

AIM FOR MOTIVATION

Employees who consider themselves highly motivated are up to four times more productive than employees who do not.



Aim for motivation – the key factor of all great results!

Studies show that employee motivation is a key factor in relation to revenue, efficiency, customer satisfaction, performance and reducing absenteeism. Organisations with highly motivated and engaged employees improved operating profit by 19.2 percent over a period of 12 months, whereas organisations with low engagement saw a decline of up to 32 percent.

Other studies show that employees who consider themselves highly motivated are up to four times more productive than employees who do not. One interesting aspect of the result of these studies is that the level of motivation and engagement among your employees is, to a very large extent, something that you can influence. If you want to know how, you have just found your own motivation for reading this article.

What do you think when you hear that there is no such thing as unmotivated employees? They simply do not exist! **Do you agree or do you think this is a very naive statement?**

Whatever you think about this you should know that it is one of the basic assumptions in this article. The choice is now yours: you may think this is too far from your leadership thinking, and you may consider not reading this

article after all, or you may be curious to read more about this way of working with motivation within leadership and organisations. You chose the last option. So why is this basic assumption about motivation important? Because psychological studies show that if you are able to see all your employees as motivated individuals with the capabilities of achieving great results, the chances of them being exactly that in their daily work will increase.

This is also described as the self-fulfilling prophecy. Therefore, leaders who want to become better at evoking motivation and engagement have to work with their way of thinking and focus on seeing the intrinsic motivation within all employees. And even though you might think that it is a difficult task to give yourself, it is possible to learn for most leaders, and it is necessary in order to become even better at evoking motivation within individuals, groups and organisations. In this article you will get some answers of how to work with these motivational thoughts and behaviours.

How to create motivation – is it that simple?

What is the characteristic culture in your organisation when the top management wants to achieve better

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results? What is their approach and what is your approach? The overall question to this is: how do you create intrinsic motivation within every employee in your organisation in order to reach the goals? Let us start with a typical situation that most leaders know of when they want to motivate and engage their employees.

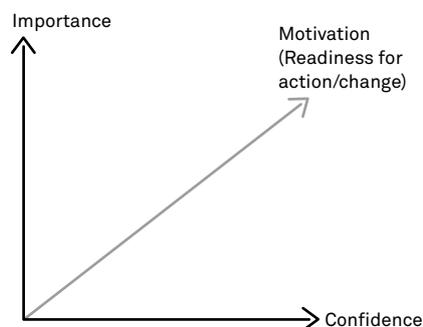
Imagine that right now you are leading a division meeting, where you are going to present to the employees that the top management has decided to change the way the company develops its new products. The company has constituted a New Product Development team in each of its business divisions, and you think that it is an excellent idea. You tend to get a little too eager to persuade the employees to love the new strategies and solutions as much as you do. You might meet the employees with your leadership insight and quick ways of identifying what you believe to be the right direction for the division. In an engaging manner you point out previous mistakes, present future opportunities and put things into perspective. In your eagerness you barely notice when the employees' glances begin to wander round the room, indicating that they are no longer really listening to your "power speech".

Can you recall having been in a similar situation? If so, you are not alone, because what many leaders in situations like these tend to forget is that while they have significant knowledge about the company and know which changes are necessary in order to reach the goals, the employees are the ones who are most affected by the

changes. They have to see the opportunities from their perspective and discover the potential of the changes to become motivated for the change and to create the best results for the company. In order to make this happen, there are two things which are essential for leaders to be able to evoke in every employee, if they aim for motivation. These two things are:

1. **Creating an inner sense of importance.** The employee has to see the purpose and understand the meaning of why a change is needed – not only from a company perspective but also from the perspective of each employee. Also known as the WIIFM-principle (What's In It For Me).
2. **Creating an inner feeling of confidence.** The employee must see himself as competent and able to carry out the necessary changes as well as believe that it is possible to succeed with it.

