

Motivation

When we ask participants how motivation feels, they usually come up with things like: high energy, happy, satisfied, in control, sense of achievement. In short: motivation feels great! The bad news is that you cannot motivate other people – they can only motivate themselves.

What you can do, as a leader, is to ensure that your people have the appropriate environment in which they can themselves feel motivated. The American psychologist Frederik Herzberg provides a useful model (shown below) for ensuring that such an environment is in place, and for trouble-shooting with a team member what is missing for them if they are currently struggling with their levels of motivation.

Meaning/Context

We need to understand why our work is meaningful and the context in which we are doing it. How are we advancing knowledge? How are we contributing to the research vision of the lab?

TIP: It's easy to lose sight of these things, so it's sometimes enough simply to remind a team member of the bigger picture.

Feedback

We need to see that both we and our work are successful: Experiments are going well, we publish in a good journal, we present the work at a conference. It also means that we need to receive detailed, positive feedback from our boss or peers.

TIP: If a team member's experiments are failing, try giving them extra technical support and/or praise their perseverance and dedication.

MOTIVATION FACTORS

Happy

In Control

High Energy

FEELING
HIGHLY
MOTIVATED

Achievement

Satisfied

Focused

HYGIENE FACTORS

Situational Control

We need to have sufficient resources to undertake our work: The appropriate skills, knowledge and experience, the right equipment and materials, enough time, and a balance between freedom and supervision (the right balance will be different for each person).

TIP: If a team member is reluctant to undertake work, find out what's holding them back and address what they need to restore situational control.

Belonging/Recognition

We need to belong to a group and have our contributions recognized. Regular meetings are important to acknowledge hard work. Social events are also important (e.g. celebrating birthdays or published papers).

TIP: A lack of belonging outside the lab can also impact work. Give the person time to process what is going on; they will be appreciative and motivated when they have resolved their personal issues.

Frederick Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivation Theory

Herzberg worked with 200 employees in Pittsburgh in the 1950s to discover their attitudes to their jobs, what led to these attitudes, and how this affected their motivation. He identified two main areas: Hygiene Factors and Motivation Factors. When Hygiene Factors

are missing, we experience dissatisfaction and struggle to feel motivated. When Motivation Factors are present, we experience satisfaction and are capable of even higher levels of motivation. All of these factors together contribute to motivation and the feelings that accompany it.