CREATING 'FLOW' FOR GENERATING EXCELLENCE IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCES

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ABSTRACT

The present paper examines the correlation between extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, and the emotional state flow experience on the basis of latest researches made by behavior scientists. The impacts of these parameters on the organizational performances are also discussed. Attempt have been made to develop an applicative motivational model that can be utilized by managers in order to generate intrinsic motivation and flow experience among the employees while they are involved in the organizational activities. Also various constraints have been identified that intimidating managers to put the efforts on generating intrinsic motivation and flow experience.

INTRODUCTION

In the first half of the 20th Century all the management scientists supported and gave emphasis on the theme that focused on how managers should personally behave in order to motivate employees and encourage them to perform at higher levels and be committed to the achievement of organizational goals. Research and observations showed that well motivated employees are more productive and creative. Since then motivation of employees in the organization became burning issue and many behavior scientists did research on this topic, gave various theories of motivation in order to equip professionals with the knowledge of how to motivate people in the organization. In spite of enormous research, basic as well as applied, the subject of motivation still needs many clarifications.

According to present understanding, the motivation is willingness of a person to generate high level of efforts to satisfy personal, organizational, or societal needs. In organizational perspective the motivation of employees is the essential strength to generate excellence in the organizational performances.

Motivation can be extrinsic or intrinsic with approach or avoidance behavior. With extrinsic motivation we do things regardless of our interest or passion, because somebody else (leaders, managers, parents, and teachers etc) tries to make us do something by offering rewards that can satisfy our needs. Sometime managers use negative motivational techniques by giving threatening like financial deduction, or termination against poor performance. We do the activity by being externally motivated either to achieve external rewards (extrinsic motivation with approach behavior) or to avoid negative consequences (extrinsic motivation with avoidance behavior).

With intrinsic motivation we do things because we like the activities themselves. Intrinsic motivation with approach behavior ignites us to do the things to enjoy the activity and to achieve excellent results. Sometimes we like the work but we do the same to avoid unpleasant events (intrinsic motivation with avoidance behavior). These unpleasant events may include poor feedback from boss, loss of boss's confidence on us, loss of autonomy and implementation of more controls on our choices.

Researches on motivation have reported that those who are more intrinsically motivated show more interest, excitement and confidence about the task. They have reported higher self esteem and

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subjective well being. Intrinsic motivation can be strengthened by giving autonomy to people performing the task. In other words autonomy means giving the freedom to people making choices about how to complete the task. Positive feedback also strengthens intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is weakened by giving punishment or even giving threatening of punishment, and pressured evaluation and feedback. It is also weakened by imposing goals, deadlines, and directives. One controversial finding also suggests that intrinsic motivation is also weakened by giving people extrinsic rewards that are perceived as controlling (Deci et al. 1999). This is because these rewards reduce people's perception of autonomy and they tend to concentrate more on rewards than on the activity.

Professors Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000) developed self-determination theory which predicts that when our three innate, psychological needs are satisfied, intrinsic motivation is likely to crop up. These are the need for competence, which concerns succeeding at optimally challenging tasks and being able to attain desired outcomes; the need for autonomy which concerns experiencing choice and feeling like the initiator of one's own actions; and the need for relatedness, which concerns establishing a sense of mutual respect and reliance with others (Baumeister 1997). Managers can satisfy the need for relatedness of their subordinates by being supportive to them on every aspect of their job. They must avoid controlling and micromanagement. The need of autonomy and competence can be met by designing the task in such a way that people must perceive it as challenging and meaningful, and they must believe that they can achieve the task outcome.