The motivation coordinate



Source: Miller & Rollnick, 2007

Within motivational leadership we call this "keeping track of the motivational coordinate".

The motivation coordinate consists of two axes: The vertical axis shows the employee's perceived importance of carrying out the change. To put it in other words – how important does the employee think the change is seen from his or her perspective? The horizontal axis indicates the employee's confidence in succeeding with the change. You could also put it like this: to what extent does the employee believe that he or she has sufficient competences to make it possible to carry out the change?

Let us look at the example from before in which you as a leader was trying to persuade a division to become motivated towards the way the company develops its new products. Even though you as a leader might think it is a great idea, and you see the importance of the change in order to achieve better results for the company, it is crucial that the employees are the ones who present the arguments of the importance of the change – not by you telling them the answers to the questions, but by letting the employees express in their own words how they perceive the importance. It is through what people hear themselves say and think that they evoke their inner motivation towards what they will take action on afterwards.

“IT IS THROUGH WHAT PEOPLE HEAR THEMSELVES SAY AND THINK THAT THEY EVOKE THEIR INNER MOTIVATION TOWARDS WHAT THEY WILL TAKE ACTION ON AFTWARDS.”

This approach in which the employee's thoughts and spoken words create the direction of their motivation is the second basic assumption within this article and within the motivational leadership approach.

So going back to our example, you might consider asking some of the following questions if you want to evoke intrinsic motivation through raising the level of importance within the group of individuals in the division you are in charge of.

Evoking importance:

“From your point of view – how do you as an employee see the importance of these changes?”

“How can these changes become important to you – both at a personal level and at division level?”

“In your opinion, which positive impact for our division can these changes lead to?”

The next step is to work on evoking intrinsic motivation through raising the level of confidence in succeeding with the changes in the organisation. Below are some questions that can help you do that.

Evoking confidence:

“In your opinion, what are we already doing which makes us able to carry out changes in our daily work?”

“How can we increase the probability of success – what can each of us do, and how can I support you in this?”

“Which supporting structures do we have or need in order to support the New Product Development team in our business division?”

These examples are all focused on raising the level of perceived confidence by making the employees talk themselves into their own belief in succeeding with the change. One important thing about using the motivational coordinate is to remember that different employees are at different levels of readiness for action/change – some are high on both importance and confidence, and they are the ones who are easy to motivate towards the change. Other employees are high on importance and low on confidence, and some are high on confidence but low on importance.

These two groups are the ones you have to be more patient with and remind yourself that there is no such thing as unmotivated employees. They are all more or less motivated – your job is to help them see their own perceived importance or confidence and thereby help them raise their level of intrinsic motivation towards the change – it is that simple but not always that easy.





Motivation traps

Things that might motivate in the short term but not in the long term

If you want to avoid the motivation traps, you may consider doing less of the following:

- Tell the employees about the right solutions and give them advice about how you want them to solve things. Why? Most employees today will experience “your help” as a lack of autonomy and ownership towards the changes and new solutions.
- Push the employees in the direction you want them to go and do not spend much time on setting the direction together with them. Why? Because in this way you do not get the long-term benefits of handling changes as a collaboration between the employees and you, where different levels of change readiness in the organisation can be contained better and resistance towards the changes can be reduced.
- Act as the authority that is not interested in how the employees think and feel about the changes and how they see things from their perspective. Why? Because in this way the employees do not feel any empathy from the leader and therefore do not feel the same commitment to “go the extra mile” in terms of achieving great results for the company, and the leader.

