MOTIVATION 1.0

→ Motivation 1.0 is based on survival -- living beings do what they need to do to survive.

“Call this early operating system Motivation 1.0. It wasn’t especially elegant, nor was it much different from those of rhesus monkeys, giant apes, or many other animals. But it served us nicely. It worked well. Until it didn’t.”

MOTIVATION 2.0

“We also had a second drive—to seek reward and avoid punishment more broadly. And it was from this insight that a new operating system—call it Motivation 2.0—arose.”

“In the early 1900s, [Frederick Winslowe] Taylor, who believed businesses were being run in an inefficient, haphazard way, developed what he called ‘scientific management.’ His invention was a form of ‘software’ expertly crafted to run atop the Motivation 2.0 platform. And it was widely and quickly adopted. Workers, this approach held, were like parts in a complicated machine. If they did the right work in the right way at the right time, the machine would function smoothly. And to ensure that happened, you simply rewarded the behavior you sought and punished the behavior you discouraged. People would respond rationally to these external forces—these extrinsic motivators—and both they and the system itself would flourish.

The Motivation 2.0 operating system has endured for a very long time. Indeed, it is so deeply embedded in our lives that most of us scarcely recognize that it exists. For as long as any of us can remember, we’ve configured our organizations and constructed our lives around its bedrock assumption: The way to improve performance, increase productivity, and encourage excellence is to reward the good and punish the bad.”

PROBLEMS WITH MOTIVATION 2.0

1. “Suppose somebody gives me ten dollars and tells me to share it—some, all, or none—with you. If you accept my offer, we both get to keep the money. If you reject it, neither of us gets anything. If I offered you six dollars (keeping four for myself), would you take it? Almost certainly. If I offered you five, you’d probably take that, too. But what if I offered you two dollars? Would you take it? In an experiment replicated around the world, most people rejected offers of two dollars and below. That makes no sense in terms of wealth maximization. If you take my offer of two dollars, you’re two dollars richer. If you reject it, you get nothing. Your cognitive calculator knows two is greater than zero—but because you’re a human being, your notions of fair play or your desire for revenge or your simple irritation overrides it.

2. Begin with complexity. Behavioral scientists often divide what we do on the job or learn in school into two categories: “algorithmic” and “heuristic.” An
algorithmic task is one in which you follow a set of established instructions down a single pathway to one conclusion. That is, there’s an algorithm for solving it. A heuristic task is the opposite. Precisely because no algorithm exists for it, you have to experiment with possibilities and devise a novel solution. Working as a grocery checkout clerk is mostly algorithmic. You do pretty much the same thing over and over in a certain way. Creating an ad campaign is mostly heuristic. You have to come up with something new.

The implications for motivation are vast. Researchers such as Harvard Business School’s Teresa Amabile have found that external rewards and punishments—both carrots and sticks—can work nicely for algorithmic tasks. But they can be devastating for heuristic ones. Those sorts of challenges—solving novel problems or creating something the world didn’t know it was missing—depend heavily on Harlow’s third drive. Amabile calls it the intrinsic motivation principle of creativity, which holds, in part: ‘Intrinsic motivation is conducive to creativity; controlling extrinsic motivation is detrimental to creativity.’ In other words, the central tenets of Motivation 2.0 may actually impair performance of the heuristic, right-brain work on which modern economies depend.”

**MOTIVATING WITH “IF-THEN” REWARDS: CARROT AND STICK PROBLEMS**

‘‘If-then’ rewards require people to forfeit some of their autonomy. Like the gentlemen driving carriages for money instead of fun, they’re no longer fully controlling their lives. And that can spring a hole in the bottom of their motivational bucket, draining an activity of its enjoyment.”

“Amabile and others have found that extrinsic rewards can be effective for algorithmic tasks—those that depend on following an existing formula to its logical conclusion. But for more right-brain undertakings—those that demand flexible problem-solving, inventiveness, or conceptual understanding—contingent rewards can be dangerous. Rewarded subjects often have a harder time seeing the periphery and crafting original solutions. This, too, is one of the sturdiest findings in social science—especially as Amabile and others have refined it over the years.10 For artists, scientists, inventors, schoolchildren, and the rest of us, intrinsic motivation—the drive to do something because it is interesting, challenging, and absorbing—is essential for high levels of creativity. But the ‘if-then’ motivators that are the staple of most businesses often stifle, rather than stir, creative thinking. As the economy moves toward more right-brain, conceptual work—as more of us deal with our own versions of the candle problem—this might be the most alarming gap between what science knows and what business does.”