There are six regulatory styles on self determination continuum in the theory of Self Determination given by Rayan and Deci. These are non-regulation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, integrated regulation and intrinsic regulation. These regulatory styles suggest that there is definite relationship between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. When we get involved in any activity we start with the stage known as amotivation where our regulatory style is non-regulated, and our perceived locus of causality is purely impersonal. Gradually we move to extrinsic motivation stage where we show compliance with the activity for the sake of external rewards or to avoid punishments. Here the activities are externally regulated and our perceived locus of causality is also external. Further within the extrinsic motivation stage if we are continuously involved in the activity then our ego gets involved into the process that gives us internal rewards and punishments. We feel more self control and our regulatory style is introjected regulation where our perceived locus of causality is still somewhat external. In the next step of self determination continuum we identify ourselves and get involved into the activity personally. This is identified regulation where we tend to value our actions consciously and view them as having personal importance. Our perceived locus of causality becomes somewhat internal. Now then we move to integrated regulation where our perceived locus of causality is internal where activities are congruent with our own identity and synthesized with the self. Finally we reach to the stage of intrinsic motivation where we are intrinsically regulated and the causes of our involvement in the activity are purely internal. In this stage the activities are experienced as naturally interesting and enjoyable.

The self determination theory clearly indicates that all of us get involved into the activity with extrinsic regulation and gradually if we find the activity is challenging yet achievable we get involved into the process with intrinsic regulation.

The ultimate intrinsic motivating state is described by the unique and highly pleasurable emotional state known as flow. Martin Seligman (2002) divided positive emotions associated with the present into two classes that are momentary pleasure and more enduring gratification. The momentary pleasure arises from sensual experiences such as feelings come from sex, beautiful perfumes and delicious flavors. Gratification bring entail the state of absorption or flow that generate from engagement in activities such as teaching, reading, and painting etc. These activities involve using our signature strengths. Signature strengths are our personal strengths associated with six virtues given by Peterson and Seligman (2001) in their Values in Action Classification. These six virtues are Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance and Transcendence.

Rock climbers, musicians, chess players, surgeons all reported this "flow" state or state of absorption when their activities possessed this perceptual structure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1977), and afterward reported a greater interest in these tasks as a result of this flow experience. Professor Mike

Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1990, & 1997) has shown through extensive research that when people are engaged in challenging but controllable tasks that are intrinsically motivating (means people enjoy the process) they experience a unique psychological state referred to as flow. When people experience flow while doing the work, there is no distraction in their thought, they totally get involved in their work; they stop hearing anything; their self disappears, and their concentration is immense, they are really unconscious to their surroundings after they get going (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). In flow we no longer think of uncertainties and disappointments of our everyday life. Our sense of self disappears during the activity and surprisingly the sense of self come out as more strengthened self after the completion of the task.

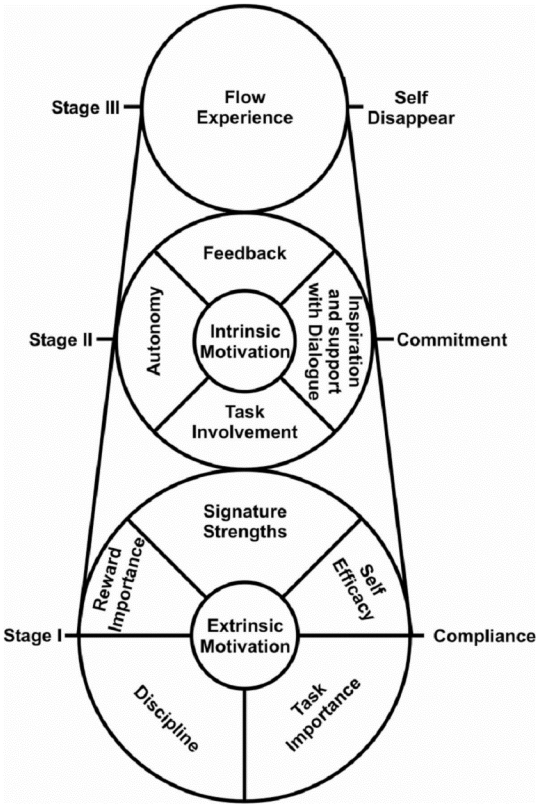
This psychological state of mind at work known as flow or state of absorption generates highest level excellence and competence in the organization. In order to generate flow experience in a particular activity we must have skills set to perform the task, good chance of completing the task, and there must be clear goals and immediate feedback.