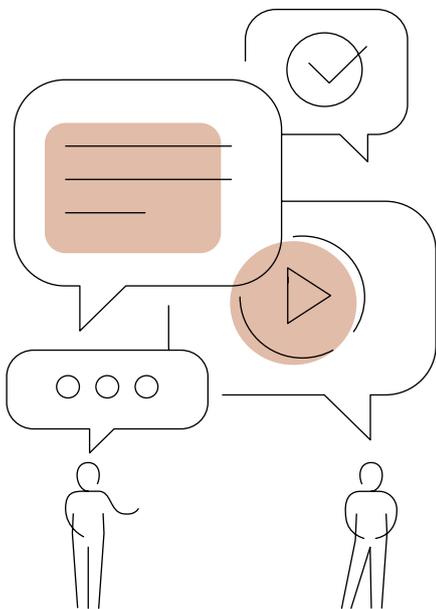
- Use rewards and punishment as the most common motivational drivers in your organisation. Why? Because as long as the tasks only involve very simple and repeatable skills “carrots and sticks” work, but once the tasks call for more advanced and complex skills, these external key motivational factors do not work, and if they work, they only create a sense of short-term motivation

Whether you find these things important to practice in your leadership, and whether you have the confidence in trying to avoid the motivation traps, is something only you can decide. But if you have a desire to become better at evoking intrinsic motivation in order to help the employees and the business do better, you will find valuable knowledge in the evidence-based method called motivational interviewing. In the following section, you will get a taste of what is special and how to work with this method.

Remind yourself that there is no such thing as unmotivated employees. They are all more or less motivated - your job is to help them see their own perceived importance or confidence.

Change talk is the “engine”

Motivational interviewing differs sub-



stantially from other interaction and communication approaches by focusing on motivation statements, also called change talk, i.e. statements in favour of change. Change talk is when you hear and evoke statements about:

- Desire for change
- Ability to succeed with the change
- Reasons and need for change
- Commitment and action to make the change

For the last 30 years, research on motivational interviewing has shown that, what people hear themselves say and think has a huge motivating impact. In other words, what the employees hear themselves say is more likely to be consistent with what they do later on.

This is called change talk. Change talk has to be the “engine” when working with motivational leadership. Here it is crucial that leaders become more capable of identifying, listening for and evoking change talk. But how do you evoke change talk? By asking certain questions you can evoke change talk and elaborate more on the answers you are given.

Evoking change talk

“What do you wish for in terms of the changes that the organisation is going through?”

“Which abilities have we used in similar situations in the past in order to make the best of the changes we have been involved in?”

“Which abilities do we have today that can help us succeed with the new challenges?”

“Seen from your perspective, what are the reasons and needs for the changes that the top management has decided to implement in our company?”

“Which elements in the change process are the easiest ones to commit to - and how can we take action on this?”

Within the motivational leadership approach we also use the technique of asking scale questions in a certain way in order to evoke change talk. Here we ask downwards instead of upwards. Let us go back to our example with the constitution of a New Product Development team in each business division. After talking about what is going to happen in the organisation, you ask the division:

Leader: *“Tell me, on a scale from 1 to 10 – where 10 is very important to you and 1 is not important to you at all – where will each of you place yourself when I ask you, how important it is for you to implement the new changes with the NPD team?”*

One of the employees starts: *“Well, it is important to me that we are able to implement the new changes we are facing, but I would have to say that on a scale from 1 to 10 I will place myself on. The reason for that is that there are so many other things I need to get done before I can promise you to focus completely on the new development task, we have ahead of us with the NPD team.”*

Leader: *“Okay, so it is important to you. Tell me how come you say 7 and not 3?”*

Employee: *“Well it is because I know that there are many people in the company who depend on the NPD team before they can move on with their tasks (change talk – reasons and*

needs). I also know that we can have the changes implemented in our division if we prioritise our time differently (change talk – abilities).”

Do you see what is happening here? The leader evokes change talk by asking downwards. What would have happened if the manager had asked upwards?

