounts or else I feel guilty for not being fair to people.

Can you apply this motivator in your organization? Of course! Develop and grow a clear code of conduct or value system in the organization. This will motivate people who see their own values reflected in the organization's values.

Issue 5 of [Moving Motivators](#)

The CHAMPFROGS Model: Acceptance and Mastery

Acceptance

When I researched the need for acceptance, the main theme I found was people's intrinsic need for self-esteem and a positive self-image. It is something that all of us share. As children, we need it most from our parents; later in life, we need it from our partners and peers.

Interestingly, the need for acceptance is often associated with people who are lacking in their sense of self-worth. It is said that such people are motivated to purposefully avoid conflict and criticism. They fear rejection and will do anything to seek the approval of parents, partners, or peers.

However, we don't need to refer to clinics and self-help groups as the primary examples of organizations that have acceptance of people built into their systems. It is insufficient only to repair people's self-esteem. We can also boost it and strive to have a diverse group of people feeling great about

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themselves, regardless of their background and their physical or mental nature.

Diversity of workers is the key to innovation in organizations. As a manager, you can do more than just be respectful toward minorities. You can ensure that people get hired because they add distinctive qualities to the social system. You can ensure that teams are organized in such a way that diversity in all forms is not merely tolerated as being acceptable, but embraced as being crucial. I can imagine no better way to motivate those who feel the need to be accepted for who they are.

Mastery

Consultancy companies full of specialists come to mind when I think of organizations driven by mastery. But one could also think of law firms, martial arts schools, and other organizations that, in order to survive, depend on growing people's level of competence in certain disciplines.

Mastery is about the challenge behind the work that people do. Some people are perfectly happy with easy tasks that come with good compensation. Others have the need to feel challenged so that they can grow their skills and make progress toward excellence. For example, the pursuit of mastery is the reason that all my projects are time-limited and different from the previous ones. Doing more of the same is just not challenging enough for me.

As a manager, you should make sure that repetitive and boring tasks are stripped from your business model and either automated or handed over to another business where people know how to thrive on that kind of work. You are responsible for offering people work that feels challenging to them but is still within their abilities.

Issue 6 of [Moving Motivators](#)

The CHAMPFROGS Model: Power and Freedom

Power

When I think of power, the first types of organizations that come to mind are political parties, secret service agencies, and government departments. In

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literature, power is often associated with dominance behavior, leadership, and imposing one's will on others.

Personally, I prefer to see power as the need to have influence in the world, which feels like a more positive and enlightened description. Many would agree with me that there is little evidence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama showing dominant behavior and imposing his will on others. And yet, he is considered to be quite an influential figure. Therefore, he has power. Power is about being able to change things around oneself and make a difference in the world.

It is no coincidence that the word power is encapsulated in the word empowerment. As a manager, you can set up the environment in such a way that people feel empowered to take responsibility and become leaders and change agents, without having to ask someone's permission. A stifling hierarchy and bureaucracy will be demotivating for people with a high need for power.

Freedom

Without a doubt, startups and other entrepreneurial organizations are among the best examples for the motivator of freedom. I have always liked running my own businesses, and when I was employed I preferred small organizations. Why? Because they made me feel freer.

Independence and autonomy are well-known motivators for many people. It's just a hunch, but I think introverts are more likely to be motivated by independence than extroverts. (I dare say it is the most important motivator for me!) People who are motivated by freedom usually dislike being dependent on others. They don't want assistance to get things done and would rather do everything themselves. It has happened many times that people offered me help with something, but asking for help rarely even crossed my mind!

Like power, freedom is closely connected to empowerment of workers. In a hierarchical setting, there is an implied dependence of employees upon management in which employees feel they need authorization for just about anything they wish to do. Freedom is also about empowerment in the network. People must feel free in the self-organizing teams in which they are working. When some team members insist that all decisions are made collaboratively

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and that rules are necessary to keep order in the team, those who are motivated by freedom may feel that their environment is suffocating them.

The CHAMPFROGS Model: Relatedness and Order

Relatedness

If freedom is appreciated by introverts, then relatedness is surely one of the main motivators among extroverts. Again, I'm just guessing. But some people thrive on social contacts with other people. They need family or friends to chat, play, and have a good time together.

