



Motivating a Project Team

Neville Turbit (Dec 05)

Overview

We all know that a motivated team will achieve more than an unmotivated team. The difficulty is creating a motivated team. This first white paper talks about some of the factors behind the art of motivation.

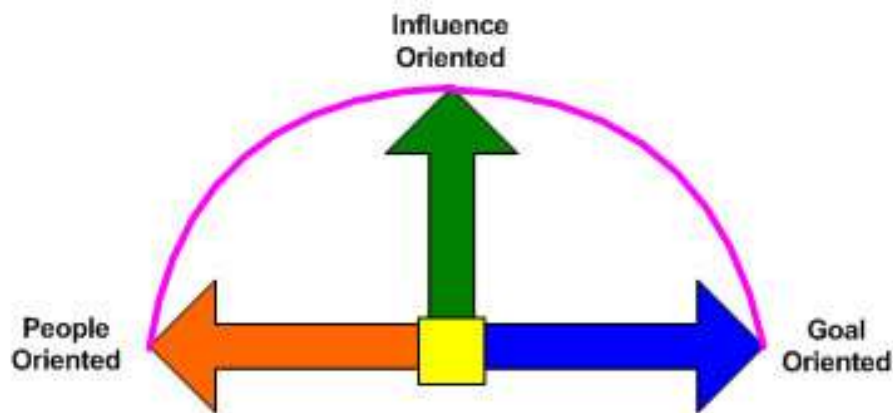
Notice I say “art”, not “science”. Motivation is a blend of technique, understanding and creativity. If it were a science, there would be a formula we could all use but like most endeavours requiring human interaction, it is more art than science.

The Building Blocks of Motivation

I have often heard Project Managers - and Line Managers for that matter - say they cannot get an individual motivated. One line I heard which stuck with me was a Project Manager who told me:

“I have goals that I strive to achieve but I set her goals and she just ignores them.”

Well, maybe the person is not motivated by goals. Not everyone is goal oriented. To many people, goals are something you pay lip service to while getting on with your job. A useful way to understand motivation is to look at where somebody sits on a diagram such as the one below. Where does the needle sit?



There are three basic orientations that people have. They sit somewhere on an arc between People Oriented and Goal Oriented.

People Oriented

These types of people are motivated by the relationship between themselves and the people they come into contact with. How everyone gets along is important. Teams and interaction are critical to their achievement. They tend to not like working alone, and are most productive in a group environment. A stereotype is the sales person who has the ability to make everyone feel comfortable in their company. Typically, but not always they are extroverted and have a wide circle of friends.

Influence Oriented

An influence oriented person is concerned with their status in the organisation. They look on each task as an opportunity to display to the world their own skill, ability and be recognized for doing so. How the world perceives them is important. They form links to people who have a level of influence in the organisation, and often get things done through these affiliations. They are usually willing to compromise to get something done if the alternative is that it is not done at all.

Whilst a stereotype may be your average politician, this is probably a bad example. Most people assume a politician is out to feather their own nest but an influence oriented person can use their skill to achieve good as well as bad outcomes.

Goal Oriented

A goal oriented person is motivated by achieving things. They are focused on targets and will move heaven and earth to achieve their target. They like nothing better than the challenge of setting and reaching a goal. They also tend to be very focused – often to the detriment of their relationship with the people around them. They can sometimes be very dogmatic and unbending in their desire to achieve. If you want a person to walk to the North Pole on their own, this is the sort of person to do it.

Mixing Motivations

People's base motivation exists somewhere on the arc. Initially you might think they have a base motivation that spans all areas. On closer examination however this is not true. People's orientation may change over the years, or more likely decades, however they will always be:

- People Oriented
- People/Influence Oriented
- Influence Oriented
- Influence/Goal Oriented
- Goal Oriented

You will see from this mix, that People/Goal Oriented is not mentioned. The motivations are actually contradictory. Whilst the People person is motivated by the friendships and associations with people, the Goal person is motivated by driving forward towards a goal, and people are a secondary issue.