Let us try again but now doing the opposite, i.e. asking upwards instead of downwards. This time, we start in the middle of a conversation:

Leader: *“Okay, so I can hear that it is important to you. Tell me how come you say 7 and not 10?”*

Employee: *“Well it is because there are so many other important assignments that are waiting to be done. I do not think I have the time to handle the whole change thing with the NPD team right now. You should also know that others in our division told me that they do not think it is realistic to have the NPD team up to speed before summer.”*

Do you see what is happening here in the last example? By asking upwards instead of downwards, the leader evokes status quo talk instead of change talk. Status quo talk is statements and stories that focus on all the reasons for not doing the change. What happens in this situation is that the employee talks himself into not wanting to do the change and focuses on all the disadvantages which the new situation with the NPD team is causing. By making him talk mostly status quo talk, you evoke only intrinsic motivation for continuing the way he is already handling the situation, and if he has to do something else he would only do it because you have told him to do it, not because he was motivated to do it.

Scale questions

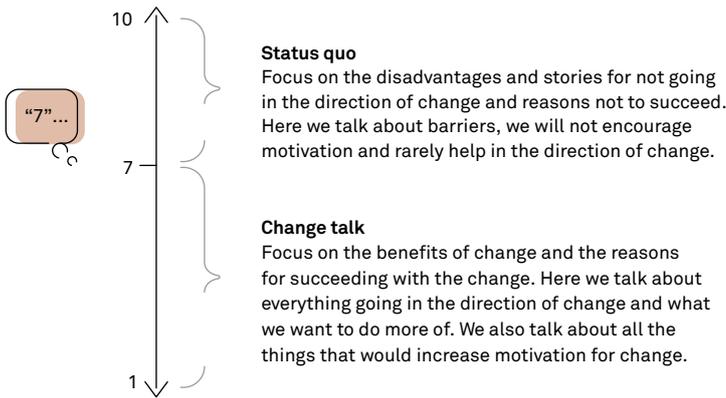


Illustration: What is going on in the two conversations when you ask downwards instead of upwards.

Change talk is also something you can work with at an organisational level. Here you focus on what stories are dominant in your organisation – are the stories making a movement towards change or status quo? Do the stories support the direction you want your company to aim for or not? One thing that is for sure, is the fact that things will happen when people in organisations start talking and sharing their stories about how they relate their abilities, skills, beliefs, emotions etc. towards the organisational goals that are set. With change talk you will get a chance to reinforce both old and new behaviour that can support each individual within any given organisational change – small or big.

No matter what stories are told they have a strong effect on the level of motivation and behaviour in your organisation (as illustrated below). Change talk in organisations are stories that strengthen the employee's confidence and capabilities so they are more likely to say:

"We have a desire for doing more of ...";

"We have the ability to succeed with ...";

"We have good reasons and a need for doing ...";

"We will take action on ..."

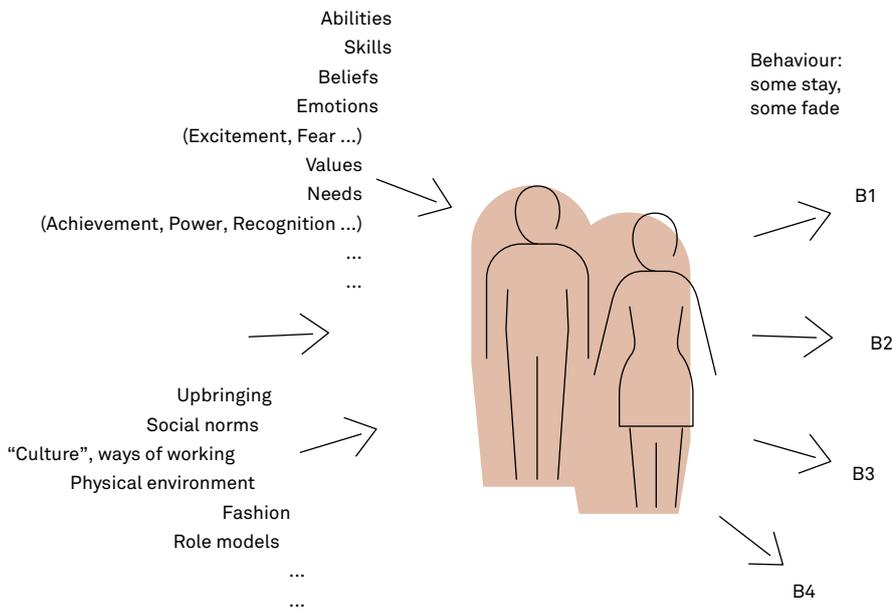
Evoking change talk in organisations requires that your organisation makes room for employees to talk and learn from situations where they succeed, and that the organisation, in addition to a focus on problem-based issues, also focuses on strengths, visions and a need for change.

