

# Motivation – A Way to Weaken Humans; Some Thoughts for New Millennium Managers

Sunanda Degamboda

Department of Industrial Management, University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

## Abstract

Conventional approaches to motivation use external stimuli, tangible or perceived, as the instrument of motivation, and these approaches may produce incongruence in our value system, and trigger off stress and related mental and physical disorders. Higher human output is safely and best achieved through harmonizing the external stimuli with physical and physiological needs and the value base of workers. Some recently emerging approaches in the West have explicitly departed from conventional confinements, but without significant success. A new wave of thoughts that relies on inner resident energy of man is sweeping the Western management arena. This new wave of thoughts which draws parallels to insight akin to Buddhism, may pave a way for a paradigm shift in motivation theory in the new millennium.

## Introduction

The author attempts to explain the incompatibility of conventional motivation theories with basic human values, and develops a conceptual framework for making workers "self motivated", or motivated by their own value system. The supportive external environment too is emphasized. Motivation is discussed in an organizational context, and emphasis is placed on business organizations. The author does not discard the conventional theories, which were useful within the contingencies that prevailed at the time each theory was born, and for a limited period of time. The validity of this statement is seen by the fact that theories on human motivation have been subjected to evolution, modification, and sometimes rejection, with the passage of time.

The question is then, should we forego human motivation? The answer is a clear no, because directed human motivation is a fundamental imperative for the human society to grow in terms of knowledge & skills, wealth, and social welfare. This research paper attempts to explain that when external stimuli alone are used to motivate workers, a second party imposed conditions often create incongruence with personal, family, social, and value system of the worker, which in the long run produce adverse effects on the person and the organization.

## Beginnings of the Motivation

Motivating people in an organizational context occupies the central focus of modern management thoughts. Management thoughts have continued to recognize the **motivated individual** in the organization as the key to goal achievement. In essence, the scientific management approach of Frederick Taylor, known as the beginning of modern management thoughts, was an attempt to increase output by motivating the work force. Environmental setting and training of workers were supplementary measures to achieve a greater output. The socio economic imperatives for new thoughts on management were

created by the industrial revolution that catalyzed and sparked industrial growth. The economic growth that followed the industrial revolution influenced on many facets of human life. History illustrates that modern management thoughts began a long evolutionary journey around 1856. This evolution started with a sharp focus on the "efficiency" of the individual in the organization. Later, the individual's significance was dissolved in group significance. Finally, and again, the focus has been shifted back to the individual, but this time the individual is viewed in a different perspective. The new perspective of the individual makes him an entity within which an enormous amount of inner energy that consists of creativity, innovation, greater output, and power to influence others by "radiating" his inner energy resides.

However, and lamentably, while approaches to management have made an upward shift, paradigms of motivation have only moved in a circle, without a forward movement leading to a shift of paradigms. The objective of this research article is to show that conventional ways of motivating that developed in the West have not advanced to break the conventional conceptual framework for motivating workers. The researcher goes further to show that conventional Western methods of motivation dampen the true potential and creativity of workers, and weaken them in the long run. The article explains that a new approach to motivation based on neuro-biological findings, brain functions, and mind processes is emerging in the West. This new wave of thoughts precipitates, or at least draws parallels, with the concept of insight akin to Buddhism, and is expected to pave the way to a paragon motivation theory in the new millennium.

### **Shifts in Theories of Motivation**

Socio-economic imperatives that prompted shifts in management thoughts permeated into the arena of motivation, which is a sub region of organizational management. The basis underlying conventional motivation theories and approaches can be understood by classifying various approaches to motivation into different perspectives. Such a classification has been given by Ricky Griffin (Griffin, 1990) who identifies three perspectives of motivation theories.

The content perspective on motivation attempts to find factors and variables that influence worker motivation. Two widely known content perspectives on motivation are Abraham Maslow's need hierarchy model and Frederick Herzberg's two factor theory. The lesser known ERG theory (introduced by Clayton Alderfer) is another content perspective which suggest that people's needs are grouped into three possibly overlapping categories: existence, relatedness, and growth. These content perspectives have good explanatory powers but lack application orientation and capacity.

