Motivating Your Employees in a Time of Change

Checklist 068

Introduction

In today’s constantly changing and competitive environment, it is vitally important for organisations to engage and motivate their employees. Those who are motivated and engaged use their talents and abilities to the full and make the best contribution they can to the work of the organisation. Failure to do this can result in a loss of competitiveness and profits.

In spite of the many theories and practical examples available to draw on, motivation is still often viewed as a difficult matter to handle. Financial rewards are often perceived as a generic cure to motivation, but this fails to take account of the fact that different individuals are motivated by different things and in different ways. The reality is that monetary rewards work very well for tasks that are specific and measurable, but are less successful when creativity and the ability to ‘think outside the box’ are required. Indeed, at times this approach can even be counter-productive.

Maintaining motivation is particularly important and challenging during times of rapid change and economic uncertainty. At such times morale can sink dramatically due to the insecurity that change can bring, particularly at times of organisational restructuring or downsizing. In addition, it may be difficult to motivate some employees if they are on short term contracts, or working as temps. This checklist is designed to help managers to engage, motivate and develop employees more effectively in the context of change.

Definition

Motivation is the creation of incentives and working environments that enable people to perform to the best of their ability. The aim of motivation is to engage people with the work they are doing, in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for individuals and the organisation as a whole.

Action checklist

1. Find out more about motivational practice and theory

To gain ideas on motivating people, you could begin by looking at examples of good practice from other companies. You might identify these via the media, by hearsay, or by reading management articles.

Classic theories of motivation include Herzberg’s hygiene theory, McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y, Ouchi’s Theory Z which he argued achieves a balance between theories X and Y, and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. These are all still popular, although they date back some years. They differ in nature but they all see change and motivation as a process. Contemporary thinking in this field includes the MacLeod and Clarke report ‘Engaging for success’. Looking at theories and real-life examples should stimulate your thoughts, and give you some ‘starter’ ideas on how to motivate your own people.

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2. What motivates you?

Think about the factors in your working life that have been important to you. What has motivated you or demotivated you in the past? What motivates your family and friends? Money can be a strong motivator for some. But everyone is different, and for many others, powerful motivators may include real responsibility, positive support when things go wrong, a need for meaning, status or influence, a sense of belonging, self-development, and working for an organisation whose work they consider valuable or important. Bear in mind that different cultures have different views of motivation and that culture plays an important role in understanding what motivates people.

Understand the differences between real, longer-term motivators and shorter-term spurs such as a new PC or improved canteen facilities.

3. Find out what people want most from their jobs.

People may want more status, more pay, better working conditions, and a choice of fringe benefits. But find out what their main motives are by asking what they want most from themselves and from the job. You might do this in performance appraisals; by using employee surveys; or through informal discussions. Answers people give may include:

- more interesting work
- to work for effective bosses
- to see the end result of their work
- more participation

- greater recognition
- more involvement and challenge
- more opportunities for development
- more responsibility and empowerment.

Remember that clear two-way communication is essential during times of change to ensure employees remain motivated. Find out what motivates each individual and set about addressing it.

4. Walk the job

Every day, find someone doing something well and tell them they are doing so. Make sure your interest is genuine, but don't go overboard or appear to watch over people's shoulders. If you have ideas about work improvements, don't shout them out. Instead, help job-holders to find their own ways to improve their work. You don't need to be able do everything better than your team - in fact the contrary is likely to be the case. But set a good example, and make it clear what levels of support you will give to others. The visibility and trust of senior managers is vital, especially in times of change.

5. Remove de-motivators

Identify factors that de-motivate staff. These may be psychological (boredom, unfairness, barriers to promotion, lack of confidence in the company or senior management); or they may be physical (buildings, equipment, noise levels). Some factors can be dealt with easily, while others will require more planning and time to work through. Demonstrating your concern to find out what is wrong, and do something about it, should in itself help to boost general morale. Refrain from keeping people in the dark about what is happening as this can instantly de-motivate employees who will feel insecure or unprepared for the changes afoot. It is also important to recognise and manage any individuals who are exercising a negative influence over other team members.

