Motivation: How to Increase Project Team Performance

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ABSTRACT

Stimulating team member performance requires a project manager to harness many different interpersonal skills. The level of enthusiasm applied toward project efforts has a direct impact on the project results. Because motivation can inspire, encourage, and stimulate individuals to achieve common goals through team-work, it is in the project manager's best interest to drive toward project success through the creation and maintenance of a motivating environment for all members of the team.

INTRODUCTION

Motivation can inspire, encourage, and stimulate individuals and project teams to achieve great accomplishments. Motivation can also create an environment that fosters teamwork and collective initiatives to reach common goals or objectives. The level of motivation an individual and/or team applies to project efforts can affect all aspects of project results, including a direct impact to the triple constraint project success factors (i.e., on time, within budget, high quality, met scope/customer expectations). Knowing this, it is in the project manager's best interest to understand the reason for demotivation in order to achieve project success through the creation and maintenance of a motivating environment for all members of the team.

The book *Essentials of Supervision* defines management as "achieving results through others" (Simpson, Gould, Hardy, & Lindahl, 1991, p. 5). Stimulating team member performance requires a project manager to harness many different interpersonal skills, including good communication and the ability to train others, make decisions, lead by example, and create a positive, motivational environment by understanding and associating with the key components of motivation. Unlike most tangible project management functions, motivation is not designated by the project manager to a team member; instead, motivation is internal to each team member and derived from a team member's desire to achieve a goal, accomplish a task, or work toward expectations. Motivation can be considered the conduit of ambition applied to the desired accomplishment. Just as some teams are stimulated to achieve great success throughout all project efforts and assignments, other project teams may remain uninspired and shuffle meekly, quietly, and unpretentiously toward project completion. With this in mind, there are two opposing questions that have often been raised when reviewing drivers and motivators of individual and team performance. These resounding questions are "Can a project manager motivate others to perform?" or is it more accurate to ask "How does the project man-ager create an environment conducive to outstanding team synergy and peak individual performance?" (Scholtes, 1998). The subsequent research provides the answer to these questions as well as a further exploration of motivational approaches a project manager can apply to the project team

environment.

Motivational Theories
McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y
McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y motivational approach identifies polar differences in subordinates. Theory X team members are classified as individuals who require constant attention, do not want to work, need punishment to achieve desired effort, and avoid added responsibilities. In contrast, Theory Y individuals are classified as team members who want to work, find the job satisfying, are willing to participate, do not require a controlling environment, and seek constant improvement or opportunity (Kerzner, 2003, pp. 194–195). An additional suggestion for managers who implement the use of Theory X and Theory Y is that they must apply flexibility when assigning an individual to one of these two categories as each person has the potential to change mannerisms, work habits, and enthusiasm toward work throughout years of service, within each project, and for various positions, assignments, or responsibilities.

• *Roles and Responsibilities*—A project manager using a Theory X motivational approach will naturally create an authoritative and controlling work environment. Within the project man-ager role of a Theory X environment, the project manager will dictate decisions. The role assumed by project team members within a Theory X environment is to evade added responsibility and do as minimal amount of work as possible to achieve the project goals without punishment. On the other hand, Theory Y motivation naturally creates a participative environment with strong manager-employee relations. Within the project manager role of a Theory Y environment, the project manager will seek input and assistance from the project team to obtain the best possible alternative for project implementation. The camaraderie exhibited between the project manager and the project team is one of teamwork, agreed-upon separation of duties and responsibilities that will collectively be achieved through the competence of the individual team members involved as well as the desire for the team to ultimately obtain project success (Kerzner, 2003, pp. 194–195).

• *Advantages*—Theory X and Y identifies a gap commonly found between different types of individuals within the workplace. Based on the differences, a distinctive motivational approach may be applied to achieve the desired results. For example, a new employee with minimal exposure may commonly fall within the Theory X category as the team member may not initially understand project tasks, may feel overwhelmed with current efforts (thereby avoiding further responsibility), and may need guidance through-out assigned work efforts. These new employees may also require clear forms of punishment for nonperformance. Having the project manager provide individualized attention to the Theory X team member will ensure the team member stays "on-task" and progresses according to plan. On the other hand, an experienced individual may naturally fit into the Theory Y category as the team member may understand both expectations and consequences, have a desire to learn and grow, and generally find work fascinating and enjoyable. Having the project manager provide an environment that allows the

Theory Y team member to be challenged, grow, participate, and take ownership for project responsibilities, will allow the project team member to stay motivated and achieve project goals or objectives.