Perhaps due to these shortcomings, the content approach shifted towards a process perspective. The process perspective focuses on why people choose certain behavioural options to fulfill their needs and how they evaluate their satisfaction after they have attained these goals. The Expectancy Theory of Victor Vroom is perhaps the first significant process perspective that rest on four basic variables. First, Vroom assumes that behaviour is determined by a combination of forces in the individual and in the environment. Second, he assumes that people make decisions about their own behaviour in organizations. Third, he assumes that different people have different types of needs, desires, and goals. Fourth, expectancy theory assumes that people make choices from

among alternative plans of behaviour based on their perceptions of the extent to which a given behaviour will lead to outcomes (Vroom, 1964). Two other theories: Equity Theory (developed by Stacy Adams) and Attribution Theory too may be included in the process perspective.

Reinforcement perspective explains the role of those rewards as they cause behaviour to change or remain the same over time. All of these perspectives take the view that the individual in his present state of performance is "weak", and planned attempts to induce will and operational efficiency through external stimulants are needed to reach organizational goals. Furthermore, there is no reference, or even a reflection, on the possible long run effects on the individual of increasingly high levels of externally stimulated motivation and the demand placed on him for increasingly large outputs.

### **Conventional Motivation and Welfare of Workers**

An analysis of the above mentioned motivation methods shows that they are based on four passive assumptions: (i) First, the target of motivation is the individual. Conventional theories assume that organizations will achieve pre-determined goals better when individuals are motivated to a higher level, (ii) Second, these theories assume that the individual is inherently weak and his capacity could be enhanced by external manipulation, (iii) the instrument of motivation is external stimuli, tangible, perceived, or expected, and (iv) all conventional approaches to motivation use a pre-determined goal and direction for the individual, determined mostly by the motivator(s). Is it possible to "motivate" a person and gain lasting benefits through external stimuli, real or perceived? By benefits it is meant both, benefits to the individual and the organization, particularly in the long run. If motivation is defined in a narrow sense as "achieving desired goals through greater output of individuals", such targets may be achieved through conventional motivational approaches but the cost at which such targets are achieved is often neglected, or not appreciated.

It is now accepted that intense attempts at motivating the work force may conflict with the worker's neuro-biological system, brain functions, and the state of mind. Such conflicts produce "stress triggers", and the worker who develop stress triggers will develop mental disorders such as anxiety, stress, and depression. A large number of work related stress triggers have been identified. Some of the more important work related stress triggers are unclear instructions, long work hours, inadequate, delayed, or inaccurate information, crisis, deadlines, monotonous repetition, desire to compete, boredom, little authority, and the like (Rix, 1997). Conventional ways of motivation are bound to create a myriad of these unintentional triggers. It is lamentable that motivators have failed to identify and appreciate these unintentional but traumatic effects produced by attempts at motivating workers. In essence, conventional approaches to motivate a person fertilize the individual's desire to fulfill egoistic needs. Ego building process may result, depending on the success or failure perceived and/or experienced by the individual, either in aggressive or passive behaviour. Either of these behaviour reinforces that particular behaviour and impedes the individual's wholesome development as a member of the organization (Back and Back, 1992).

An argument in favour of conventional motivation approaches is that the worker accepts the motivational attempts "willingly", and ipso-facto will not develop harmful levels of stress. Proponents of this hypothesis are of the view that a

"certain amount" of stress is beneficial in a work situation. " There is no more justification for avoiding stress than for shunning food, exercise, or love. But in order to express yourself fully...." (Selye, 1975). Those who support these arguments seem to be more conscious of the individual's outwardly expressed willingness but ignorant of whether a given motivational attempt would produce a conflict in the neuro-biological system, brain functions, and thought process. Susanne Rix gives a balanced view on this argument. " If there is insufficient motivation or challenge, the stress of boredom and apathy inhibits performance, ensuring that peak performance is impossible. At the other end of the spectrum, when the individual has moved beyond their optimum stress level, or the pressure is allowed to accumulate, peak performance is again impossible. We must therefore find out optimum level of stimulation (Rix, 1997)"

It is found that conflicts in the neuro-biological system, brain functions, and thought process could produce negative effects that lead to mental disorders and subsequent loss of appetite for work. The "super managers" who achieved unusual success through extremely productive work have done so due to their ability to harness the enormous power resident in the mind. Richard Bandler and John Grinder explored into the mechanism of how some high achievers managed situations, particularly situations of change. Bandler's and Grinder's research gave rise to a new vista of personal development known as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (Shapiro, 1998). They concluded that attempts at inducing a person through external stimuli and simultaneously creating what we call a "conducive work environment" would not solve the managerial problem of making people to work better. The consequence of external stimuli based motivation, particularly in the long run, has a potential to weaken the workers.