6. Demonstrate support

Your working culture may be a demanding one where errors are not tolerated or a more tolerant one where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, or pointers for development. Either way, people need to know what kind and levels of support they can expect from you. Is there any flexibility around the existing rules and procedures? Is it acceptable for them to use their initiative at times when circumstances indicate a need to adapt the rules? Management support is a hurdle at which motivational practice, and the relationships built around it, can falter. Empower people but be clear in setting boundaries that people can work within, and be sure that they have your full support for as long as they operate within the limits set.
7. **Be wary of using only cash incentives**

A fair and robust reward system is of core importance in developing a committed workforce, but research surveys suggest that money is often quite low down the list of motivators. Fringe benefits can be effective in attracting new employees, but rarely motivate them to use their potential more effectively. A manager’s skill in supporting, guiding and relating to members of his or her team, however, is repeatedly found to be a central factor in employee engagement.

8. **Decide on action**

Having talked with and listened to people, take steps to change existing policies and attitudes in line with your investigatory findings and introduce new ideas on how to improve motivation and morale. Your plans may include new policies on internal promotion, more flexible working hours, increased empowerment, and employee involvement and participation. You may also consider non-monetary incentives, such as recognition or award schemes, vouchers, paid time to serve the local community, discounted goods, or tickets to the theatre or other events. A selection (or flexible variation) of fringe incentives that could be used might include training and development, healthcare benefits, childcare assistance, low-interest loans, help with travel or transport, sabbaticals, or special leave concessions, like study leave. Ask people what they would appreciate in order to identify the most effective means of encouraging motivation and engagement. Whatever policies you consider it is imperative to ensure that you consult fully with employees and trade unions about them.

For junior or even middle managers, the implementation of such policies may be beyond your remit. In such cases learn how to influence your senior management to make policy changes.

9. **Manage change**

To implement the new policies successfully, good communications will be vital. Many people have an instinctive resistance to changes that are imposed upon them by others, so encourage employees to be involved in, and contribute to, the planned changes and their implementation. Most of the time resistance to change is due to the fact that people don’t understand the reasons for it so address this issue. Communicate as much as you can and as often as possible about what is going on and why. Seek people’s input at different stages as new policies are set up, and adapt or change the policies in line with feedback people give. Ensure that everyone is able to air their feelings and opinions honestly, so that any widespread problems or issues are immediately clear.

Try to focus on reaching agreement, seeking where possible, to win people’s involvement and ownership. Also, provide timely information and give employees the opportunity to say how change should be managed.

10. **Provide feedback**

Feedback is a valuable part of the motivation cycle, so let employees know how their development, progress and accomplishments are shaping up. Offer thoughtful comments, and discuss their next steps or future targets. Organisational performance is ultimately driven by the engagement of individuals, so appraisal and development management provide ideal opportunities to develop motivational skills. Invite opportunities to give feedback on a reasonably frequent basis, reinforcing the organisation’s strategy and culture. Remember that, as a manager, you are the key motivating or de-motivating factor for people in your team; the team atmosphere you create and the relationships you build will be a main route to earning people’s discretionary effort and co-operation. Providing feedback and seeking employees’ opinions are important for keeping them motivated and engaged.

**Managers should avoid:**

- making assumptions about what drives others
- poor communication
- forcing people into things that (you think) will be ‘good for them’
- forgetting about the need for inspiration and excitement in the workplace.
National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance to the following standards:
B: Providing direction, units 5, 6, 7, 9
C: Facilitating change, units 1, 2, 3, 4
D: Working with people, units 5, 6

Additional resources

Books

The progress principle: using small wins to ignite joy, engagement and creativity at work, Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer

Manager’s guide to motivating employees, 2nd ed., Anne Bruce

Drive: the surprising truth about what motivates us, Daniel H Pink

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI’s management library. More information at: www.managers.org.uk/library

Related checklists

Employee engagement (245)

Related thinkers

Frederick Hertzberg – the hygiene-motivation theory (01)
Abraham Maslow – the hierarchy of needs (09)
Douglas McGregor – theory X and theory Y (026)

Related models

Forcefield Analysis
Herzberg’s two-factor theory of motivation
McGregor’s theory X and theory Y
Maslow’s hierarchy of needs
Vroom’s expectancy theory

This is one of many checklists available to all CMI members. For more information please contact

t: 01536 204222   e: enquiries@managers.org.uk   w: www.managers.org.uk

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