- *Disadvantages*—Knowing that a man-ager may have a collection of both Theory X and Theory Y individuals on the project team, leadership and decision-making efforts may become more difficult. For instance, Theory X team members require more of an authoritative environment neatly controlled by the project manager. However, an authoritative environment will be demotivating to the Theory Y team members as there is minimal need for such a degree of control. For Theory Y team members, a participative environment is more conducive for motivation, thereby requiring a project manager to implement a balanced leadership style to accommodate all types of team members (Kerzner, 2003, p. 195).

Herzberg's KITA Motivation

Herzberg's KITA motivation, or "kick-in-the-pants" approach, is based on the idea that both positive and negative external motivators exist. KITA is built on the idea that the manager requires the use of "carrots" (positive KITA) or "sticks" (negative KITA) to drive task completion. Often, the positive KITA inspires a competitive work environment that creates both winners and losers (Scholtes, 1998, pp. 38–39). An alternative suggestion to KITA implementation may be to create a collective competition where the teamwork drives the achievement of project goals, objectives, and team success.

- *Roles and Responsibilities*—As mentioned, KITA motivation naturally creates a parent-child relationship between the manager and team members (respectively). Within the parent role, the manager applies both the responsibilities of encouragement and regulation. At times, the manager will personally assist with the team member's success to support the project efforts. While at other times, the manager will consider the need to control the situation as the team members are viewed as undependable and inept. For the role of the team member, KITA motivation stirs both productive and malevolent attitudes. The team member may exhibit constructive tendencies while competing for the "carrots." In some situations, team members may lean toward spiteful acts as a result of a low-trust, low-respect environment (Scholtes, 1998, p. 41).

- *Advantages*—The KITA motivational approach allows the project manager to define the degree of control implemented within the project for adherence to project requirements and consistency with project methodology and efforts (negative KITA). The manager is also given flexibility to be the team champion. The team members are given the opportunity to obtain special recognition for personal goals and project achievement (positive KITA). The drive toward goal achievement produces important project or task completion.

Disadvantages—The atmosphere that is created through this parent-child.

Power Motivation

McClelland's power motivation is driven by the ability to dominate and manipulate goals, direction, or decisions. Individuals who are motivated by

power are drawn toward the ability to offer input and access into a variety of situations from risk review and competition to a general need for appreciation or personal acknowledgment. Motivation through power will naturally steer an individual toward leadership opportunities (Rad & Levin, 2003, pp, 82–83). Most individuals driven by power will gravitate toward positions that include a level of control. Common "power" roles may be management, group leader (technical, business, etc.), men-tor, or even process owner.

• *Roles and Responsibilities*—As previously mentioned, an individual who is motivated by power will naturally fill a leadership role within the project team. Individuals drawn toward power can be given ownership of broad tasks to drive toward collective team agreements, overcome inherent risks, and adhere to specific project objectives. Again, the project manager may want to place the power-driven individual in a role that would capitalize on the individual's natural motivational tendencies yet be mindful of the need to manage conflict and ensure suggestions provided comply with project needs while offering personal visibility (Rad & Levin, 2003, p. 82). After assigning efforts to "power"-driven individuals, constant balance between appropriate levels of control and consistency with project direction are required to avoid rework, added costs, and conflicts.

• *Advantages*—A project manager has the ability to rely on the natural leadership tendencies of individuals who are motivated by power. The project manager can exude confidence in and seek assistance from power-driven individuals by assigning tasks to focus on reviewing alternatives, overcoming risks, and steering other team members toward common project-consistent objectives. Training of others, compliance with project objectives, and cultivating agreements are additional strengths of power-driven individuals (Rad & Levin, 2003, pp. 82–83). An individual motivated by power is self-driven and tends not to require a great deal of prodding for performance. These individuals will likely rise to challenges presented in order to apply additional control and influence in those areas surrounding them.