### **Emerging Western Perspectives on Motivation**

Recently, empirical studies on Japanese management and practices of successful companies and managers have given rise to a myriad of new thoughts on management and motivation that prompted growing interest in the West to adapt some of these thoughts. In essence, Japanese management style is founded on their deep seated cultural values. Japanese cultural values often promote group significance and dissolve the individual's significance in the waters of group norms and goals. Japan is an exception where the community focus in business is still preserved by founding their corporate models on the village model where the dominant values are consensus and harmony (McMillan, 1985). The Japanese approach to motivation is not really a theory but a philosophy. The basic idea underlying this philosophy is to bring management and subordinates together as partners (Griffin, 1990). In essence, the Japanese management system discards attempts at motivating the individual, which they perceive as an ego building process, which is not beneficial to the individual or the organization. All conventional motivation theories of Western origin depart from this philosophy of Japanese managers. Western managers have attempted to adapt the Japanese system but have often failed, primarily because the Japanese management system is an integral part of their culture and value system they preserved for a long time. The Western management, on the contrary, is an individualistic system. In effect, the West was venturing to impose a few elements of the Japanese system into a system having a conflicting culture and a value system.

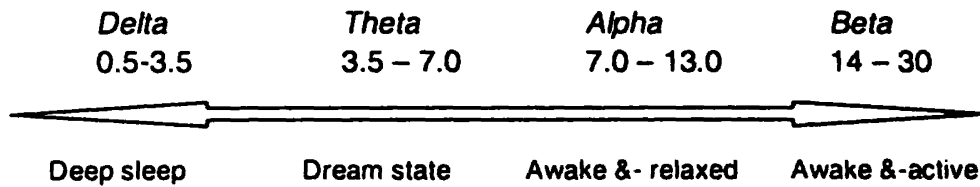
Another perspective emerging in the West is the "character based" motivation where a person's assertiveness is held as most important character type in motivation and leading. Like Herzberg's hygienic factors, which set the arena conducive to motivate a person, assertive character of a person (in contrast to passive and aggressive characters) is the basis for motivating him and make him productive in the long run (Back and Back, 1992). The case of assertiveness as a factor conducive for motivation did not gain much ground because more wholesome and comprehensive theories that have greater application power emerged later.

### **Some Thoughts on Motivation in the New Millennium**

In this section the author intends to present a few significant findings of recent origin from the West and the East on human development and motivation that would be instrumental in developing a motivation theory for the new millennium. Many of these approaches have philosophical or theoretical roots in the Eastern wisdom. These thoughts rely on the resident inner energy of man, resident as potential or dormant energy, and are slowly being transformed into theories and techniques of motivating individuals. Another characteristic of these new thoughts is that they do not impose confinements to the individual's thoughts, directions, and behaviour, but attempt to grow the individual as composite mind-body entity, enveloped in spirituality.

A theory, perhaps better described as a conceptual model, that explain contrasting functions of the left and right hemispheres of the human brain, helps managers to utilize inner energy resident in the brain functions. In simple terms, the left hemisphere of the brain performs logical and analytical functions while the right brain activity promotes emotion and imaginative skills. Some prefer to categorize the two sides of the brain as rational(left) and irrational(right) sides. Researchers such as Springer and Deutsche (Springer and Deutsche, 1989) believe that in the midst of industrial and business development, the human race has been, for centuries, using more of the left side of the brain. Springer and Deutsche advocate the development of "bi-modal" thinking to harness intuitive skills and use them in conjunction with rational skills of the left hemisphere. The Western world seems to have neglected the vast amount of inner energy associated with the right brain. Strategies of thoughts that use imagination, emotion, and sensory skills are largely the domain of the right hemisphere of the brain and have been neglected in Western cultures (Rix, 1997)

Findings on the relationship between brain wave frequency and talents give a very practical method of improving productivity of individuals and groups. Research on talented individuals have revealed that such people were gifted with (or they developed by practice) a low brain wave frequency while awake and active. Figure 1 shows the spectrum of brain waves and the mind state associated with each class of waves. Wave frequency is given in cycles per second. The brain wave frequency of an average person is in the *Beta* range while awake and active. This range represents a high stress span and conventional motivation often leads to *Beta* state of brain wave frequency.