Do not confuse means and ends when people like hanging out with others. There are those who socialize with peers mainly because of the effect it has on their position in the social network. Such people could be motivated by power or status, not by relatedness. With relatedness, we clearly refer to those who like socializing for the sake of not being alone.

What can you do as a manager to have relatedness motivate your people? My thinking is that social interaction between them happens easily, unless it is somehow blocked by the environment. For example, it's easier for people to socialize in a relaxed, open office space than in a noisy room full of cubicles and corner offices. Likewise, you can take care that the work environment does not stop at the exit, but that there is plenty of opportunity for people to engage beyond the company's office walls. And with remote teams, there are also many options for chat and play. Your challenge is to give workers a good reason not to skip their team hangouts!

Order

All human beings need a sense of order and certainty. This is wired into our brains. There's a reason why managers and leaders often complain about employees resisting change—people mostly like to keep things the way they are.

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In an agile context, with organizations facing accelerated change and more frequent disruption, it is not easy to offer people a sense of certainty. With the average lifetime of companies shrinking every year, nothing is certain for anyone.

So, what can you do to satisfy people's need for order and stability? The solution is in the details. Job security is an illusion, but we can still achieve a bit of certainty in other ways. For example, many people don't like working at a different desk every day, so give them the option to have a preferred desk if they so desire. Many people don't like variable pay, so offer them a monthly income that is stable (even when they are freelancers). Many people dislike not knowing what is expected of them, so make sure you agree on a work profile or job description, preferably that they created themselves. The future of the company might be uncertain, but you can work to decrease the number of unpleasant surprises that people are confronted with every day.

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The CHAMPFROGS Model: Goal and Status

Goal

Many people want more out of their work than just a job or a career. They would like their work to be part of their calling. This nicely coincides with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which says that self-actualization is the fifth and highest level of intrinsic motivation. The first two levels, physiological and safety needs, correspond to having a job, while the third and fourth levels, belonging and esteem, correspond to having a career. An ordinary job or an exciting career may be what people had before they found their calling. (It took me 20 years.)

Not only charity organizations have idealism woven into their raison d'être. Great organizations can (and should) have an inspiring purpose that goes beyond making money and pleasing stockholders, customers, or other stakeholders. If you can't define the why of your company, the rest doesn't really matter.

Motivate your employees by clarifying what the company stands for and what it tries to achieve in the world. People appreciate recognizing that their personal goals are reflected in the work they do. For example, the purpose of

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my company is to help people be happier in their jobs. This motivates my fellow workers because the purpose resonates with their own goals. In some cases, the company's purpose is the reason they joined!

Status

There is a good reason many people want to decorate themselves with awards, titles, badges, brand names, silver linings, and golden medals. It increases their social standing. The pursuit of wealth is in many cases an indicator of someone's desire for status, but there are other ways of earning status, too.

Privilege, recognition, and exclusivity come in many forms. The vertical structure of traditional organizations is an obvious candidate: those at the top decide who else is allowed to climb higher on the corporate ladder. The desire for status leads to long job titles, favored parking spaces and spacious corner offices. But we can find status in social networks as well. Apart from climbing upwards in hierarchies, people also enjoy accumulating connections in networks. I cannot deny checking my Klout score every now and then, just to see how well I'm doing as an influencer compared to my peers.

As a manager, you can nurture people's need for status by offering them opportunities to make progress in the directions that matter to them. But you should aim for company-wide recognition of people's achievements in a fair and transparent way. The social standing of employees should correlate to their capabilities for production and innovation, not their talent at playing office politics games.

Issue 9 of [Moving Motivators](#)

The Moving Motivators Exercise

If you check any organization where people are genuinely happy and engaged, you will find that the work and the organization trigger their intrinsic needs for curiosity, honor, acceptance, mastery, or any of the other motivators. What you will find is that people are engaged because of the work and the people around them.

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And that brings me to the only genuine employee engagement program that I am aware of: figuring out how people in your organization are intrinsically motivated and changing the organization in such a way that people's intrinsic needs are satisfied by the system. You could start by playing the moving motivators game.

