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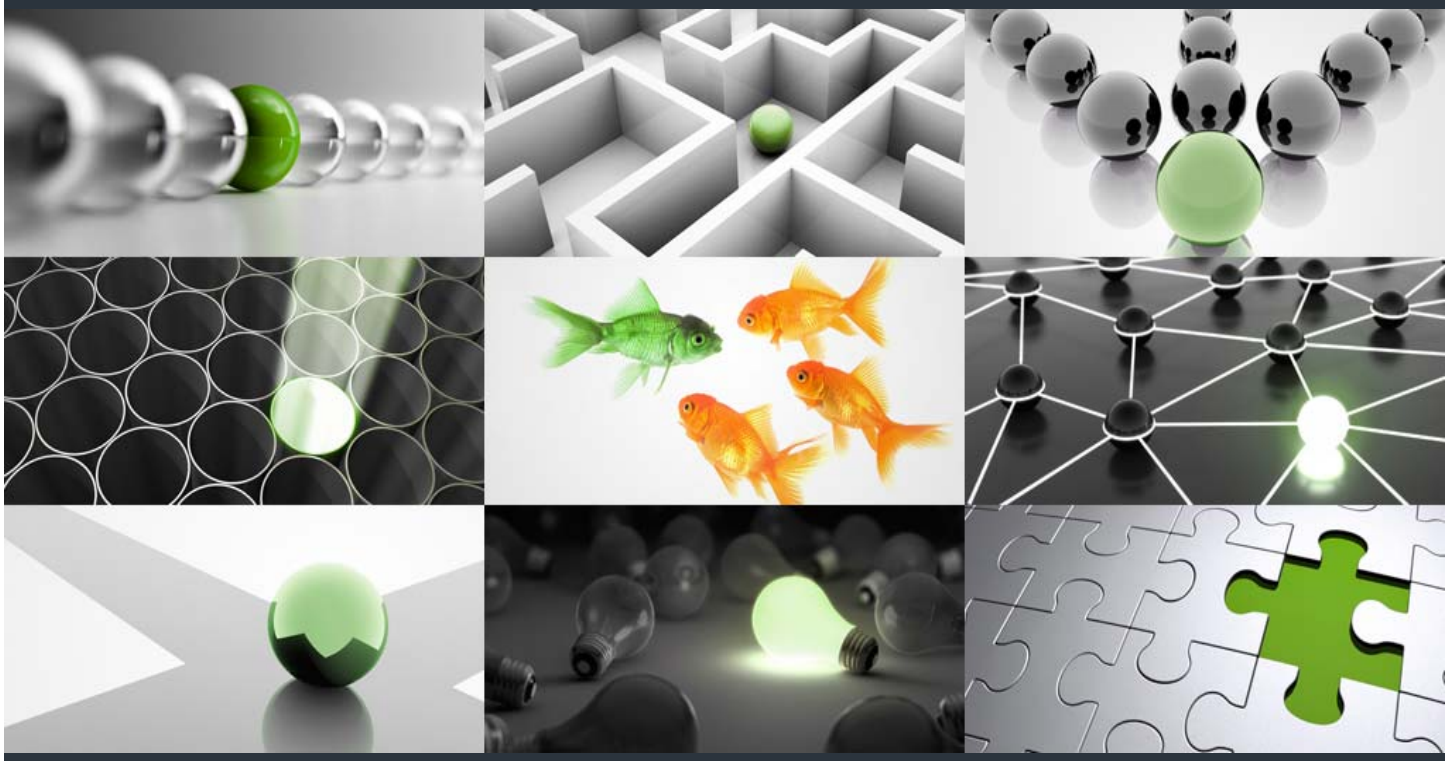

# Rialto White Paper:
# Motivation – it's role in developing employee engagement

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# 1. Introduction

Most of us have been experiencing tougher times both in terms of business development and engaging & retaining good people in our businesses. A fundamental question which is asked by most managers and leaders is "how can we motivate our people to give their best in these tougher times". No matter what organisation you are involved with it has never been more difficult to predict the future and manage risk and uncertainty. However, as we will see later in this white paper people need a degree of certainty and security about the future if they are to give their best and produce excellent, value-added performance.

