Motivating Personnel
Techniques to Secure the Best Results

LEE TOM PERRY
Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior
School of Management
Purdue University

INTRODUCTION

I intend this presentation to be practical. What you are here for, after all, is to learn techniques to apply to the work you do, hopefully, so you can improve it. Nevertheless, I want to begin by providing you with an organizing framework that is theoretically based but written in plain English. The purpose of this framework is to educate you about the several approaches that can be taken to motivate persons with whom you work. The framework is based upon three levers of motivation. Personnel can be motivated by:

1. Changing the content of the work to make it more meaningful.
2. Setting moderately challenging (realistic) goals that when reached provide a sense of accomplishment.
3. Offering desirable rewards (which can be given or withheld) for desired performance.

Using any one of these levers will increase the level of motivation of your personnel. Many managers, of course, use at least one of these levers. What should be remembered, and, indeed, what I would like to emphasize today, is that there is a potential to use all three levers. In other words, a complete program for motivating personnel would integrate techniques based upon each of the three levers.

Given this organizing framework let us examine specific techniques that relate to these three levers.

Changing the Content of the Work to Make it More Meaningful

There is a great deal written in my field—organizational behavior—about designing jobs to make them more meaningful. Speaking to you today I feel at a slight disadvantage because I am unfamiliar with the specific natures of the jobs you do. For this reason, to illustrate principles I will use examples related to jobs with which I am familiar that may or may not resemble your jobs. This requires you to filter out what is and what is not applicable. The principles I will discuss, however, are sufficiently general to be applicable to a wide variety of jobs.
Changing the content of work to make it more meaningful involves improving five core job characteristics (Hackman, 1976):

1. **Skill variety** - the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities that involve the use of a number of different skills and talents.

2. **Task identity** - the degree to which the job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work—that is, doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome.

3. **Task significance** - the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, whether in the immediate organization or in the external environment.

4. **Autonomy** - the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out.

5. **Feedback** - the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his performance.

To improve these five core job characteristics, five different techniques can be used (Hackman, 1976).

- Combining tasks
- Forming natural work units
- Establishing client relationships
- Vertical loading
- Opening feedback channels

**Combining Tasks**

In the past it was the conventional wisdom that fractionalizing jobs improved efficiency. At the same time, however, fractionalized work was unfulfilling and, therefore, led to such hidden costs as high absenteeism and turnover. The principle of combining tasks is based on the assumption that such costs often can be reduced by taking existing and fractionalized tasks and putting them back together again to form a new and larger module of work. At the Medfield, Massachusetts plant of Corning Glass Works, for example, the job of assembling laboratory hot plates was redesigned by combining a number of tasks that had been separate. After the change, each hot plate was assembled from start to finish by one operator, instead of going through several separate operations performed by different people.

Combining tasks contributes in two ways to the experienced meaningfulness of the work. First, **task identity** is increased. The hot plate assembler, for example, can see and identify with a finished product ready for shipment, rather than with a nearly invisible junction of solder. Second, as more tasks are combined into a single worker's job, the individual must use a **greater variety of skills** in performing the job, further increasing the meaningfulness of the work.
Forming Natural Work Units

A critical step in the design of any job is the decision about how the work is to be distributed among the people who do it. Numerous considerations affect that decision, such as technological constraints, level of worker training and experience, efficiency from an individual or systems engineering perspective, and equity of individual work loads. Work designed on the basis of these factors usually is distributed among employees rationally and logically. The problem is that the logic used often does not include the needs of employees for personally meaningful work.

For example, consider a typing pool consisting of one supervisor and ten typists who do all the typing for one division of an organization. Jobs are delivered in rough draft or dictated form to the supervisor, who distributes them as evenly as possible among the typists. Under such circumstances the individual letters, reports, and other tasks performed by a given typist in one day or week are randomly assigned. There is no basis for identifying with the work or with the person or department for whom it is performed, or for placing any personal value on it.

By contrast, creating natural units of work increases employee “ownership” of the work and improves the chances that employees will view their work as meaningful and important rather than irrelevant and boring. In creating natural units of work, one must first identify the basic work items. In the typing pool example, that might be “pages to be typed.” Then these items are grouped into natural and meaningful categories. For example, each typist might be assigned continuing responsibility for all work requested by a single department or by several smaller departments. Instead of typing one section of a large report, the individual will type the entire piece of work, with knowledge of exactly what the total outcome of the work is. Furthermore, over time the typist will develop a growing sense of how the work affects co-workers or customers who receive the completed product. Thus, forming natural units of work increases two of the core job dimensions that contribute to experienced meaningfulness—task identity and task significance.

Establishing Client Relationships

Creating client relationships can be viewed as a three-step process:

1. Identifying who the client actually is.
2. Establishing the most direct contact possible between the worker and the client.
3. Establishing criteria and procedures so that the client can judge the quality of the product or service received and relay his judgements directly to the worker.

By establishing direct relationships between workers and their clients,
jobs often can be improved in three ways. First, *feedback* increases because additional opportunities are created for the employees to receive direct praise or criticism for their work. Second, *skill variety* may increase, because of the need to develop and exercise one’s interpersonal skills in managing and maintaining the relationship with the client. Finally, *autonomy* will increase to the degree that individuals are given real personal responsibility for deciding how to manage their relationships with the people who receive the outputs of their work.