To elicit a flow experience there must be good balance between perceived skills (self efficacy) and perceived challenge. The goals must be clearly defined. Also one must perceive high demand and greater skills requirements. There are two components of demand. The first component is tightness of the condition for a performance and second component is the perceived importance of task outcome. When the perceived importance of the task outcome is high and the conditions for that performance are tight or a bit stretched, then the perceived demand is elevated for the performance. The flow experience is likely to occur in high demand task because the fine grain details of performance require more attention. Rock climbers who choose tough rock faces in order to utilize their capabilities to the maximum, reported the experience of flow.

Intrinsic motivation and flow experience in all the activities are imperative to engender excellence in the performance. These dimensions are highly desirable in order to convert organizational resources into competence. As we all know that the resources can be imitated by competitors but the competence generated within the process cannot be copied.

Based on recent research findings on intrinsic motivation and flow experience the applicative motivational model is developed by the authors of present paper. This model is exceedingly useful for practicing managers for generating excellence in the organizational performances through elicitation of flow experience among employees in different activities.

Applicative Motivational Model



The applicative motivation model developed by the authors of this paper consists three stages I, II, and III. The stage I if the stage of compliance that suggests that people get involved in any task with more extrinsic motivation and attracted by extrinsic goals. Therefore they need compliance with the task. At this stage managers need to work on various dimensions like generating the importance of task, creation of strict discipline in the environment, perceived importance of rewards, higher self-efficacy belief and signature strengths of the people involved in the task.

Signature strengths are needed in a person to be intrinsically motivated. The six virtues wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence are concluding the signature strengths in a person. These virtues are identified by Peterson and Seligman (2001) from the writings of important

moral philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustan, Aquinas, and others. These virtues are state of mind or a state of being considered as traits in a person. According to Socrates without liberation from our ego process it is very difficult to come upon these virtues. These virtues are required to create order in consciousness. By ordering consciousness one means the presence of positive emotions like non-violence, peace, harmony, love, happiness and joy, and absence of negative emotions like hatred, conflict, sorrow, fear, and anxiety etc. These virtues can be developed by bringing our character strengths into our day to day actions. Wisdom refers to strengths that involve acquisition and application of knowledge. This can be achieved by bringing curiosity, creativity, love for learning, good judgment, emotional intelligence, and seeing big picture into our regular action. In the same way the virtue of courage entails the will to accomplish goals against all odds. This can be attained through perseverance, spirit, and integrity. Humanity involves high interpersonal competence and can be acquired through the strengths of compassion, and capacity to love and be loved. Justice provides us the capacity to relate us with wider community that requires teamwork, equality, and leadership. The virtue of temperance brings about the moderate expression of appetite and can be achieved through self-control, cautiousness and humility. The transcendence connects us to wider universe. It can be realized through admiration of beauty and excellence, gratitude, optimistic approach, spirituality, forgiveness, playfulness and humor.

As discussed earlier that people get involved into the task initially because of extrinsic regulation that is why to work on four important dimensions of extrinsic motivation strict discipline, self efficacy, task, and rewards is essentially important.

It is important to bring people into discipline in order to correct their neural pathways. In all the "Arm-forces" across the world the most important value is discipline. One cannot face hardship without having the discipline in his habit. Strict punishment is the other face of the discipline that is required to generate people's compliance with the process at amotivation stage, described by Rayan and Deci in their theory of "self determination" discussed above.

Professor Albert Bandura (1997, 99) is the originator of self-efficacy theory. According to theory the perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs which we hold about our capability of performing tasks within a particular area. According to bandura in any region of performance, our opinion about our capabilities determines our expectations about the end result of our actions. If we expect to be successful and accomplish desired results, then this acts as a motivation to execute the action. If we expect to be failed, this acts as disincentive. Therefore in order to perform the task or to get involved into the task a person must have faith on his or her capabilities. Self-efficacy beliefs can be fabricated from four sources of information:

1. Mastery Experiences: Through perseverance and continuously sharpening you skills and developing competencies.
2. Vicarious Experiences: Through observing how others have succeeded in their endeavors.
3. Social Persuasion: People's self-efficacy belief may be strengthened if they are persuaded by their coach, mentors, friends and parents etc.
4. Physical and Emotional States: People's self-efficacy belief can be enhanced if they are emotionally stable, and physically fit.

