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MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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HUMAN CAPITAL

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By definition, motivation determines our behavior, effort, and persistence. For instance, an employee is (hopefully) motivated to deliver exceptional work on time. There are some who might say that motivation comes from the individual, that another person cannot motivate someone. Whether that's true or not, one thing is certain: An employee needs the proper environment in order to feel motivated. And the responsibility for creating that work environment belongs to management.

Fortunately, we have many tools we can use to encourage and support employees. During the past decade, Facebook went from 1 million to more than 1 billion active users. Twitter was launched. Apple released the iPhone. These digital tools have accelerated communication in the business world.

To offer some perspective about how much the digital world affects business, here are a few statistics from e-commerce site Selz.com:

- 80 percent of Internet users have purchased something online, 50 percent more than once.

- U.S. e-commerce sales were around $304 billion for 2014; that's expected to increase to about $491 billion by 2018.

- Global e-commerce sales made using a mobile device are expected to increase to $638 billion by 2018.

Technology has changed business because we as individuals have changed the way we interact with technology. The capabilities and benefits of using technology have motivated us to change our behavior and habits. We can now deposit a check, plan a vacation, shop for shoes, and even monitor our health using technology.

Organizations have to recognize these changes and incorporate technology into our work experience. In the same ways that technology motivates us to connect and engage as consumers, technology can motivate us to connect and engage as employees.

In the book *The Social Employee: How Great Companies Make Social Media Work*, authors Cheryl Burgess and Mark Burgess point out

MO·TI·VA·TION (NOUN)
/ˌmōdəˈvāSH(ə)/

The reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way.

that technology has blurred the lines between organizations, employees, and customers. It used to be that the only people who contributed to an organization's brand were in the marketing department. Now every employee has the ability to make an impression on a customer through an interaction on social media.

This means organizations will want employees to be motivated to use technology in a positive way. It's good for business. But for employees to be motivated to use technology, they need to understand it and how it works. They also need to believe that their efforts to use technology are supported and encouraged by management.

This *TD at Work* will:

- Describe the capabilities of technology in today's workplace.

- Explain how to apply technology to classic motivation theories.

- Outline how you can use technology to motivate.

- Provide tips on using digital tools to motivate employees and measuring success.

TECHNOLOGY IN TODAY'S WORKPLACE

Understanding the technology landscape is important because it helps you choose the best technology tools to support employee engagement, communication, and motivation. For example, Jacob Morgan, in his book *The Collaborative Organization*, shares research on select collaborative technologies and how they are used for workplace effectiveness:

- **Mashups** are applications that combine data from multiple internal and public sources,

then publish the results to an enterprise portal. It allows users to create their own unique way of visualizing data.

- **Wikis** allow individuals to collaboratively create or edit a webpage. They can also be used as a document repository within teams.

- **Blogs** allow individuals to share their thoughts and ideas using a web-based platform. They are a great way to showcase subject matter expertise.

- **Forums** are similar to organized message boards or online discussion sites. Conversations are threaded and sorted by topical relevance.

TECHNOLOGY ISN'T A MILLENNIAL THING

While young professionals today have always lived in a world with USB drives and downloadable music, it doesn't mean they're the only ones embracing technology. In fact, the adoption rate of digital technology is fairly consistent by age group. According to a Pew Research Center Mobile Technology Fact Sheet, 88 percent of Baby Boomers, 93 percent of Gen Xers, and 97 percent of Millennials use the Internet.

What's more interesting is what digital technology is being used by which age group. Take a look at these statistics from *Demographics of Key Social Networking Platforms:*

- Facebook is used by 87 percent of Millennials but only 63 percent of Boomers.

- Twitter is used by 37 percent of Millennials, 25 percent of Gen Xers, and 12 percent of Boomers.

- Instagram is used by 53 percent of Millennials, 25 percent of Gen Xers, and 11 percent of Boomers.

- LinkedIn is used by 31 percent of Gen Xers, 30 percent of Boomers, and 23 percent of Millennials.

Just as we tailor our message to our audience, we have to find the right channels to get our message across in the digital space. All technology isn't the same and we can't make assumptions about the way technology is being used by individuals.

- **Videos** are extremely popular due to the near-universal access everyone has to video making. Videos are often used for general communication, idea generation, and innovation. They don't have to be fancy—they can even be made with a smartphone.

- **Real Simple Syndication (RSS)** allows users to receive updates on various forms of content, such as blogs or news sources. The information is delivered to the user through a "reader."