Therefore, if change talk is the "engine" when evoking inner motivation at an individual level and at an organisational level, it really matters how you ask questions and which stories thereby becomes dominating in your organisation. You might ask yourself: what about all the good reasons you know your employees have for not liking the change?

How do you handle that? Do you always have to have an approach, where you only focus on change talk and all the advantages of going in the direction of the change? That is what we will take a look at in the next section.

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Change talk / status quo stories in organisations



Source : Figure inspired by Herrero L., 2008, Viral Change

“BEING DIVIDED AND FEELING AMBIVALENT IS IN THE NATURE OF ALL CHANGES.”

Give room for ambivalence by exploring the decisional balance

Associated with all change processes there are good reasons for doing the change and good reasons for not doing it. If we know how to handle this ambivalence, we have one of the keys to evoking intrinsic motivation. So why is that?

Every time an employee has to make changes in his working procedures, a mental balancing act occurs. There are advantages and disadvantages of the “old” working procedures, and there are advantages and disadvantages of the “new” working procedures. Whenever the employee may be perceived as unmotivated, it may be due to the fact that he is divided between the two alternatives: either to carry on as up to now or to change behaviour and

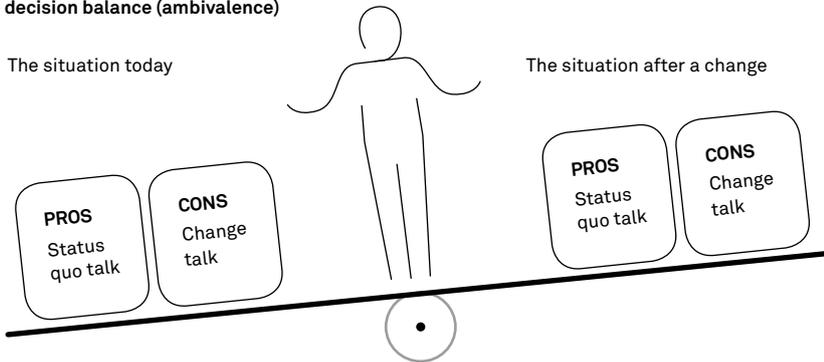
do it the new way. Being divided and feeling ambivalent is in the nature of all changes. What decides the employee’s future behaviour when making a change is decided by which side carries the most weight on his decisional balance.

As mentioned in the section about change talk, research shows that people are inclined to do what we hear ourselves say and think, even when it concerns irrational behaviour. That means when you as a leader start proposing concrete solutions, the ambivalent employee will very often react defensively. He will find a number of arguments why the solution is a bad idea or why it will not work, and he will start talking about the disadvantages of following the proposed solution: *“Yes I understand, however, on the other hand ...”*

This is a natural reaction when we feel misunderstood and ignored, or when we feel that the complexity we experience every day is overlooked. The more you as a leader push your employee, the more his thoughts and talk will focus on the secure and familiar side of the decisional balance – the status quo side. This will thus increase the probability that he will carry on with his usual behaviour.

The first step towards avoiding a reinforcement of the employee’s negative pattern of thoughts is that you are conscious about what you make the employee say and think during your conversation. Try to examine and understand the employee’s choice between two alternative situations by posing questions inspired by the decisional balance.