“...mixing rewards with inherently interesting, creative, or noble tasks—deploying them without understanding the peculiar science of motivation—is a very dangerous game. When used in these situations, ‘if-then’ rewards usually do more harm than good. By neglecting the ingredients of genuine motivation—autonomy, mastery, and purpose—they limit what each of us can achieve.”
“The problem with making an extrinsic reward the only destination that matters is that some people will choose the quickest route there, even if it means taking the low road...Contrast that approach with behavior sparked by intrinsic motivation. When the reward is the activity itself—deepening learning, delighting customers, doing one’s best—there are no shortcuts. The only route to the destination is the high road. In some sense, it’s impossible to act unethically because the person who’s disadvantaged isn’t a competitor but yourself.”

**CARROTS AND STICKS: The Seven Deadly Flaws OF ‘If-Then’ Reward Systems**

1. They can extinguish intrinsic motivation.
2. They can diminish performance.
3. They can crush creativity.
4. They can crowd out good behavior.
5. They can encourage cheating, shortcuts, and unethical behavior.
6. They can become addictive.
7. They can foster short-term thinking.

**When carrots and sticks might work:**
“Glucksberg’s experiment provides the first question you should ask when contemplating external motivators: **Is the task at hand routine?** That is, does accomplishing it require following a prescribed set of rules to a specified end? For routine tasks, which aren’t very interesting and don’t demand much creative thinking, rewards can provide a small motivational booster shot without the harmful side effects.

While such tangible, contingent rewards can often undermine intrinsic motivation and creativity, those drawbacks matter less here. The assignment neither inspires deep passion nor requires deep thinking. Carrots, in this case, won’t hurt and might help. And you’ll increase your chances of success by supplementing the poster-packing rewards with three important practices:

- **Offer a rationale for why the task is necessary.** A job that’s not inherently interesting can become more meaningful, and therefore more engaging, if it’s part of a larger purpose. Explain why this poster is so important and why sending it out now is critical to your organization’s mission.
- **Acknowledge that the task is boring.** This is an act of empathy, of course. And the acknowledgment will help people understand why this is the rare instance when “if-then” rewards are part of how your organization operates.
- **Allow people to complete the task their own way.** Think autonomy, not control. State the outcome you need. But instead of specifying precisely the way to reach it—how each poster must be rolled and how each mailing label must be affixed—give them freedom over how they do the job.”

“This is a crucial research insight. The science shows that it is possible—though tricky—to incorporate rewards into non-routine, more creative settings without causing a cascade of damage.”
“The essential requirement: Any extrinsic reward should be unexpected and offered only after the task is complete...In other words, where “if-then” rewards are a mistake, shift to “now that” rewards—as in “Now that you’ve finished the poster and it turned out so well, I’d like to celebrate by taking you out to lunch”...But keep in mind one ginormous caveat: Repeated “now that” bonuses can quickly become expected “if-then” entitlements—which can ultimately crater effective performance...First, consider nontangible rewards. Praise and positive feedback are much less corrosive than cash and trophies. In fact, in Deci’s original experiments, and in his subsequent analysis of other studies, he found that ‘positive feedback can have an enhancing effect on intrinsic motivation.’ “

“...Second, provide useful information. Amabile has found that while controlling extrinsic motivators can clobber creativity, ‘informational or enabling motivators can be conducive’ to it. In the workplace, people are thirsting to learn about how they’re doing, but only if the information isn’t a tacit effort to manipulate their behavior. So don’t tell the design team: ‘That poster was perfect. You did it exactly the way I asked.’ Instead, give people meaningful information about their work. The more feedback focuses on specifics (“great use of color”)—and the more the praise is about effort and strategy rather than about achieving a particular outcome—the more effective it can be.”

“In brief, for creative, right-brain, heuristic tasks, you’re on shaky ground offering ‘if-then’ rewards. You’re better off using ‘now that’ rewards. And you’re best off if your ‘now that’ rewards provide praise, feedback, and useful information.”

**TYPE I (INTRINSIC) MOTIVATION & SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY**

SDT (self-determination theory), by contrast, begins with a notion of universal human needs. It argues that we have three innate psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When those needs are satisfied, we’re motivated, productive, and happy. When they’re thwarted, our motivation, productivity, and happiness plummet.

Human beings have an innate inner drive to be autonomous, self-determined, and connected to one another. And when that drive is liberated, people achieve more and live richer lives.

**Ultimately, Type I behavior depends on three nutrients: autonomy, mastery, and purpose.** Type I behavior is self-directed. It is devoted to becoming better and better at something that matters. And it connects that quest for excellence to a larger purpose.