You can also use existing technologies to boost employee engagement—a move that might make it easier on those employees who are less technologically savvy. With technology an integral part of our everyday lives, it only makes sense to support and encourage employee motivation using tools and processes they are familiar with. For instance, company intranet and Yammer groups can help employees collaborate both with members of their own team and with others outside of their division or office. You can even encourage employees to think of creative ways to use social tools they already access regularly. It will show them that management supports their efforts to engage.

APPLYING TECHNOLOGY TO CLASSIC MOTIVATIONAL THEORY

Using new technology tools doesn't mean we have to abandon classic theory. Old-school methods still work; we just have to challenge ourselves to apply them in new ways.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory supposes that all people seek to satisfy a hierarchy of five kinds of needs: physiological, safety and security, a sense of belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. He proposed that people must have their needs met at the lowest level before they can progress to the next level of the hierarchy. Once a need is met, it's no longer a source of motivation.

Self-actualization, the peak of Maslow's hierarchy, is defined as the realization or

fulfillment of one's talents and potential. In a business context, self-actualization has a direct correlation to employee engagement, which can be explained as the intersection of maximum contribution to the business and maximum satisfaction for the employee.

If employee needs aren't met, then they will not be satisfied with their work and will not be able to contribute at a high level to the organization. In other words, they won't be engaged. A key need for employee satisfaction is a sense of belonging. In the workplace, that translates to interpersonal relationships, whether those are in person or online. Employees can build connections through virtual teams, online communities, and social media interactions.

Saul Carliner writes about the value of personal learning networks (PLNs) in his book *Informal Learning Basics*. Defined as the entire collection of people you exchange information with, PLNs allow employees to feel a sense of belonging, have social interactions, and learn from colleagues. An example of a PLN is ATD's LinkedIn group. Organizations might also have internal communities for employees who have similar interests. Employees are motivated when they feel as if they belong and are connected to their work.

Once employees have their social needs met, they will look to fulfill their esteem needs. Maslow's hierarchy defines esteem needs as appreciation and respect, both of which can be found in a mentoring relationship, regardless of whether the employee is the mentee or the mentor. While mentoring has traditionally taken place face-to-face, new technology allows for virtual mentoring relationships. For example, employees can use FaceTime, Skype, or another video-enabled digital tool.

McClelland's Human Motivation Theory

Psychologist David McClelland argued that everyone has three types of motivational needs: achievement, affiliation, and power.

1. *Achievement* refers to the need to work on moderately difficult tasks and receive feedback on the work.

FIGURE 1. MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

- Self-Actualization
- Esteem
- Sense of Belonging
- Safety and Security
- Physiological
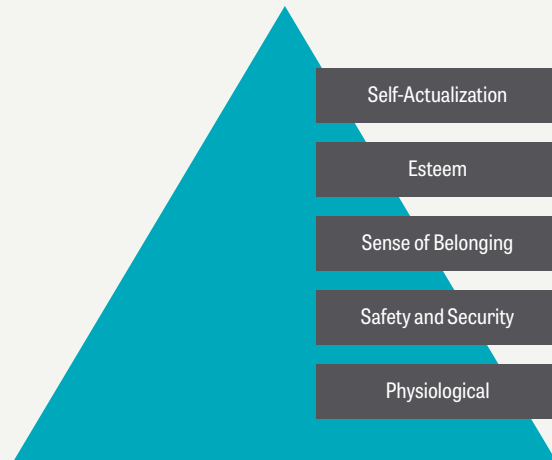
SOURCE: USED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE AUTHOR.

2. *Affiliation* is the need to be a part of a group and maintain social relationships.

3. *Power* means valuing discipline, in terms of the constant need to be better.

Digital influence can create affiliation, power, and achievement. It's having the ability to effect change, influence opinions, and drive results. It comes as a result of people's online reach (the quality and quantity of their network), relevance (how their messaging aligns to current interest), and resonance (how far their information travels within their social networks). It's created by online collaboration and social curation.

In the workplace, employees can meet these motivational needs by becoming curators of digital content. Individuals who master the skill of curation are valuable in the social community and relied upon as a source of information. The result is authentic digital influence, which is very powerful.

Curating content in itself is a difficult task; it takes dedication and time. However, there are numerous online platforms, such as Evernote and Pearltrees, that make organizing content much easier. Additionally, employees might find this three-step approach for curating information

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