



INFLUENCING FOR PERFORMANCE

Reflecting on basic needs

1. How well are you looking after renewal (physical) needs at work? What steps are you taking to ensure you and your people are regularly recharging and refreshing? For example, are there regular breaks and changes in pace? Importantly, do people appear chained to their desks, or is there obvious movement during the day?
2. How emotionally invested are people in their jobs? Is there passion and enthusiasm or are people clearly disengaged? Specifically, what intentional activities are in place to build and/or sustain emotional connection with work and the organisation?
3. What about focus (mental aspects)? Does the climate allow people to focus on getting their job done or do organisational distractions (such as negative politicking or micro managing) get in the way?
4. How connected are your people with the purpose and strategy of the organisation? Does the work build up or break down the sense of meaning and purpose?

The basic premise is pretty simple

Although businesses may describe success quite differently, they all share a basic, even simple premise. Business activities must deliver results. High-performing organisations manage, usually with persistent effort, to craft a pretty clear picture of the business outcomes required. Essentially, the business side of the equation is quite straight forward.

But almost all organisations rely profoundly on people (rather than machines only) to deliver these desired business outcomes. It is the aggregate of individual performances that determines the extent to which desired organisational outcomes are achieved. But as anyone who has been accountable for results knows all too well, this (human) side of the organisational performance equation is usually extremely complex.

On the organisational side of the equation, individuals pursue shared organisational goals and collective efforts align to deliver desired organisational results. On the employee side of the equation though, each individual has their own personal goals and expectations which need to be met if effort is to be sustained. So, even in small organisations, there is likely to be a very large and complex variation in individual motivators.

Four basic categories of motivators

One obvious way of managing complexity is to simplify where possible. One way of simplifying thinking about the complex topic of human needs comes from a recent study by performance consultant, Tony Schwartz, and his academic collaborator, Christine Porath. From a worldwide sample of over 19,000, mostly white-collar employees, researchers suggest performance is improved and sustained when four basic needs are met.

First there is the category of physical wellbeing, equating at work to renewal. That means taking regular breaks to recharge! Schwartz and Porath found that people taking a break every 90 minutes fared a lot better than those who took no breaks, or only one, during the day. Those taking regular breaks reported a 46% higher level of health and well-being and, somewhat unsurprisingly, an almost 50% greater capacity to think more creatively. Since many people are knowledge workers of some kind, renewal is especially significant.

The second basic area of need is emotional. In a work context, feeling valued is especially important. This aligns closely with UGM's contributing-belonging model of motivation and performance, discussed in previous briefings. Those with supportive bosses are 67% more engaged and 1.3 times as likely to remain with the business.

The third basic need is 'mental' and, in the work context, this involves feeling able to focus mental effort on what needs to be done and deciding on the best way to do it. Schwartz and Porath report that only 20% of respondents felt they were able to focus on one task at a time, with that group reporting feeling 50% more engaged at work.

Finally, there is the 'spiritual' need, or feeling that contributions are meaningful and connected to a higher purpose (i.e. something beyond 'self'). Staff who feel they're doing meaningful and significant work are 1.4 times more engaged and have 1.7 times the job satisfaction compared with colleagues who don't have the same sense of purpose.

The multiplier effect of meeting basic needs

Perhaps the most interesting results from the basic needs study was the cumulative impact of the four categories of motivators on six important performance related metrics. The metrics are engagement, likelihood of retention, stress reduction, focus, life satisfaction and positive energy at work.

Looking at engagement, when one basic need was met, engagement jumped by 50%. When all four basic needs were met, engagement surged to 125% compared with those who had none of the basic needs met. Meeting one of the needs saw 'focus' jump more than 25%. Meeting three of the four basic needs saw that benefit rise to more than 200% compared with those who had no basic needs met. Results were similar for likelihood of retention, expect that meeting just a single basic need contributed to a massive 50% increase in likelihood of retention.

Are businesses meeting these basic needs?

As obvious as these needs may appear, and despite the value they return, many organisations are doing very poorly at meeting even basic needs. For example, only 18% of people reported having regular time for creative or strategic thinking, compared with 70% who said they did not. One third said they had opportunities to do what they most enjoyed, but almost 60% said this was not the case for them. Astoundingly (though it didn't surprise us!) only a quarter of people felt connected to their company mission, with half reporting they did not feel connected! And, it's not much better at the micro-level: only 36% said they were able to prioritise their tasks, with 46% stating they weren't able to do that at work.

How does your business fare in meeting the basic needs of individuals? Being introspective for a moment, how well are those needs being met for you, no matter what your level. If those needs are not being met there will be an impact on sustained performance - your own or those who report to you.