The decision balance (ambivalence)



Source: Miller & Rollnick, 2007

Decisional balance questions

“In your opinion, what are the advantages of the way we work today and what are the disadvantages?”

“Tell me, which potential disadvantages do you see in the new way of working with our products? And which advantages do you see in the new way of working?”

Being interested in both sides of the decisional balance has a motivational impact in itself, because the employees will perceive your interest in understanding and listening to their ambivalence related to the changes as an appreciative and understanding way of handling their concerns. Talking about ambivalence, both you and the employees will become aware of the advantages and disadvantages, and if you manage to make people talk no more than 40 percent status quo talk and at least 60 percent change talk, you will have an increased chance of evoking intrinsic motivation towards the changes afterwards. This is when the employee’s decisional balance is tipped towards making the changes.

But there is more than questioning technique to it if you want to evoke intrinsic motivation within your organisation, and that is what the next section is about – how to really make a difference in terms of creating inner motivation among employees in organisations today.

Tools and “tricks” do not do it – it is all about motivational behaviour!

Some leaders hope to find the easy way out and can be tempted to learn a few smart tricks or techniques to manipulate people to think they are motivated. But to be honest, this only works in the short run and would never have an impact and effect in the long run – it might even do more harm than good.

If a leader truly wants to become a person who can evoke motivation, he or she has to look at their own behaviour in terms of how they normally motivate other people to do their best and what motivates themselves.

Studies have shown that it is necessary to have a good relationship with the

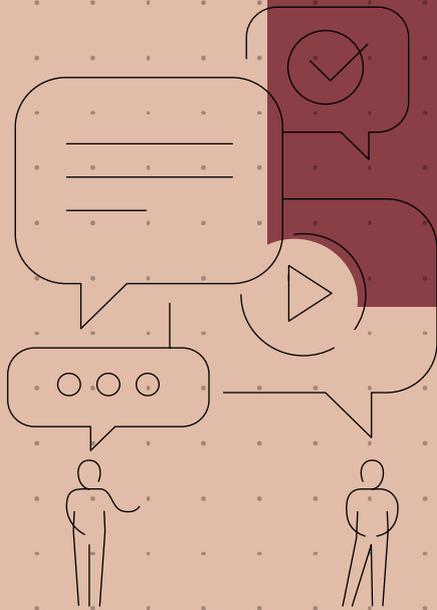
people you are having a professional relation to, if you want to evoke inner motivation. A “good relationship” does not imply that you should be friends with your employees. What it means is that there is trust between you, and that you sincerely want the best for them. Within motivational leadership we acknowledge that there is a causal connection between our behaviour, what we listen for and what we evoke of change talk, and what the other person thinks, says and does afterwards – the level of intrinsic motivation.

Motivational behaviour consists of four elements which are essential whenever you are aiming for evoking intrinsic motivation. These elements are:

1. Aim for autonomy
2. Aim for collaboration
3. Aim for empathy
4. Aim for normativity

Let us take a closer look at these four behaviours.

**“IF YOU MANAGE
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Aim for autonomy

In a motivational leadership perspective, autonomy is defined as the individual's unreserved right to set the direction of his or her own life without interference. An employee will often automatically feel resistance to pressure and instructions, and, ironically, it is the recognition of the freedom to choose which sometimes leads us to become motivated to follow the instructions. Therefore, it is crucial that leaders constantly point out the opportunities where the employees have a free choice and to a certain extent make decisions without imposing one particular solution or one "right answer" on others. Hereby, you strengthen the employee's inner motivation as well as their importance and their confidence that they are able to succeed with the task because they have chosen their own right way.