“...what a few future-facing businesses are discovering is that one of these essential features is autonomy—in particular, autonomy over four aspects of work: what people do, when they do it, how they do it, and whom they do it with. As Atlassian’s experience
shows, Type I behavior emerges when people have autonomy over the four T’s: their task, their time, their technique, and their team.”

**MOTIVATION AND THE CONCEPT OF “FLOW”**

"Most important, in flow, the relationship between what a person had to do and what he could do was perfect. The challenge wasn’t too easy. Nor was it too difficult. It was a notch or two beyond his current abilities, which stretched the body and mind in a way that made the effort itself the most delicious reward. That balance produced a degree of focus and satisfaction that easily surpassed other, more quotidian, experiences. In flow, people lived so deeply in the moment, and felt so utterly in control, that their sense of time, place, and even self melted away. They were autonomous, of course. But more than that, they were engaged. They were, as the poet W. H. Auden wrote, ‘forgetting themselves in a function.’"

**MOTIVATION AND THE “GROWTH MINDSET”**

"... consider goals. Dweck says they come in two varieties—performance goals and learning goals. Getting an A in French class is a performance goal. Being able to speak French is a learning goal. ‘Both goals are entirely normal and pretty much universal,’ Dweck says, ‘and both can fuel achievement.’ But only one leads to mastery.

In several studies, Dweck found that giving children a performance goal (say, getting a high mark on a test) was effective for relatively straightforward problems but often inhibited children’s ability to apply the concepts to new situations. For example, in one study, Dweck and a colleague asked junior high students to learn a set of scientific principles, giving half of the students a performance goal and half a learning goal. After both groups demonstrated they had grasped the material, researchers asked the students to apply their knowledge to a new set of problems, related but not identical to what they’d just studied. Students with learning goals scored significantly higher on these novel challenges. They also worked longer and tried more solutions. As Dweck writes, ‘With a learning goal, students don’t have to feel that they’re already good at something in order to hang in and keep trying. After all, their goal is to learn, not to prove they’re smart.’"

“Indeed, the two self-theories take very different views of effort. To incremental theorists, exertion is positive. Since incremental theorists believe that ability is malleable, they see working harder as a way to get better. By contrast, says Dweck, ‘the entity theory . . . is a system that requires a diet of easy successes.’ In this schema, if you have to work hard, it means you’re not very good. People therefore choose easy targets that, when hit, affirm their existing abilities but do little to expand them. In a sense, entity theorists want to look like masters without expending the effort to attain mastery.”

**FLOW AND "GRIT"**

"As wonderful as flow is, the path to mastery—becoming ever better at something you care about—is not lined with daisies and spanned by a rainbow. If it were, more of us
would make the trip. Mastery hurts. Sometimes—many times—it’s not much fun...the West Point grit researchers found that **grittiness—rather than IQ or standardized test scores—is the most accurate predictor of college grades.** As they explained, ‘Whereas the importance of working harder is easily apprehended, the importance of working longer without switching objectives may be less perceptible . . . in every field, grit may be as essential as talent to high accomplishment.’”

"As Carol Dweck says, ‘Effort is one of the things that gives meaning to life. Effort means you care about something, that something is important to you and you are willing to work for it. It would be an impoverished existence if you were not willing to value things and commit yourself to working toward them.’ Another doctor, one who lacks a Ph.D. but has a plaque in the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts, put it similarly. ‘Being a professional,’ Julius Erving once said, ‘is doing the things you love to do, on the days you don’t feel like doing them.’”

“This is the nature of mastery: Mastery is an asymptote. You can approach it. You can home in on it. You can get really, really, really close to it. But like Cézanne, you can never touch it. Mastery is impossible to realize fully. Great athletes often say that they can—that they must—become better. They say it when they’re amateurs. They say it after their best outing or at the end of their finest season. They’re pursuing mastery. That’s well-known. What’s less well-known is that they understand that they’ll never get it. It will always hover beyond their grasp. The mastery asymptote is a source of frustration. Why reach for something you can never fully attain? But it’s also a source of allure. Why not reach for it? The joy is in the pursuit more than the realization. In the end, mastery attracts precisely because mastery eludes.”

“In business, we tend to obsess over the ‘how’—as in ‘Here’s how to do it.’ Yet we rarely discuss the ‘why’—as in ‘Here’s why we’re doing it.’ But it’s often difficult to do something exceptionally well if we don’t know the reasons we’re doing it in the first place. People at work are thirsting for context, yearning to know that what they do contributes to a larger whole. And a powerful way to provide that context is to spend a little less time telling how and a little more time showing why.”