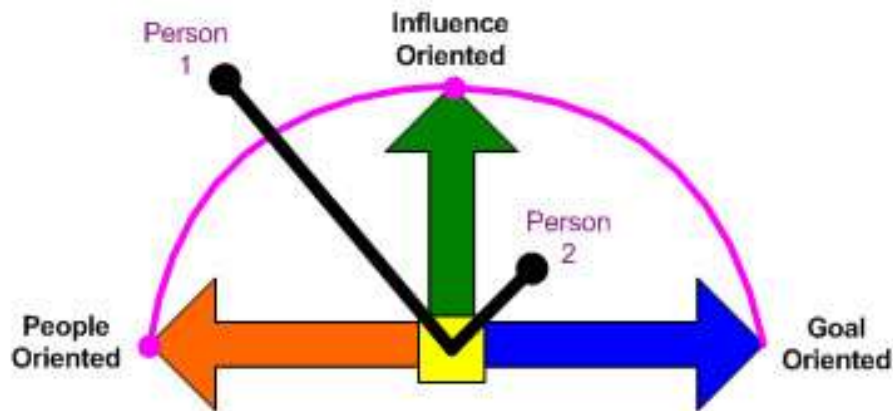
That is not to say a Goal Oriented person cannot be good with people. The difference is that it is a learned skill and has a degree of “unnatural” feeling. It is something the person will have had to work on to develop.

It is a bit of a generalisation but People oriented people are usually found in the Sales Department and Goal oriented people in the IT department. When you think about it, IT, (and in particular programming), is a very goal oriented and focused undertaking not requiring lots of people interaction. It may be highly creative, but that is a different thing to motivation. Programming is attractive to people who want to focus on goals in a non participative environment. When I first moved to IT after a long career in Business I had to adjust my approach. I found many, but certainly not all, people responded to an approach along the lines of:

“I need to know where you are up to. Can we spend 10 minutes to run through progress to date, and what you expect to achieve in the next week?”

No chit chat. No time wasting. Clear goal of the meeting and a clear timeframe. That appeals to a goal oriented person.

Another dimension is the level of motivation. Some people are highly motivated, and some are well less than highly motivated. If you look at the two people below, Person 1 is off the scale but Person 2 is just off brain dead.



How to tell the Motivation

It takes a little practice but you can tell the type of motivation by watching and listening to people.

- People Oriented tend to use the words ‘we’ and ‘us’. They have good relationships, or would like to have good relationships with people on a personal as well as business level. They are the ones likely to organise staff social events. They hate doing tasks where they are on their own.
- Influence Oriented use what might sound like ‘wishy washy’ terms but in fact are leaving their options open for a change of direction. They sound like they are qualifying their position. You hear responses peppered with phrases like ‘One option is...’, ‘What do you think about ...’, ‘There are several solutions including...’ They will often want to know what other people (particularly superiors) think before taking a stance. A task that will require interaction with influential people is one they will put their hand up for.
- Goal Oriented are probably the easiest to spot. They are definite. They use words like ‘We must..’, ‘Failure is not an option’, ‘Whatever it takes we will achieve...’. They want decisions made now, and consultative decision making is something you do only if you must. Often they are perceived as poor communicators but people who get things done at all costs. Crash through people.

A Story

This story is too good to pass up. Many years ago – a few decades to be honest – I was running a motivation training program where we spoke about orientation. We did a few tests to understand the motivation of the attendees. One girl, who was a Sales

Manager, was strongly goal oriented. When the results were distributed, she stood up and denied she was goal oriented.

“I am people oriented and this is a load of BS. In fact, I am going to stand here and convince you that I am not goal oriented if it takes all night.”

The more she went about her ‘goal’ of convincing us all, the more the group started laughing. I tried to stop her but to no avail. After about 5 minutes she was faced with a group rolling around the floor almost in tears as she set about her goal of convincing us she was not goal oriented. She stormed out.

I was surprised next day when she returned. After some time I asked her what she now felt about her goal orientation. Her response was:

“Last night I was furious. I called my closest friend who I have known since schooldays. I explained the orientations and asked her where she thought I was. Without hesitation she said goal oriented. I slammed the phone down. I then asked my husband. He said goal oriented. I tried for half an hour to explain I was people oriented. I couldn’t convince him.