Managers should ensure that the task they are mutually designing must be challenging yet achievable, specific, and clearly understood. It should also be meaningful so that people must perceive it as extremely important for them to accomplish. In order to generate intrinsic motivation and the flow experience within the task it is imperative that the person involved in the activity must perceive the task as exceedingly important for him. For instance consider about a mountaineer trapped at Himalayan terrain at 20000 ft height and in order to reach at safe place he need to climb at least 50 meters otherwise he may fall down in a canyon which is 15000 ft deep. At this time the task of climbing 50 meters is extremely important for the climber because it is a question of life and death for him. During climb the climber would be highly alert and sensitive to all the details. He will lose the track of time and self awareness and after the completion of the task or in other words after reaching the safe place the climber's self will emerged as more strengthened self. That is why the demand should be high in a given task so that people ought to use their skills to their limit and experience flow.

Initially the linkage of rewards with the task outcome is very important to bring people into action. The rewards should be meaningful and in congruence with people's expectation. Carefully designed rewards are highly instrumental in generating

extrinsic motivation among people. Collectively these four dimension namely discipline, self-efficacy, well designed task and rewards will generate external regulation among people in putting their efforts guided by extrinsic motivation.

Once the people are willingly involved into the activity, and come to second stage i.e., commitment stage, they should be provided with autonomy for making their choices with regard to decisions about desired course of action, deadlines, and approach. Immediate and clear feedback is important for people to focus on activity and make desired corrections at regular intervals. Positive feedback is highly instrumental in generating intrinsic motivation. Managers should carefully design the feedback systems and should support people in creating self feedback system.

People don't want to be controlled by others they always seek support from their leaders in their endeavors. Supportive leadership ensure that the leaders are there to give the credit of success to their subordinates and ready to take the blame on their own shoulders for all failures. Supportive leaders are involved in giving sensible suggestions for improving the performance; needful counseling to strengthen people's self-efficacy beliefs, and do required mentoring to enhance signature strengths by bringing people's character strengths into action. Supportive leaders are continuously involved in identifying and shaping the potentials of their subordinates. They inspire people through positive transactions and strokes. These small transactions in the interpersonal relationship produce great results in terms of generating intrinsic motivation.

The sincere efforts on providing autonomy, feedback, support and inspiration collectively will induce intrinsic motivation where people would be enjoying the activity. This activity will become self-rewarding for them as they would feel rewarded by the excellence they are generating in their performance.

Finally people may move into third stage of the applicative motivational model. This stage is an emotional state known as flow experience where people's self gets disappear. They would be able to engender highest level of excellence because of their deep concentration into the activity and utilization of their skills to their limit. This model once successfully implemented will create outward spiral because people after completing the task will find themselves more motivated. They will identify their self as more strengthen self and a person with high self-efficacy.

Managerial Limitations in Generating Intrinsic Motivation and Flow Experience

Through the discussion on motivational issues with managers from diverse organizations during our survey following managerial constraints were identified that are limiting managers towards the development of intrinsic motivation and flow experience:

- According to managers interviewed, the basic reason for their reluctance towards intrinsic motivation's development is that the flow cannot be created in pockets; the whole organizational environment has to be transformed in order to engender psychological energy and positive emotions among all the employees. For this thing to happen the top management has to take keen interest and nurturing leadership is required.
- Secondly in the business organizations there are many routine jobs in production, marketing, finance and HR departments, these jobs can be made challenging but there is limit to make them interesting as compared to activities like sports, painting, singing, drama or reading.
- The qualitative appraisal is difficult to make, and to justify because of its intangibility. On the other hand extrinsic motivational techniques are tangible and easier to implement. It is also easier to rate employees' performance on quantitative terms and to decide extrinsic rewards against quantitative appraisal.
- Majority of managers are afraid of losing control over employees and their performances if they adopt intrinsic motivational techniques in isolation. Though from extrinsic rewards with approach and avoidance techniques they try to generate intrinsic motivation among their followers without much success. The intrinsic motivation is weakened by giving people rewards for completing interesting tasks, particularly if these rewards are perceived as controlling (Deci *et al., 1999*).
- The intrinsic motivation is weakened by punishment, threats of punishment, pressured evaluation, and by imposing, goals, deadlines and directives. Therefore large number of managers feels that with extrinsic focus they are able to keep things under control, to avoid risk

of failure, to stabilize the system, to generate the compliance in the system, to achieve quantitative goals successfully and finally to run the organization in profit.

