



## What is the best engine performance?

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The importance neglected to give meaning to what it is...

For some, money leads the world, and nothing is worth a premium to motivate employees. For others, the true engine of the motivation, is passion: the most productive are always those having fun in their work, and not those who simply perform their job. Who is right? Who is wrong?

Hard to say...

Yet a study allowing to see clearer in what appears to be a debate without end. Entitled *Knowing that you matter, matters! The interplay of meaning, monetary incentives, and worker recognition*, signed by: Michael Kosfeld, management Professor at Goethe University in Frankfurt (Germany); Susanne Neckermann, Professor of Economics at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam (Netherlands); and Xiaolan Yang, Professor of Economics at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou (China), a study whose results should surprise more than one...

Three researchers wanted before to see if giving a mean to his work was something very important, or not, for employees. They particularly wished to evaluate if this had an impact on their individual performance. Better, they wondered if the conventional engines of motivation at work - bonuses, recognition of the employer to the employee, etc. - were really effective. And even, if these motivations used at same time, if they were not a risk.

Extensive program, is it not? And yet, they have managed to perform simply. Using a single experiment. It was thus asked to 413 volunteers, to complete a most repulsive task: enter data from paper documents in a computer. All participants, we can expect, were not doing this task in the same conditions:



> **A job that has sense.** For some, it was clarified that their work was essential to carry out an experience of the highest scientific importance. And they were asked to perform it well, because without, this experience would never give the expected results.

> **Work meaningless.** For others, it was clarified that the experience to which they contributed in enriching the database, had already been completed. It was only a trivial operation to verify the validity of the results already found. And nobody told them that it was essential to do the experience.

In addition, another variable considered, concerning the personal interest to participate in the experience:

> **Remuneration fixed.** For some, it was just promised a fixed remuneration for work performed.

> **Financial incentive.** For others, he was promised compensation predetermined for work performed as well as a performance bonus (i.e. If you entered correctly more data than originally expected).

> **Symbolic recognition.** And at last, for others, it was promised predetermined compensation and symbolic recognition to the most efficient member, known to all, at the end of the work requested. What symbolic recognition? A trophy was given to the best performer.

Results? Hard to believe ...

> **The importance of the meaning of work.** Those for whom the mission to complete the work, made sense to them, had a better performance than the others. A better performance, as an average of 14% more.

> **The significant importance of the financial incentive.** Those who were promised a bonus performed a better work than those who had a predetermined pay. 8% higher, as an average.

> **The importance of recognition.** Those for whom it had been promised to symbolically recognize the most successful participant did the best results of all participants. Because their performance has been, as average of 19% greater than those who did the work with a predetermined pay.

Therefore, the ideal to motivate his employees, is to take the time to explain to them how their work is important to the company and also take the time to symbolically emphasize the exceptional contribution provided by the best performer of the group. These motivations are much better than to offer a premium, from time to time.



That is not all! The three researchers have sought the best possible combination of different elements of motivation. Because each may - *who knows?* - enter in conflict with others.

A great idea which, in fact, allowed them to make many discoveries:

> **No interaction between the meaning and money.** This is not, because someone is offer a premium for whom his work makes sense, that he will work ardor. *Idem*, it is not because you gives more meaning to the work to be done to someone, who is already promised a bonus, that he will suddenly work more and better than before.

> **Ambiguous relationship between the meaning and the recognition.** When it is proposed a trophy to someone for whom the work has meaning, it demotivates. *Idem*, when you gives more meaning to the work to be done to someone who is already promised a trophy, it discourages.

Why? "Because the two are in conflict, since they aim opposite goals: when our work has meaning, it gives a good picture of ourselves to ourselves; While when seeking recognition, it encourages us to give a good image of ourselves to others", the three researchers explain in their study. However, there is an interesting combination: it may pay to offer a symbolic recognition to those for whom labor has little meaning; because their motivation is therefore the best.

What is to remember? First of all, that the best engine performance, is you! Then two practical tips to (re) motivate you, to apply now:

> **Be aware that you are important to them.** This is the fundamental element of motivation at work. Take the time to identify what makes you the best, and no other, to carry out the new project we just gave you. Yes, detect the different talents who are more identify to you and that you can more communicate to. And convince yourself that you are the right person, at the right time, in the right place.

> **Find a meaning to your work.** When you are asked to take charge of a new project, start by identifying what will be the meaning for you. Consider, for example, the importance of the objective of it. Or else the importance it can have for yourselves. And keep all this in mind during the weeks, or even months, to come.

There you are. You can start now. And do not hesitate to give me news.

By the way, the mathematician Seymour Papert said in *THEORY OF NEURAL-ANALOG REINFORCEMENT SYSTEMS AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE BRAIN-MODEL PROBLEM*: "To learn anything, start by finding a sense."