

WE MAINTAIN OUR MACHINES BETTER THAN WE MAINTAIN OUR PEOPLE

The Motivational Engine

Paul Herr

According to Gallup, only 17% of employees in the U.K. are emotionally invested in and focused on creating value for their organisations every day¹. If this were an exam, 17% would equate to an 'F'. I can therefore state with some confidence that modern best practices earn failing grades in 'Basic Employee Motivation'

Let's compare how companies treat their manufacturing equipment to how they treat their employees — their *human* capital. The difference is enlightening.



Imagine that we are standing in a factory manager's office. Now let's ask the manager a basic question, "Is your machinery operating at its rated capacity or is it malfunctioning?" The manager might calmly turn to his computer, pull up a few graphs, and answer confidently, "Everything is functioning according to specifications."

'The sad fact is, we treat our manufacturing equipment far better than we treat our employees'

Companies earn high grades for monitoring and maintaining their manufacturing equipment. Skilled technicians are assigned to monitor and maintain the factory's machinery. The machines themselves are fitted with sensors that track key operating parameters. These parameters are plotted second-by-second on control charts to monitor whether the machinery is operating as expected. Whenever these parameters drift outside of their normal ranges, the machines are stopped, and preventative maintenance is performed. The factory manager, in other words, has lots of diagnostic information at his fingertips and does a marvellous job maintaining the manufacturing equipment.

Now let's ask the manager, "How is your human capital functioning — your people?" The startled manager might answer, "Err, what do you mean?" It may not even occur to the manager that people can malfunction just as easily as the machines they operate — and that they too require monitoring and maintenance. According to Gallup, the financial fallout from failing to perform routine maintenance on our people is measured in legions of disengaged employees and in many millions of pounds of lost productivity.

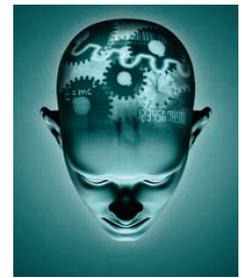
Let's dig a little deeper into this disparity between the way our manufacturing equipment is treated and the way our employees are treated, because it leads to a startling conclusion — modern organisations don't understand human nature, don't understand the motivational engine that drives high performance, fail to monitor the motivational engine, and fail to perform routine preventative maintenance to keep employees operating at their best.

What's the horsepower of your engine?

Human beings, just like factory machines, are equipped with sensors that measure their state-of-repair. The output signals from these sensors are motivating feelings of pleasure and pain. When we feel good,

we are operating at our rated capacity, and when we feel bad, we are malfunctioning. I developed a simple survey to capture these pleasurable and painful feelings and summarise them as 'motivational horsepower'. I recommend that companies measure their motivational horsepower monthly and plot the results on a control chart to determine whether their employees are functioning optimally — or malfunctioning. Someday, I predict, all companies will do this.

Motivation is a general energising force that gets everybody to do their jobs faster, better and smarter. If companies can increase this energising force, then every other desirable operational, financial and HR metric should go up with it. This is why I call motivational horsepower the 'master metric' that drives everything else.

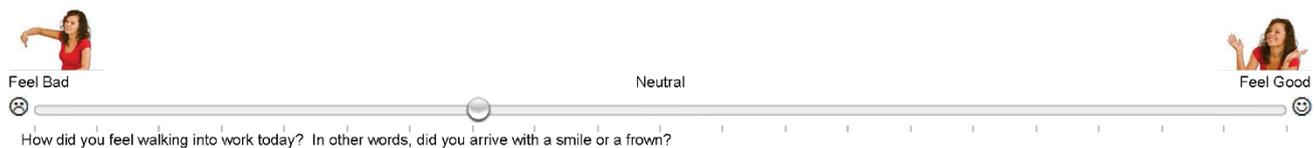


*What's the
Horsepower
of your engine?*

At this point our factory manager might protest, "I'm not as clueless as you suggest. I measure the horsepower of my motivational engine with a yearly employee-engagement survey." To this I would respond, "Measuring motivation annually just doesn't cut it. If your engine is malfunctioning, do you really want to wait a year to find out? Measuring motivation annually is like measuring cash-flow annually. It is downright un-businesslike."

To be honest, we shouldn't be too critical of our factory manager. Motivation is a murky and complex subject that is not taught in business school. Even the scientific community had a muddled understanding of the motivational engine until recently. The bottom line however is clear — if you want to improve productivity, reduce costs, and retain the best people, you need to frequently monitor the state of repair of you engine.

Screen Shot of the Final Question of the Horsepower Survey



I've been studying the motivational engine for 30 years. I know what it looks like and how companies can tap into it. If you'd like to discuss your company's human 'engine', and how to maintain it, please call Tactixⁱⁱ, my UK Partner, for a free consultation.

ⁱ **Gallup Business Journal** : November 2013.

ⁱⁱ Contact Tactix on +44 (0)20 8299 6500