So……..how do we motivate people in tougher times?

To answer this question it is useful to review what motivation theories have suggested over the years and bring these ideas up to date.
The first issue we have to address is whether we can actually motivate others? Can we get into the hearts and minds of others and inspire them or is our task more concerned with creating the circumstances and environment that enables and encourages people to be motivated. It has been said by many writers that only around one in twenty people are inspired in terms of their work performance. So how do we raise that to a higher percentage? There is no doubt that there are 'transcendent' leaders and managers who do operate in such a way that their people become inspired and metaphorically 'walk three feet about the ground'. However, the majority of managers in our organisations are not in that league and we have to consider how those managers can raise the motivational level of their people.

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It has also been suggested in a number of studies that a proportion of staff (in some cases 80%+) not inspired by their work and if given the opportunity they would leave their jobs to follow another lifestyle. In a recent online survey 83% of those surveyed in the US classified themselves as passive jobseekers. This is a tragic comment given all the management and leadership education that has taken place in the past few decades. Why is that many managers and leaders do not create a work environment which motivates people and creates a positive atmosphere for a lifestyle they wish to pursue?

In examining the issue of motivation, particularly in tough times, our approach is to consider the contextual factors in which people work and to identify how those factors may be used to 'switch people on' to giving great performances rather than motivating them through the fear of redundancy or loss of earnings due to poor performance. In order to do this we will consider five frameworks which have been used over the years to try to understand motivation in the workplace and then distil the common elements from these frameworks to produce our 'toolkit for motivation in tough times'.

The five frameworks are:

1. What Maslow really said about motivation
2. The two factor theory of Fred Herzberg
3. McGregor's thoughts on managers expectations
4. The pragmatic approach of basic and growth factors
5. The SCARF model given to project teams from neuroscience

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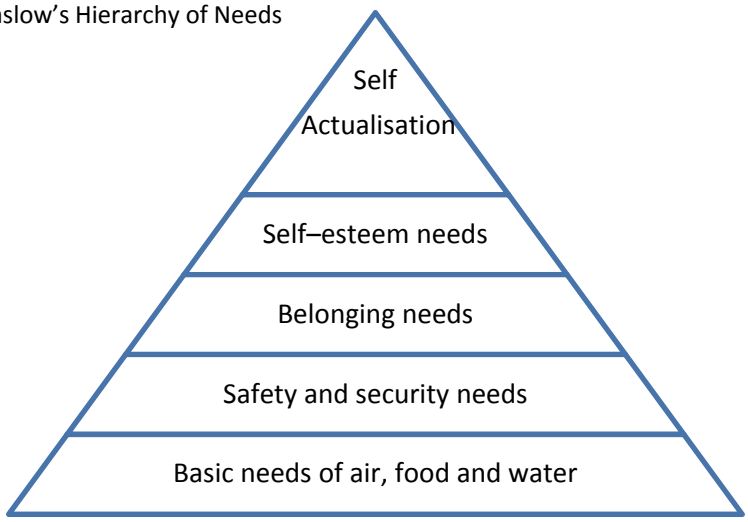
# 2. Revisiting Maslow

Back in the 1950s Abraham Maslow created his hierarchy of needs as below.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs




The basic idea is that in order to 'motivate' people or shift them into a motivated state it is important to satisfy various needs they have in order of relevance and importance. At the basic level we all need air, food and water in order to survive. Our attention then turns to safety and security needs and then to satisfying our need to bond with others and feel part of a social group. Once those needs are satisfied then our attention turns to wanting to satisfy our need to feel valued and important and once that is achieved then we are, according to Maslow, in a position to reach our potential through the process of self-actualisation or being totally in tune with our context and work environment. There are a number of interesting issues which arise from thinking about Maslow's approach. Firstly he proposed a hierarchy of needs where the lower order needs should be satisfied before the higher level needs become significant.