Let us go back to our example, and see how you in a direct manner can cut straight through to the employee's autonomy and inner motivation:

Leader: *"You all know that it has been decided to constitute a New Product Development team in each business division, and we have talked about the disadvantages and the advantages of this new situation. It is entirely up to you what you think about it all, and how you make the best of the new situation. I will support you, but I cannot decide how you should handle the new situation only you can."*

Aim for collaboration

The meaning of collaboration can be compared to a dance, where the leader sets the direction while constantly making sure that the employees are motivated to move along. The leader has to be careful not to step on the

employee's toes, but still has to have the courage to challenge them to set new standards.

Together they discover strengths and new possibilities. If you start pushing your employee (one of the most common motivation traps) instead of dancing, it is no longer considered motivational leadership. You might think that sometimes it is not possible to dance, but the longer you can stay on the dance floor, the better chance you have of evoking inner motivation in your organisation and with that great results!

Regarding our example. A way of collaborating with the employees in a situation like this, is for you to involve them as much as possible and let them come with their input:

Leader: *"Even though the strategic business perspective is already decided, there are still things, we can influence in terms of finding the best solutions for our division. We have to find our strengths and abilities, and figure out how to use them in order to reach the overall business target. Together we have to find the best solution both for us and the company."*

Aim for empathy

When referring to empathy in motivational leadership, focus is first of all on the leader's effort and desire to help the employees by seeing things through their eyes and understanding their perspectives. Research has shown that the degree of empathy has a significant effect on the level of motivation – both in the short term and the long term.

So how do you show empathy at work? Looking back at our example one way for you to show empathy in this situation could be:

Leader: *"I can imagine that this new situation might not be a desirable situation for some of you. To help me understand your situation I would like to hear your thoughts about how you see the new situation. Both pros and cons."*

The best way to define empathy we have found in a quote by the famous Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. He once expressed:

"If One is Truly to Succeed in Leading a Person to a specific Place, One Must First and Foremost Take Care to Find Him Where He is and Begin There. This is the secret in the entire art of helping. Anyone who cannot do this is himself under a delusion if he thinks he is able to help someone else. In order truly to help someone else, I must understand more than he but certainly first and foremost understand what he understands. If I do not do that, then my greater understanding does not help him at all. If I nevertheless want to assert my greater understanding, then it is because I am vain or proud, then basically instead of benefiting him I really want to be admired by him."

For the past 10 years, studies within organisational development have shown that the level of empathic behaviour in organisations has a huge influence on performance. Leaders with excellent cognitive empathy, for instance, experience performance which is better than expected from their direct reports. And executives who have this mental asset of empathy do better when assigned to a culture different from their own – they are able to pick up the norms and ground rules of another culture more quickly.

Aiming for empathic behaviour in organisations should not only be seen at an individual level. Today, some of the

most successful businesses are aware that they need to focus on empathy, both in an inner and an outer perspective. Daniel Goleman, one of the leading figures within organisational thinking today, explains that his studies have shown that leaders need to cultivate a triad of empathic awareness — an inward focus, a focus on others and an outward focus. He calls this “the hidden drivers of excellence”.

Let me share with you a few words on the three hidden drivers:

1. **Inner focus:** being aware of own thoughts and feelings. This is the basis of managing our own inner world
2. **Focus on empathy:** being aware of other people and focusing on their inner world and their thoughts and feelings
3. **Outer focus:** being able to sense and understand the larger system and reading the outer world in order to come up with an effective strategy that can have a positive impact on both the larger system and the organisation

Whether empathy at these three levels is something you will start focusing on is of course something only you can decide for yourself. You have been given some normative information about the topic, and now you have to think of how this information fits or does not fit into your leadership, which brings us to the next motivational behaviour – being normative.

Aim for normativity

For sure you have to be normative and give a lot of information to your

employees every day. But do you do it in a way that evokes motivation to move towards the things you inform them about, or do you do it in a way that makes your employees want to do the opposite or just not listen?