The moving motivators game can be played by one person, as a personal reflection tool; by two people, in a one-on-one setting; or even by a team of peers, as part of a retrospective or team-building exercise. I have facilitated the exercise many times with hundreds of people all around the world. The results have always been quite inspiring.

Here is how to play it:

1. Download the free PDF with the 10 motivational cards from the Management 3.0 website (m30.me/motivators)

2. Find someone to do this exercise with: your spouse, your colleague, your best friend, or the pizza delivery guy.

3. Be the first one to start so that you gain trust and set a good example. (The other person starts by being an observer.) Order the cards horizontally. What's most important to you goes on one side; what's least important goes on the other side; the rest end up somewhere in the middle.

4. Now imagine some kind of change or event that would have an impact on your motivation, such as moving to a new home, changing workplaces, getting a job promotion, or extending your family.

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5. Imagine the impact of this change on your 10 motivators. When the impact is positive, move the card up; when the impact is negative, move the card down.

6. While you're moving your cards left and right and up and down, tell the other player what you're doing and why. Just try to think out loud, describing what the words and pictures mean to you and why you're moving them.

7. When you're all done, switch roles. And then, evaluate!

For example, I consider freedom, status, and curiosity to be my most important motivators, while I find acceptance and relatedness the least important. When I quit my day job a number of years ago, my freedom and curiosity motivators (important for me) went up, because I became independent and was able to explore a new work life. My relatedness motivator (less important) went down, on the other hand, because I left many nice colleagues behind. Still, the net effect was positive overall. It was a good decision.

A few tips

There is no right or wrong in this exercise. Everyone is wired differently. Some people are motivated by freedom, others by relatedness. The beauty of the game is that it reveals these differences and makes people aware that we often misjudge each other by assuming that everyone is just like us. (I have assumed many times in my life that freedom is as important for other people as it is for me. I have learned that I was wrong.)

There is often some disagreement about terminology, and that's OK. Even the scientists don't agree with each other. The meaning of power and status for me can be slightly different from your interpretation of those words. What is

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more important is that the cards help us explain how we feel and what we need.

Manage the system, not the people

The moving motivators game makes it a lot easier to ask the question, "What motivates you?" For many people, this question is too vague and abstract to answer. But when they have 10 cards on a table, with nice pictures on them, and they are asked to move them around spatially, left to right and up and down, a discussion about motivation suddenly becomes a lot easier.

As managers, we ask people what motivates them because we want to answer the question, "What's in it for them?" The goal of the organization is to engage people for productivity. We seek proof that this is indeed happening. And if we can't find any evidence, we have work to do.

Considering that engagement of people should be a built-in property of the organization, you now understand why employee engagement programs oftentimes don't work.

Almost all employee engagement programs focus on specific activities undertaken by managers or consultants to directly "motivate" people, using team-building exercises, outdoor activities, charity contributions, or games and parties. But no amount of motivational activities can hide that the system itself is not engaging. And hiring a motivational speaker is not going to make a difference either. It would be the equivalent of hiring a clown at a funeral to do something about all those sad faces.

It is the goal of a firm to motivate people to be productive together. Therefore, motivation is a systemic property of the firm. Sadly, in many organizations, workers are motivated only by their financial compensation, but there is no real engagement with the work and the people because other intrinsic motivational properties are missing.

Managers must seek ways for curiosity, honor, acceptance, or any of the other intrinsic motivators to become systemic properties of the firm. That means, even when you're not paying attention to the system for a while, the system's properties are still affecting the engagement and behavior of

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workers. The proverbial carrots and sticks (incentives and punishments) don't fall into that category. They may work for you, but they require your continuous attention to have them be effective. And before you know it, the business fails to work without them.

Engagement of people should be woven into the fabric of the organization in a systemic way. This means you shouldn't waste your time trying to motivate individuals. If you do, you're operating in failure mode. You won't be able to keep that up indefinitely. Use your time to understand why the system, the organization itself, is not engaging them. That means, even with the simplest, most mundane kinds of jobs, organize the system in such a way that people find some of their 10 intrinsic motivators satisfied. Manage the system, not the people.