- It has also been observed in many organizations that managers who believe in extrinsic motivation are always searching the answer to the question that why their organizations are not performing up to expected excellence despite their workers are working day and night with full compliance to organizational systems.

These findings certainly suggests that majority of corporate managers are in a favor of extrinsic motivational techniques to keep things moving and to sustain their profits. They do not follow the strategies for intrinsic motivational development in the organizations because of long and tedious procedures and strive to generate excellence in the organization.

Organizational Limitations in facilitating Intrinsic Motivational Environment

In order to know the correct path to generate flow experience among the employees of an Indian organizations following intrinsic non-motivators were identified that are to be eliminated for the purpose:

- **Non-Alignment of employees with the DNA:** The DNA of the organization is the core source of positive emotions and psychological energy for employees. It provides meaning to organization's existence, common direction to all the stakeholders and values that guide the behavior of employees. Well defined DNA is merely a written document that increases the file load on the shelf. It can breed positive emotions and psychological energy only when each of the employees is emotionally aligned with it, and is committed with organization's vision, mission, and goals, and believe strongly on organizational values. We found that such thing is missing in many organizations. Managers at all levels of the organization need to communicate about it on multiple forums and through mentoring and nurturing leadership. Top level managers must put conscious efforts to align their behavior with organizational values. They should present themselves as role model to their followers by showing commitment with organizational mission, goals, and values. When the employees will come to know about the direction where they all are heading, the purpose of their existence, and would share the organizational values, they will get filled with full of psychological energy and positive emotions.
- **Ambiguity in Management-Employee Expectations:** Our conversation with management and employees on this issue revealed that in majority of the organization there was no clarity in terms of management and employees' expectations from each other. This is more significant in terms of qualitative parameters of the performance. The communication gap is clearly visible among them. The management is lacking both in empathy as well as in assertiveness. The win-lose situation is there between management and employees. Because of these reasons the employees of the organizations are not clear about what level of performance is required or in other words what management expects from them and also what they should expect from management. Eradication of this ambiguity and foundation of win-win situation will definitely produce positive emotions.
- **Inadequate Performance Evaluation Tools:** It was also observed that the items used in the performance evaluation form were mostly quantitative, based on five point rating scales. The managers are used to rate employee's performance merely on their observation and may be distorted perception, that too with common human error of ticking on mid points. There is a strong need to develop qualitative evaluation tools that can evaluate the efforts also and not only the results.
- **Camouflaging of Performance Evaluation's Objectives:** Ideally the performance evaluations are made to provide feedback to employees in positive manner about how best they have performed and the areas needing improvement. But while going through the entire procedure we have found that mostly the performance evaluation reports are considered as confidential reports in the organizations and managers are using that as weapon against workers to win their compliance. This negative utilization of performance evaluation decreases the intrinsic motivation. In order to create flow in the environment all necessary changes should be made in terms of evaluation criteria as well as feedbacks on performances.

- **Unwillingness to learn new skills or sharpen existing skills:** According to Csikszentmihalyi (1997) the task which leads to flow experience must be challenging yet achievable and it must demand that we use our skills almost to their limits. But mostly the employees lack skills to perform the jobs and also they are unwilling to learn new skills or sharpen existing skills. In other words we can say that majority of employees are unaware of their incompetence or level of competence that they can achieve. This clearly shows that there is lack of mentoring and nurturing from managers. We cannot generate excellence by simply releasing the rules, regulations, and order on paper, and evaluating the performance on paper. We need to do the mentoring and nurturing of our employees on one to one basis at each and every encounter.

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