The typical situations where you as a leader have to give normative information could be:

- When you have to explain corporate decisions
- When you are going to pass good or bad news to the employees
- When you are going to give instructions and set a direction in the situation

It is of course important to be normative once in a while as a leader, and there are many ways of being normative. Within motivational leadership you can be normative as “the expert” within company, subject and leadership matters, but you can never be an expert on how the employees will perceive the information you give them. Only they have the answer to that. Therefore, it is important to be aware of how to give normative information with motivational behaviour. Here is what studies have shown works:

1. Ask what the employees already know and want to know about the situation
2. Give the information in a neutral way
3. Check the impact which the given information has on the employees

Let us go back to our example:

Leader: “In the last period we have worked hard to find new sustainable

solutions for the company going forward. How much have you heard about that, and what in particular do you find important to know more about?”

By asking the employees what they have heard about the change and what they want to know more about, you get a clear picture and valuable knowledge about where they are and what they think of the present situation. Let us move on to the next step.

Leader: “We are going to change our way of developing new products. In every division, a constituted New Product Development (NPD) team will be placed that we have to work with”.

By being neutral in the way you give information and not telling the employees what they should think about the information, you give them a chance to have their own thoughts about the information and help them “look at the information” from their own objective perspective. Let us move on to the next step.

Leader: “So now you know which changes will be implemented, what do you think of this?”

When you have listened to their answers, you have created the best situation for them to be motivated of hearing and talking more about the normative information you have just given them.

A photograph of a sign that says "GOOD VIBES ONLY" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The sign is mounted on a dark, textured surface. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with a person in a pink shirt and dark pants, and some equipment or structures. A solid dark red horizontal bar is positioned above the sign.

GOOD
VIBES
ONLY

Putting it all together

The motivational leadership behaviour that you have been introduced to in this article can help you, if you want to increase the level of motivation in your organisation and raise revenue, efficiency, customer satisfaction and performance.

The level of motivation and engagement among your employees is, to a very large extent, something that you can influence by focusing on your own behaviour (your inner world) as well as on the behaviour of your employees (their inner world).

Whether you want to try some of the things you have been presented with in this article; whether you agree on the assumption that there is no such thing as unmotivated employees; whether you believe that your way of showing motivational behaviour has an important impact on the motivation you will be able to evoke, whether you believe what people talk about in your organisation as possible tipping points of creating a motivational culture or not – it is all up to you.

The choice is yours in terms of creating motivation within yourself, within your organisation and maybe also within the larger system surrounding you. I wish you all the best!

By Pernille Erichsen (MSc in Psychology, member of Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT)) and author of the book Aim for motivation – Motivational Interviewing in leadership. (The book is currently only available in Danish).

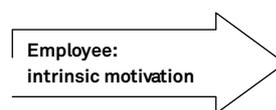
Aim for motivation



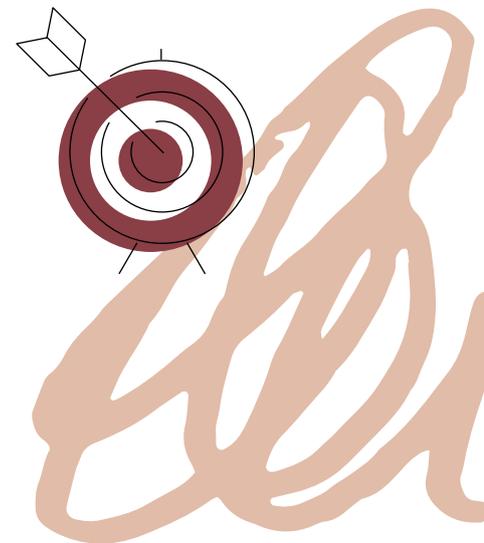
- Aim for autonomy
- Aim for collaboration
- Aim for empathy
- Aim for being normative



- Desire
- Ability
- Reasons and needs
- Commitment and actions



- High inner importance
- High inner confidence



Source: Erichsen, 2014

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