**Figure 1 – State of Mind and Brain Wave Emission**

(Source: Rix Susanne., Super working, S Abdul Majeed & Co., Kuala Lumpur, 1997)

Talented individuals have lower than the normal *Alpha* frequencies, which is a state associated with the individual's ability to relax while being awake and active (eds. Obler & Fein, 1988). This knowledge has given rise to interests in developing techniques by which brain wave activity could be lowered to *alpha* and lower levels, and facilitate creativity and intuition to surface.

Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) is another development within the new wave of thoughts on human development and motivation. The aim of NLP is the inner empowerment of the individual. It provides a model that enhances understanding of one's thinking processes, the way one uses his senses to understand what is happening around him. This is the neuro component of the subject. Second, the linguistic component helps you understand the way you use language and how it influences you and those around you. Third, your behaviour and the way you organize your ideas and actions, which produce expected and unexpected beneficial results (Shapiro, 1998).

There is a myriad of other techniques such as active visualization, creative dreaming, dream incubation and intuition development that are productively used to arouse the inner energy resident in man. A few common features of all of these techniques may be observed. First, these methods do not lead man in a planned direction or towards a pre-determined goal. Second, these methods attempt to arouse inner energy resident in man by de-activating the mind and taking the mind away from analysis & logical judgement. It is interesting to observe that high tech methods such as music and moving visuals are widely being used to bring brain wave activity to lower *alpha* levels and sometimes to theta levels.

## **Conclusions**

Western motivation theorists and practitioners, after decades of unsuccessful application of theories and methods, are moving towards the salubrious conclusion that motivating the individual using external stimuli is likely to lead finally to dissatisfaction and mental disorders. At least two methods, the Japanese management philosophy, and assertive character building, deviate from conventional approaches. These two methods have been tried out in the West without much success. A new wave of thoughts that rely on the blossoming of man's inner resident energy, by harmonizing his mind and body, is emerging. These thoughts have produced some useful methods of personal development and motivation.

The new wave of thoughts on motivation demands freeing the worker from all pre-determined notions of motivation and takes the human mind away from the burden of analysis, comparison, pre-conception, and logical judgement. The slow de-activation of mind will produce lower brain wave frequencies, moving to lower *alpha* and *theta* levels, and occasionally to upper *delta* levels. This slow de-activation prompts inherent creative and innovative skills to surge and surface. At this level the man is able to control and command harmonized mental and physical energies at will, and achieve super output levels without stress. The man, under the influence of naturally up-surging inner energy, maintains non-emotional, but productive relationships with others, which in turn will generate greater group synergy than in a group of people motivated through external stimuli.

A deep look into the process underlying the new wave of thoughts reveals that the process draws many parallels to insight or "*vipassana*" meditation of Buddhism, where the mind is trained to play the role of a passive observer, withdrawing the mind from its usual activities of analysis and judgement. The end result of this process is inner wisdom. In a work related context the inner motivation leads to a sense of duty, and benevolence, which make work stress-free.

## References

- Back, B., and Back K., 1992, *Assertiveness at Work*, McGraw Hill, London.
- Griffin, R.W., 1990, *Management*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Lyn, W. W., 1995 *Working With Your Dreams*, Blandford, London.
- McMillan, 1985, *Japanese Way of Doing Business*, unknown publication.
- Obler, C.K., and Fein D(eds), 1988, *The Exceptional Brain; Neuro Psychology of Talent and Special Abilities*, The Guilford Press, New York.
- Rix Susanne., 1997, *Super working*, S Abdul Majeed & Co., Kuala Lumpur.
- Selye, N., 1975, *Stress Without Distress*, Hodder & Stoughton, Kent.
- Shapiro, M., 1998, *Understanding Neuro Linguistic Programming*, Hodder & Stoughton, Oxon.
- Springer, S.P. and Deutsche G., 1989, *Left-Brain, Right-Brain*, Freeman, New York.
- Vroom, V. H ., 1964, *Work and Motivation*, Wiley, New York.