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Appealing as this is on a simplistic level it clearly does not manifest itself in our world today. There are many people in the world who are achieving great things in environments which are anything but safe and secure. And not everyone needs to be part of a group to achieve greatness. And some very successful people do not have strong self-esteem needs and instead show great humility. Part of the needs theory is that once a need is satisfied it ceases to become a driving force for the person. This clearly is not the case for many people. A high performing individual in a dangerous environment still requires his or her safety and security needs to be satisfied and we all need to breathe, eat and drink!

Maslow's Theory does, however, point to the important fact that people do have needs and if we are to create a motivational context we need to ensure we handle those needs effectively.

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# 3. So what did Fred Herzberg say about needs and drivers?

Herzberg's Two Factor theory has stood the test of time for many managers and it is worth reminding ourselves that what motivates people is not the same as what de-motivates people. Herzberg suggested that we are all impacted upon by 'hygiene factors' such as salary, organisational policy, supervision, work conditions, relationships with peers and status issues. These factors do not, according to Herzberg, motivate people no matter how much resource you place in them. However, they do de-motivate people if they are not addressed appropriately in the mind of the employee.

The 'motivator factors' on the other hand such as achievement, recognition, a sense of growing as an individual, having an interesting job and responsibility do enable people to become motivated if they are handled successfully. Thus what de-motivates people is not the same as what motivates people. However, it is invariably easier to address the hygiene factors than the motivators and many human resource systems focus primarily on those factors. What needs to happen is for the focus to shift to the motivator factors. However, in practice, that is not such an easy process as it might first appear.

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# 4. Do people perform to their manager's expectations

In the middle of the 20th Century, the humanistic movement started to emerge in our organisational world. Douglas McGregor suggested that managers' expectations of their people's performance could be placed on a continuum which he called the X-Y scale. At one end of the scale, Theory X managers believed their people were lazy, disengaged and only worked for the money they earned. At the other end Theory Y managers believed their people were potentially a great source of added value and that all you need to do is to engage, train, coach and inspire them and they would achieve great things. In reality both managers are right!

It is the expectation of the manager which has a greater impact on performance than almost any other factor. Combining McGregor's approach with behavioural reinforcement such as in the One Minute Manager approach proposed by Hersey and Blanchard some years ago, can lead to the creation of outstanding performance. For those of us who have not been exposed to the One Minute Manager it is worth revisiting that concept. The idea is that the manager sets one minute goals with each of his people and then focuses on catching the person doing something right in terms of achieving that goal. That positive reinforcement promotes the Theory Y approach of believing that people are capable of great things. It is often the case however that an individual doesn't perform as well as anticipated and here the One Minute Reprimand is used. The manager goes straight to the point and tells the employee how his poor effort has made him feel as a manager.

However the key issue is that the manager balances his negative feedback with some specific positive feedback about an issue that the employee has handled well. In this way performance feedback starts to be welcomed by the employee as they know that the bulk of the feedback is positive and shows that they are valued.

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# 5. An updated view of motivation based on different types of need factors – the pragmatic approach

An approach has emerged in recent years which builds on Maslow, Herzberg and McGregor and which has proved a very useful diagnostic in the organisational setting. It suggests, as did Herzberg, that there are two types of factors which managers need to address if they are to create an environment which motivates people rather than demotivates them. In particular, a key issue to address is that of removing the fear factor from the motivational setting.

Essentially this approach suggests four factors which need to be handled successfully to avoid people becoming demotivated:

- People need to feel part of something
- They need variety in the work they undertake
- They need to feel significant in terms of their position in the organisation
- They need to feel a sense of certainty in terms of what the future may hold

If these factors are not satisfied to a significant level then demotivation will result. However, no matter how much resource is put into them, they will not significantly motivate individuals. What does motivate people, however are two factors:

- Feeling you are growing as a person
- Feeling that you are making a value contribution to something worthwhile

It is worth noting that these are emotional factors, all about feelings rather than hard issues such as salary, working conditions and benefits packages.