• *Disadvantages*—An alternative view of individuals who possess a strong desire for power includes the need to dominate, control, or have influence in all aspects of the project. Authority struggles may result between power-driven team members and the project manager, resulting in the need for the project manager to champion the power-driven team members through the assignment of specific tasks, ownership, or control. The project manager may also experience a higher degree of conflict with power-driven team members based on the need for power, a desire to persuade others, a skewed interpretation of project efforts (i.e., personal agendas), and an essential need for recognition (Rad & Levin, 2003, pp. 83–84). Knowing that power-driven

individuals tend to influence directions, it is important for the project manager to offer clear lines of control or decision-making capability, as well as an assurance that consistency of direction is followed. Without these key steps, the project manager may need to spend additional time to refocus individuals on the proper inputs, alternatives, considerations, and/or decisions that are in alignment with the project direction.

MBTI Personal Style

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) provides an ability to identify personal style based upon responses to a series of questions that collectively determine preferences and motivation tactics of each individual (Flannes & Levin, 2005, p. 43). MBTI provides a review of four common traits: (1) need for personal contact with others, (2) application of realism, (3) ability to apply logic, and (4) influences of judgment (Flannes & Levin, 2005). A combination of these four attributes helps to define an individual's personality type. Knowing this information provides the project manager with the most motivating communication approach, task direction, and level of detailed project information that will stimulate each individual, thereby creating a functional working relationship or environment.

• *Advantages*—A clear advantage to the MBTI is the unique guide to team member motivation and preference that is made available. As a project manager, it is far easier to shape communication and interaction with each individual based upon his or her known personality style than it is to guess at what approaches work best. Because there is a percentage of preference applied to each of the four common traits, there is a delineation of primary and secondary personality preferences.

• *Disadvantages*—Not everyone is interested in taking an MBTI personality assessment. Without this information, the project manager would be guessing as to which personality style or preference the individual would fall into. Also, because the MBTI can be environmental- or situational-based, if the individual taking the MBTI assessment is not applying the questions to the work environment, the results may not be fruitful. Also, throughout the course of a lifetime, an individual's MBTI tendencies can change, thereby resulting in the need to change the motivation methods.

Motivational Mistakes

As a project manager, you are exposed to a wide variety of personalities, different levels of expertise, and ranges of positional seniority along with unique backgrounds, cultures, and personal experiences of each team member. In addition, with today's global business environment, it is extremely common for a team to be virtual. Merely beginning any project may be over-whelming to a project manager, outside of the diverse motivational needs presented by each team member involved in the project. Some project managers rely on existing work relationships that have gradually developed through hall-way conversation and face-to-face contact that offers a project manager the opportunity to understand a variety of individuals' drives and reward preferences. With limited involvement and minimal personal exposure with virtual

team members, a project manager may begin to generalize or make assumptions on the needs and directions of the virtual team. Unfortunately, a project manager may easily become trapped by introducing errors when preparing an inspiring project team environment. Too often, project managers may begin project efforts with intent to offer a stimulating environment; however, they may fall short by implementing common motivational mistakes. These common management mistakes as well as possible strategies to over-come the motivational gaps are explored next (Flannes & Levin, 2005).

"Whatever motivates me will motivate others."

• *Impact*—At times, a project manager's initial perception may be that every-one would be motivated just like he or she is. A common result of this mistake is a disappointment in team members who do not react to the stimulation provided.

• *Resolution*—Begin to identify the differences in others by initially providing a more personalized approach to motivation.

"People are motivated primarily by money."

• *Impact*—Often, project managers have limited input on and availability to monetary rewards. Unfortunately, project managers often feel restrictive by this limitation.

Resolution—Begin by focusing motivational tactics beyond monetary rewards. Consider offering input into team member performance for those individuals who do control monetary rewards for your project team members.

"Team members love to receive formal awards."

• *Impact*—Though "praise in public, punish in private" is a common phrase within the management arena, a project manager must be very mindful of the fact that not everyone will desire a formal reward for completed efforts. The main concern is to avoid any negative response from the recognition offered either by the individual receiving the recognition, fellow team members, or other project teams.

• *Resolution*—If a formal award is deserved, be sure the team member would accept this form of recognition in advance. A wider acceptance of public awards may be gained through an entire "team" recognition for celebrations or accomplishments reached together, thereby avoiding the display of high regard for one team member. Influence a broader application of public recognition that could be applied or expressed by fellow project managers
for their project team efforts.

"Give them a rally slogan."

• *Impact*—The main premise of using a slogan is to provide a common theme the entire team can support to create some level of unity, resulting in greater motivation. However, the use of a slogan may provide only marginal benefit.

• *Resolution*—Consider using slogans
as part of an environmental focus rather than as a project focus. Again, individualization is the key.

"The best project leader is a strong cheerleader."

