

Employee motivation: A powerful new model

By Nitin Nohria, Boris Groysberg, Linda Elling Lee, Harvard Business Review, July-August, 2008

There are four commonly measured workplace indicators of motivation: **engagement, satisfaction, commitment** and **intention to quit**.

- Engagement represents the energy, effort and initiative employees bring to their jobs.
- Satisfaction reflects the extent to which employees feel that the company meets their expectations at work and satisfies its implicit contracts with them.
- Commitment captures the extent to which employees engage in corporate citizenship.
- Intention to quit is the best proxy for employee turnover.

The four drives

Four drives underlie motivation: drive to acquire, drive to bond, drive to comprehend and drive to defend.

The drive to acquire

We all want to get hold of scarce goods that improve our sense of wellbeing. This drive tends to be relative and insatiable. We tend to compare what we have with what others have. And we also keep wanting more and more.

The drive to bond

We like to bond with other people. The drive to bond is associated with strong positive emotions like love and caring. The drive to bond accounts for the increase in motivation when we feel proud of belonging to the organization. Fulfilling the drive to bond has the greatest impact on employee commitment.

The drive to comprehend

We want to make sense of the world around us. We want to find meaning in our job. We are motivated by jobs that challenge us and enable us to grow and learn. We are demoralized by monotonous work. Fulfilling the drive to comprehend has a great impact on employee engagement.

The drive to defend

This drive is rooted in the basic fight or flight response common to most animals. When this drive is fulfilled, we feel secure and confident. When this

drive is not fulfilled, we feel afraid and resentful. The drive to defend explains why we are hesitant to change.

Each of the four drives is independent. They cannot be substituted or ordered hierarchically. To fully motivate employees, we must address all the four drives.

The organizational levers of motivation

Each drive is met by a distinct lever.

The drive to acquire is best addressed by the reward system. Rewards must be tied to performance and the best people given opportunities for advancement.

The best way to address the drive to bond is to foster a culture that promotes teamwork, collaboration, openness and friendship.

To make sure that the drive to comprehend is fulfilled, the company must design jobs that are meaningful, interesting and challenging.

To address the drive to defend, companies must put in place fair, trustworthy and transparent processes for performance management and resource allocation.

The role of the direct manager

Employees attach a lot of importance to how their managers try to address the four drives. They believe that the manager has some control over how the company's policies are implemented. Managers may not be able to change substantially the company's compensation policies or culture. But in areas such as praise, recognition and distribution of assignments, they can demonstrate that they know how to distinguish between the top and bottom performers. Managers can also signal that they want teamwork and take steps to make the jobs more meaningful and interesting. Employees expect their managers to address all the four drives within the constraints imposed by the organization. Employees are realistic, not only about what managers cannot do but also about what they can do to satisfy the four drives. Individual managers influence overall employee motivation as much as any organizational policy does.