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# 6. So what does neuroscience have to say about motivation?

In recent years neuroscience has been nipping at the heels of psychology in the workplace and become associated with the 'positive psychology' movement. This is based on the idea that positive thinking and emotions produce an impact on the level of neural connections in the brain. Positive thoughts tend to lead to an increase in neural activity and the production of such chemicals as serotonin and thus put the individual into a more motivated and resourceful state than when negative thoughts are present. When people are negative or stressed then different chemicals such as cortisol and cortisone are said to be produced which can inhibit neural connections and reduce creativity, motivational state and performance.

What neuroscience has achieved in terms of motivation is a simple model called SCARF which is an acronym for status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness. Initially this model was about improving social interaction. Today its use has extended to many settings, in particular project management teams. It does provide a useful insight into motivation in today's hi-tech, somewhat uncertain and fast moving organisational setting in that it brings to our attention two important factors previously not mentioned, that is autonomy and fairness. These are almost certainly a reflection on the way our thoughts on leadership have shifted from just a command and control approach to one where the focus is on unlocking potential using a wider range of styles.

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# 7. Conclusion

**Putting it all together – a toolkit for enabling people to become more motivated in tougher times.**

We can distil these five approaches into a working set of practices which will reap massive rewards in terms of increasing the chances of our people becoming motivated and staying the course when times are tough.

| Best Practice | Suggested actions |
|---|---|
| **Treat every employee as if they are the most important person in the world**<br>Remember everyone has self-esteem needs. The needs of status and significance are often under rated yet proved a tremendous boost to individuals particularly in tough times | ▪ Focus on catching people doing things right rather than giving negative feedback when things go wrong<br>▪ Create a non-financial recognition system such as 'employee of the moment' to reward specifically good behaviour<br>▪ Feature individuals who do good work in your regular newsletter both to their colleagues and customers |
| **Focus on creating good relationships in the organisation,** particularly across functions so that people network effectively outside their own part of the business. Help people to get connected and relate harmoniously to others both inside and outside the organisation. | ▪ Give people the opportunity to work in a different department for a week so that they find out what makes that department tick.<br>▪ Identify areas in your business where relationships are difficult and act as a mediator to find out the viewpoints of both sides and ask each side to express the way they think the other side views the situation. This forced empathy approach solves most problems quickly.<br>▪ Organise cross function social events outside work. |

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| | Suggested actions |
|---|---|
| **Remember the power of recognition** and the very positive impact of catching people doing things right and giving positive feedback. | ▪ Read or re-read the One Minute Manager book. It's philosophy is still as relevant today as it was some twenty years ago when it was written<br>▪ Always balance negative feedback with genuine positive feedback to encourage people to see feedback as a coaching process rather than a critical or personal attack.<br>▪ Ask people about their perception of their performance first before addressing the underperformance issue. Usually people are prepared to be harder on themselves than they will accept from others. |
| **Make people feel part of something worthwhile.** People don't just work for money. They have a variety of social needs in the workplace, feeling they are part of a team which has an identity outside the organisation as well as inside it. | ▪ Find out more about what makes your people tick in terms of their personal needs, intangible as well as tangible.<br>▪ Work on developing the teams within your organisation so that people really do feel part of a team rather than just a nominal member.<br>▪ Encourage work teams to develop their own submission, vision and values within the organisation and to create their own shared identity for engaging in both work and social events. |
| **Focus on the positives & growth.** Remember you get what you expect. Do all you can to develop your people and enable them to feel they are growing as individuals. Keep up the training and development activity as like an investment account, individuals either grow or decrease in terms of the value they can add on a daily basis. | ▪ People tend to live up to the expectations their managers have of them. Create a positive expectation of your people and their potential and do everything you can to unlock that potential.<br>▪ Make sure everyone in your organisation and team has a personal development programme so that they develop a sense of certainty that they are developing as individuals and not just marking time in their current job.<br>▪ Encourage your people to work together in action learning groups to tackle real problems that hold them back. It is a good idea to set up a monthly lunchtime seminar programme so that they can report progress to others in the organisation. |