• *Impact*—Hype, positive attitude, generous support, and plenty of smiles. Though this can offer an encouraging environment, the consistent upbeat approach may not always be applicable to the project situations experienced, may become annoying to others, or may merely result in only a marginal impact *Resolution*—Look at project management as a mentoring opportunity. Work with team members through situations by applying clarifications and understandings to provide a good learning opportunity of what to continue to do in the future and what to change. When things go well, look for the strong foundation, steps, effort, and application of knowledge/experience that was applied and resulted in

the accomplishment. When things do not go as planned, look for the components that resulted in failure to seek out the learning opportunity in a desire to improve similar situations within the future.

"These people are professionals. They don't need motivating."

• *Impact*—Many project managers look at their team as a group of professionals who are educated and have some level of work experience. By not considering the importance of team motivation, the project manager may merely be trusting in assuming that the team requires minimal supervision or support. However, not every-one is a "self-starter" or driven, and many individuals work better when motivated to reach a goal and/or reward.

• *Resolution*—Treat the project team members as professionals, yet foster a motivating environment through those tools or rewards you have within your authority as a project manager.

"I'll motivate them when there is a problem."

• *Impact*—Waiting for a problem to arise may be too late for some team members and will likely result in the application of vast changes in order to create a motivating environment. Overall, this approach to motivation is a very detached managerial style.

• *Resolution*—Knowing that project management employs leadership as a key skill and leadership requires involvement, guidance, and support. Do not wait for a problem to occur prior to motivating your team. Instead, remain focused on the team

Developing Team Culture

There is a variety of components that will help foster a positive team culture resulting in high team performance and team success. The implementation of the following directives will assist with overcoming the barriers to establishing a high-performance team.

• **Team Charter**—The preparation of a team charter will assist in defining individual and stakeholder roles. This document will clear up any ambiguity existing with the project needs, focus, objectives, common procedures, deliverables, and success criteria, allowing the project team to understand the common goals, objectives, and division of responsibilities (Rad &

Levin, 2003). Refer to Appendix C for an example template available for team use.

- **Team Processes**—Define common team processes that will be used to accomplish project requirements, define standards, and clarify performance expectations. Ensure process documentation is available for all relevant identified processes within the organization, department, and project team. Provide identification of how performance will be validated and tracked for performance measurement/metrics purposes. Offer mentoring between project team members to allow all to be knowledgeable of the process (SEI_CMU, 2007).

- **Develop a Motivational Environment Built Upon the Unique Team Member Needs**—As the project manager, take the time to understand the differences and uniqueness with each team member. Personalize motivational strategies according to individual needs, desires, and goals.
- **Reward the Team and the Team Members**—Personalize rewards according to individual motivators and accomplishments achieved while celebrating team success. A good source of reward options can be found within *1001 Ways to Reward Employees* (Nelson, 1994).
- **Foster Trust, Teamwork, and Open Communication**—Promote open communication and dialogue standards among team members through team meetings and general project communication. Allow all to provide input into project conversations. Require the team to respect each other. Accept all constructive comments made. Promote a participative leadership style that provides greater ownership of project tasks and decision-making authority (within defined guidelines). Engage in team building and team celebration activities.

- **Recognize Team Member Strengths**—
Assign project tasks and roles according to individual strengths, knowledge, motivation, and development strategies. These approaches can assist in individual and/or team empowerment.
- **Develop a Mature Team**—After obtaining high team performance through the implementation of clearly defined standards, consistent, well-understood processes, team involvement from initial project planning efforts, and a motivational environment, the project team will have the possibility to focus on implementing process improvements to streamline, expand, and/or simplify tasks, responsibilities, processes, and/or project approach (Caltech, 2007).

- **Promote Project Success**—Continue to identify successes the team has accomplished (no matter the size). Be consistent with this team recognition to help the team feel accomplished and experience achievement no matter what the stage of project life-cycle development (Flannes & Levin, 2005).

Conclusion

Throughout the study and application of motivation, the project manager must understand the importance of individuality. To foster motivation with-in each team member on a project, the project manager must take the time to understand how every individual is motivated. Knowing what motivates each team member will provide the project manager the ability to connect

team members to environments, assignments, responsibilities, and objectives that foster personal motivation. In other words, the project manager should avoid applying a broad application of motivation to all team members based solely on the manager's perception. Taking the time to work with each team member to understand personal work drivers will allow the project manager .

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