**Vertical Loading**

In vertical loading, the intent is to partially close the gap between the “doing” and the “controlling” aspects of the job. Among ways this might be achieved are the following:

1. Giving workers responsibility for deciding on work methods and for advising or helping to train less experienced workers.
2. Providing increased freedom in time management, including decisions about when to start and stop work, when to take breaks, and how to assign work priorities.
3. Encouraging workers to do their own troubleshooting and to manage work crises, rather than calling immediately for a supervisor.
4. Providing workers with increased knowledge of financial aspects of the job and the organization, and increased control over budgetary matters that affect their work.

Vertical loading a job increases a worker’s sense of autonomy.

**Opening Feedback Channels**

Job-provided feedback is more immediate and private than supervisor-supplied feedback, and it increases workers’ feelings of personal control over their work. Moreover, it avoids many of the potentially disruptive interpersonal problems that can develop when a worker can find out how well he is doing only from direct messages or subtle cues from the boss. A few ways by which job-provided feedback can be provided are:

1. Placing more quality control functions in the hands of workers to increase the quantity and quality of information available to them about their performance.
2. Providing standard summaries of performance records to workers.
3. Computer and other automated machines sometimes can be used to provide individuals with immediate feedback in the form of a CRT display or a printout indicating that an error has been made.

The techniques for redesigning jobs described thus far obviously are not exhaustive. Nonetheless, they do provide a beginning point for increasing the meaningfulness of your employees’ jobs.
Now, let us turn to the second motivational lever—setting moderately challenging goals that when reached provide a sense of accomplishment.

SETTING MODERATELY CHALLENGING GOALS THAT WHEN REACHED PROVIDE A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

In all of us there is a desire to accomplish or achieve something meaningful. We experience a warm glow, a sense of achievement, a rush of positive self-concept when we reach objectives we have set. Our desires to experience this sense of accomplishment motivate us to perform. Goal-setting is based upon this characteristic inherent to all of us.

For an effective goal-setting program, the following factors positively effect employee motivation and behavior (Latham and Yukl, 1979):

1. Setting specific individual goals has superior effects on performance improvement than does less specific goal setting, such as “do the best you can.”
2. Individual goals that are perceived to be challenging, but attainable, tend to lead to better performance than do easy goals, so long as the goals are accepted by the employee.
3. Using frequent performance feedback sessions along with goal setting efforts results in a tendency for individuals to perform at higher levels than when performance feedback sessions are not used.
4. Participative goal-setting between the manager and subordinates is superior in terms of performance improvement to the use of assigned goals.

The Goal Attainment Scaling Technique (see Table 1) attempts to integrate the above factors for an effective goal-setting program. According to this technique, a superior and subordinate would jointly discuss performance goals. The subordinate would be asked to identify three or four goals he or she believes to be important to the effective
TABLE 1

GOAL ATTAINMENT FOLLOW-UP GUIDE

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<th>Levels of Predicted Attainment</th>
<th>Scale Headings and Scale Weights</th>
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<td>Scale 1</td>
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Performance of his or her job. These goals would become Scales 1, 2, 3, etc. Each of the goals are weighted in terms of their relative importance. Then the superior and subordinate would jointly decide both the most unfavorable and most favorable outcomes thought to be likely as well as the expected level of success for each of the goals. Other levels of predicted attainment could be added as needed. After the Goal Attainment Scales have been completed the form becomes a follow-up guide. The subordinate's performance is compared to the levels of predicted attainment for each goal and evaluated as good, fair or poor. Thus, he or she receives performance feedback.

Now, let us discuss the final motivation lever: offering desirable rewards for desired performance.

OFFERING DESIRABLE REWARDS FOR DESIRED PERFORMANCE

Extrinsic rewards can be effective motivators, but at the same time they are the highest priced motivators. Moreover, the expectation of employees for extrinsic rewards tends to spiral higher and higher. For this reason, their's is a qualified usefulness.

Generally, the following conditions contribute to extrinsic rewards motivating performance (Lawler, 1975):

1. Important (as perceived by the employee) rewards can be given.
2. Rewards can be varied widely and in accordance with the employee's current performance.
3. Meaningful performance appraisal sessions can take place between superiors and subordinates.
4. Performance can be objectively and inclusively measured.
5. Information can be made public about how rewards are given.
6. Trust is high.
7. Superiors are willing and able to explain and support the reward system in discussions with their subordinates.
8. The plan does not cause negative outcomes to be tied to performance.

A rule of thumb to use in developing an effective reward system is to tie rewards as closely as possible to performance. If the desire is to emphasize the motivation of individual employees then rewards should be linked to individual performance. If, however, greater cooperation is desired then rewards should be tied to group or organizational performance.

Moreover, in the development of any reward system it is tremendously important that employees participate in its design. Otherwise, the intentions of management can be misinterpreted making the reactions of employees largely unpredictable.

CONCLUSION
I have shared a great deal of information with you today. Too much information I would suspect to be internalized in one lump sum. What I would hope you would remember is only that there are three motivational levers:
1. Meaningful work
2. Goals
3. Extrinsic rewards

Using all three levers is my most fundamental prescription. The rest of the information—the techniques—will make more sense when you begin to work on the basics of designing systems to motivate your employees.

REFERENCES