



## Motivators Matter

Utilizing motivators to inspire employee engagement and performance

*By Barry He*

Everyone comes to the workplace with a unique personality and set of characteristics, preferences and values. These personal variations can diversify a team and make it more dynamic and lively, but they can also become the source of conflict, detachment, procrastination, poor performance, dissatisfaction and staff turnover if leaders fail to manage these diverse teams the right way.

Dr. William James (1842–1910), a pioneering American psychologist and philosopher from Harvard University, discovered that individuals only perform at 20 to 30 percent of their potential when unmotivated; however, they can perform at 80 to 90 percent of their potential when highly motivated. This reveals the importance of motivation-based employee management, and it also indicates that we can increase an employee's total performance by 50 to 70 percent.

With ENGAGEMENT and RETENTION becoming so important in an organization's human capital management, managers and human resource professionals need to be highly effective in discovering what truly motivates employees to perform their best.

### WHAT IS A MOTIVATOR?

“Motivator” is derived from the word “motive,” which describes needs, desires, wants or drives within individuals. It is the process of stimulating people to action and, ultimately, to accomplish goals.

Motivators are widely understood and applied in many different areas. In the business organizational context, motivators are the psychological factors stimulating people's behaviors, actions and performance. Therefore, one of the most important functions of management is to create a willingness amongst employees to perform to the best of their abilities. It is no surprise that the role of a leader is to create motivators that inspire employees to higher performance levels.

### IDENTIFYING MOTIVATORS

A lot of people believe natural motivators are money, success, recognition and a sense of belonging to a group, among others, and there are many surveys that attempt to summarize employee motivations. We at People Momentum recommend looking at

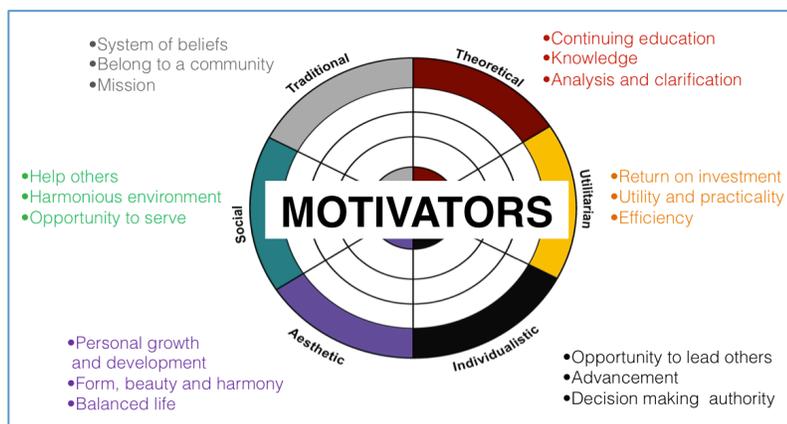
motivators from a deeper perspective: What motivates individuals comes from their values and attitudes.



In the book, *Types of Men*, Dr. Eduard Spranger (1882–1963), a German philosopher and psychologist, explained that there are six value-based motivators. These different motivators are interlinked together—with a person's top two motivators influencing the other four—to drive human actions and behaviors.

The six value-based motivators are:

- The **theoretical**, whose dominant interests are learning and discovery of truth
- The **utilitarian**, which is interested in what is practical and useful
- The **individualistic**, whose interests are primarily in power, influence and reputation
- The **aesthetic**, whose highest values are form and harmony
- The **social**, whose highest values are love of people and helping others
- The **traditional**, whose highest values are unity, rules and regulations



## THE VALUE OF MOTIVATOR MANAGEMENT

Motivation is important to **an individual** because:

1. Motivators help people achieve personal goals.
2. Individuals who are motivated are highly likely to have job satisfaction.
3. Motivators help with individual self-development.
4. Individuals typically benefit from working with a dynamic, motivated team.

Similarly, motivation is important to **a business** because:

1. Motivators drive sustained individual actions beyond that achieved through external carrot and stick approaches.
2. Motivators improve employee efficiency levels.

3. Achievement of organizational goals is more likely when using motivators.
4. Employees who are motivated tend to build friendly relationships.
5. Workforce stability is often achieved when the team is motivated.

Many business organizations, such as Starbucks, eBay, Kraft Foods, Avon and many others, have applied motivator-based management and achieved great success, both in creating a higher level of employee engagement and gaining organizational competitiveness.

## MANAGING MOTIVATORS AT WORK

Dr. Gordon Willard Allport (1897–1967), who held a PhD in psychology from Harvard, extended the study of Dr. Spranger and applied it to business. And Dr. Bill Bonnstetter, the founder of Target Training International, created the online motivator test in 1990 to help people understand their own motives and values through a 15-minute questionnaire. Throughout the years, organizations have found the questionnaire insightful in empowering and stimulating employee performance.

Let's look at the practical part of the motivator: How do managers and human resource professionals use value-based motivators at work? There are three primary areas for organizational application.

1. **Hiring and Selection** – Most people understand that employee engagement and performance comes from the right talent-job fit, and motivators are the key element in the matching process. For example, if you are hiring a sales engineer, the tendency is to think about what the position offers and match it with what the candidate values or is personally motivated by. Years of research spent decoding the DNA of top B2B sales performers in China showed that a high economic and high theoretical motivator combination (a person driving for economical returns and continuous learning and knowledge) gives a sales engineer candidate a higher chance to succeed in this position.
2. **Team and Individual Performance Management** – Managers will design work content and set goals for an employee. Based on the motivators, managers can set inspirational goals that trigger employees to fully utilize their individual potential. For example, with a high social motivator employee in HR, a manager could encourage him/her to take more responsibility in helping the staff and organization to grow. Also, by setting motivator-related performance goals, the employee will feel empowered to take deliberate actions, and all managers need to do is coach and support.
3. **Development and Career Management** – The ability to have motivator-based developmental conversations is vital to management effectiveness. As managers, we need to understand what each individual employee values and needs and then match them with developmental opportunities. We must also continue supporting them as they move toward their desired careers—preferably inside the company.

There are other application areas at work such as team culture management, conflict management, change and project assignment, among other areas. The key to

management success is in understanding motivators and being able to link individual motivators with work performance stimulators.

## **EVERYONE IS UNIQUE**

We should always bear in mind that everyone is unique and different. Therefore, motivators are not used to label people, but to deeply understand them and empower them to continually seek their passions and increase drive toward their desired achievements.

***Barry He** is the Senior Vice President of Business Development for Excelements China and a Partner of People Momentum Management Consulting.*

*Price Associates is affiliated with Excelements China and People Momentum Management Consulting. Ron Price, CEO of Price Associates, also serves as the Chair for Excelements China and is a Consulting Partner of People Momentum Management Consulting. For more information, email [info@price-associates.com](mailto:info@price-associates.com)*