It was then he reminded me how frustrated I was becoming that my sales team seemed to ignore the goals I set them. It was then the lights came on. Here I was setting goals for a bunch of people who were mainly people or influence oriented. They were not motivated at all by my goals. It was like I was seeing myself for the first time.”

It may be a humorous story but it certainly pointed out that we think everyone is like us, but we sometimes don’t even consciously know what we are.

So how do we use this knowledge?

So much for the theory of motivation, how do we put it into practice? First know yourself. Understand what motivates you, and what the implications of your orientation are. Next understand the people around you and know what will motivate them.

Suppose I want a person to complete a task by Friday. I can use the following approaches to three people with different orientations. For the sake of clarity, I have over exaggerated the approach but it will show you how to put the request.

- **People Oriented.** Hi Jan. How are you going? How is your family? We must organise another lunch for the team. There is a lot of pressure on the team at the moment and it would be good for the team if you could finish this task by Friday. Naturally we will make sure that the team can attend an input session to help you get started. It would certainly take some heat away and allow the team to not have to work over the weekend.
- **Influence Oriented.** Hi Pat. I was talking to the boss yesterday and told him about how you had finished the report over the weekend. He said to pass on his thanks for the big effort. He passed on another high profile job which needs to be completed by Friday. I would like to give a copy of the completed document to the steering committee to read over the weekend. They see this as an important step in our project. It would be very much appreciated by the Sponsor if you could take on the task and personally drop a copy of the document to each of the steering committee on Friday.

- **Goal Oriented.** Hi Bill. I noticed you are the only person to meet all your deadlines last week. Well done. Thanks to you the project is on target. We have another important task to complete by next Friday. I ran a workshop to get some input so all you have to do is go through all that information on your own, and put together the conclusions. Do you think you can achieve it?

Same task – three different approaches. Each approach is designed to present the person undertaking the task with the motivational reward that appeals to them. It does not have to be as blatantly obvious as the examples but a different flavour of the request will work with different people. Each of the approaches may be a true reflection of the situation, just looking at it from another perspective.

Feedback

Getting things done is only one aspect of motivation. Giving people feedback is equally important to make them feel connected and have a pride in their work. Using the same approach, you can make sure that what is important to the person is passed back to them. For example, in the examples above, each started with some feedback as to how their motivational aspirations were being met. It may be team mood, recognition from superiors or achievement of goals. Think of the feedback you give to a Goal oriented person. What is more valuable to that person?

- We have a happy team
- We met all our milestones

Summary

A particular motivational orientation is not a limitation on what can be achieved. There is a good example of three US Presidents who achieved their position with three different motivations.

- John Kennedy was influence oriented. He was a master at managing the various groups around him to achieve his desired outcome for the US.
- Jimmy Carter was people oriented. He loved nothing more than mixing with the people. One attributed quote when he was trying to resolve the Middle East conflict is that he wanted to get Palestine and Israel together because he hated to see people not getting along.
- Richard Nixon was goal oriented. When Watergate exploded it was irrelevant to Nixon. He had to achieve his goals regardless of what the people thought, or what the legal limitations might have been.

It is an interesting ‘what if’ exercise to think of what one President may have done if they found themselves in the situation another one faced. For example if Kennedy or Carter were confronted with Watergate, what would they have done? Kennedy would probably have managed the opposing forces in a much more subtle way from the first breath of a scandal. I can imagine

“If you stop publishing this in your newspapers, we might be able to assist your share of government advertising.”

Carter might have personally visited all the opposing parties and tried to use his relationship to minimize the damage. Nixon basically ignored everyone until it was too late.

Finally, because someone is not of our orientation, don't think they cannot use their orientation for good. Remember Mother Theresa was highly influence oriented. She achieved what she did because she used every opportunity to have a photo taken with, or take on a tour anyone she could use. She exploited that association to bring money and focus to her worthwhile cause. Many medical breakthroughs have been made by goal oriented people who focused for years on finding a cure for some disease. If you look at all the people we hold up as worthy of admiration, they have the same orientation as those around us, or even those in our own project teams.

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Project Perfect is a project management software consulting and training organisation based in Sydney Australia. Their focus is to provide creative yet pragmatic solutions to Project Management issues. In particular they help organisations with their project infrastructure.

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