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| Best practice | Suggested actions |
|---|---|
| **Remember to treat people fairly**. Make sure they realise that you are doing all you can to enable them to become successful in their work. | ▪ Work towards developing all your people not just your favourites so that everyone feels that you are managing in all of their interests.<br>▪ Have regular 'happiness factor' meetings to assess how people are feeling about the way they are being treated. This is crucial to the development of a sense of fairness throughout the organisation.<br>▪ Ensure that work and project allocation involves everyone and that it plays to each individual's strengths and preferences rather than focusing on just a few high performers. |
| **Develop the sense of job ownership**. A key point we need to develop for the organisation of the future is the high levels of enterprise in the organisation at all levels. People do have the need to feel a degree of autonomy and control. If we can enable them to feel that they are 'in charge' of their part of the organisation we can reap massive rewards in terms of performance. | ▪ Encourage a sense of enterprise and entrepreneurship in your organisation so that people think as business owners not just employees.<br>▪ Have each individual create their own personal mission, vision and values statement for their work and their career. Develop their awareness that their current job role is just a step on the ladder of success.<br>▪ Build a library of positive thinking CDs and other learning media so that each individual can work on their own self development and their desire to manage their own patch of the business. |
| **Focus on the individual's strengths rather than their weaknesses.** Ensure that they have a variety of work activities which resonate with their strengths. | ▪ Often performance feedback tends to focus on the individual's weaknesses. Instead, focus on their strengths as development in these areas will more than compensate for their weaknesses.<br>▪ Encourage each individual to develop their self-awareness by getting them to carry out a personal SWOT analysis so that they are more aware of their personal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and strengths.<br>▪ Get each individual to identify the key 20% of their tasks which produce 80% of the value they add to the business. |

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| Best practice | Suggested actions |
|---|---|
| **Encourage your people to build on the five factors of personal success.** These include taking responsibility, being positive, setting goals, persevering intelligently and networking effectively. | ▪ Get each of your people to rate themselves on the five factors of personal success with a mark out of ten and identify the two lowest scores. Encourage them to set up an action plan to address these issues.<br>▪ Ensure that each individual receives training in effective goal setting, particularly in the area of personal vision skills.<br>▪ Encourage each of your people to develop their personal network both within the company and outside of it. |
| **Work towards developing a positive philosophy.** Promote and reward positive beliefs and attitude to the work. This will result in more productive proactive activity and increasingly successful results. At the same time be realistic about the challenges and show your people that you care about them, particularly when the going gets tough. | ▪ Get each of your people to examine their beliefs about your organisation particularly any negative beliefs if they exist. Encourage them to identify what would be more useful beliefs to replace those negative ones.<br>▪ Set up a coaching session for each of your people and use a force field approach to identify the factors that are moving the person towards more motivated performance and those restraining factors which are holding them back. Work out a plan to remove as many of the restraining factors as possible. This will enable your individual to move forward and become more motivated.<br>▪ Become aware of any noticeable changes in the way any of your people are behaving. Such changes often indicate potential problems either inside or outside work. Often an informal chat can tease out such issues and the manager is then in a position to help the employee either personally or by referral to a suitable counsellor or other resource. This is important as it shows that you, the manager, cares about your people. |

It is not always the case that the manager is a charismatic, inspiring individual who elevates their people to do great things though the power of his or her personality, however, it is possible to create the conditions that encourage and facilitate people to become motivated. It is a key part of employee engagement that we take this issue seriously.

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