Seven Proven Ways to Drastically Increase Workforce Productivity in 3 to 6 Months

By: Scott R. Playfair

Introduction

Any company in today's complex business environment is driven by three critical success factors – all focused on customer satisfaction. These three factors are:

- People
- Processes
- Technology

A healthy, profitable company has equal emphasis on each of these critical factors. However, it is not easy to maintain that balance in a world of constant and rapidly changing technology combined with fierce global competition. Yet, this balance is the key to business success.

Of these three, most often the "people" element is neglected. As change impacts employees in both their personal and professional lives, the assumption that they will naturally be okay can be a serious mistake. This mistake can generate great employee dissatisfaction when people are in a state of change overload. Morale, productivity, and attitudes can decline. The change itself isn't the problem; the important issue surrounds the ability of people to handle the change. An employee who is dissatisfied with his or her job can cost a company plenty without management ever knowing it!

Here lies one of the biggest challenges faced by business today:

> *How do organizations rapidly implement the changes necessary to survive and prosper in today's complex business environment and not lose the help and support of their people in the process?*

This poses an even more important question:

> *How do companies motivate, empower, and engage their employees in this environment to generate competitive advantage?*

Every business today is in the same boat facing the same challenges. When thinking about the three critical success factors mentioned earlier – people, processes and technology – only one of the three offers true competitive advantage – the "people factor". Why is this the case?

Any company with enough money or financial backing can obtain state of the art technology driving state of the art processes. However, even the highest bidder cannot buy the motivation, caring and passion of the people who will use that technology and manage and perform those processes. These traits must be nurtured and developed by a caring and knowledgeable management team. As a result, the companies that can tap into and leverage the human resources in their organization will be the winners!

The commitment and work ethic of the people in an organization represent its only unique competitive advantage.

Therefore, the all important question that must be answered is as follows:

> *How does a business motivate, empower, and engage the human element (their*
> *human capital) to generate and sustain*
> *significant competitive advantage?*

Generating answers to this question will be the focus of the balance of this article. These findings are based on the work of Frederick Herzberg and his Motivation Theory.

Seven Key Motivation Factors

Seven key human needs or triggers must be addressed in order to generate peak performance and leverage human capital for competitive advantage. These needs are universal and apply to all levels of an organization from the boiler room to the boardroom. Although the "method" of need satisfaction may vary at different levels of the organization, the needs remain the same.

The better these needs are fulfilled, the greater the competitive advantage an organization will generate.

The seven key human needs that will give any organization tremendously improved morale and productivity are:

1. Basic Survival
2. Empowerment/ Freedom to Act
3. Variety
4. Feedback and Positive Reinforcement
5. Wholeness and Meaning
6. A Team Based Environment
7. Room to Grow and Succeed

Each of these seven needs falls into one of two categories - "satisfiers" or "motivators". Before examining the key needs in detail, it is important to understand the difference between these two categories.

"The Satisfiers"

Satisfiers are needs that must be satisfied above all others because human survival is dependent upon them. As Gandhi said, "Even God cannot talk to a hungry man except in terms of bread." These needs do not motivate in and of themselves, but their absence definitely can demotivate. When they are missing or inadequate, they consume all the thoughts and emotions of an employee. As a result, nothing else will matter to an employee with unfulfilled survival needs. The only "satisfier" on the list of seven key needs is 1) Basic Survival.

"The Motivators"

Employees are driven by other higher level needs called "motivators". Motivators comprise factors 2 through 7 on the list of key human needs. There are two types of motivators:

- Optimal
- Maximal

Optimal motivators include 2) Empowerment, 3) Variety, and 4) Feedback. They must be offered at an "optimal" level since too much is just as dangerous as too little.

Maximal motivators include 5) Wholeness, 6) Team Based Environment, and 7) Room to Grow. The more of these to which an employee is exposed, the better. They cannot be overdone.

A final comment on motivators is that human beings cannot motivate one another. They can only provide an "environment" for motivation. Therefore, the goal is to provide an environment that will allow employees to fulfill the needs that motivate them.

Let's now review each of the seven needs in detail, outlining what must be done to optimize it in the work environment.

1. **Basic Survival**

   As indicated above, basic survival is comprised of needs that must be satisfied above all others and is consequently a "satisfier". Put in terms of the work environment, basic survival includes:

   - Fair and adequate pay
   - Job security
   - Benefits
   - Health and safety

   These satisfiers are factors external to the actual job function. They must be fulfilled at a minimum and they do not motivate. However, their absence causes all-consuming demotivation.

   A general assumption for most gainfully employed people is that these survival needs have been met. This does not mean that they are perfect; they rarely are to the employee. It does mean that the employee is not totally consumed by their absence or inadequacy.

   The remaining six key needs do, however, provide the essential characteristics to create an environment for true employee motivation.

2. **Empowerment / Freedom to Act**

   Empowerment or freedom to act involves giving employees adequate space to make their own decisions. It means they have control over the management of time, materials, pace, and relations with others.

   People are intimately aware of their roles and responsibilities in the organization. They understand their work processes better than anyone else could. When employees are empowered to manage and improve those processes, they will always step up to the plate and do the right thing. The critical factor is that employees are given the authority to manage their jobs. With authority comes immense personal responsibility to perform.

   In a supportive environment, people are given the authority to set their own goals, objectives, and action plans. This gives the employees the feeling that they are trusted to manage their own jobs for optimum results. The outcome is a sense of job / goal ownership. The results generated are far beyond anything management could demand or dictate to their employees.

   Empowerment can be enhanced through proper skill training, especially in the area of process improvement. The empowerment of people and teams working on customer-focused process improvement creates an incredible synergy. This synergy feeds upon itself, ever increasing, to create unparalleled excitement, motivation and passion, which leads to exceptional performance.

   It takes true leaders to loosen the reins and see how far and fast the horse can carry them!

   Have you tried to untap your workforce's potential through empowerment? The results and payback are sure to pleasantly surprise you!

3. **Variety**

   Variety must be created to hold interest and drive performance. However, it should not become so high as to create anxiety, confusion or overwork. This issue supports the age-old adage that "variety is the spice of life." When variety is lacking, it leads to complacency. Complacency generates boredom, unhappiness, and under achievement. This leads to a multitude of unhealthy business results. If variety is essential to a vibrant and healthy life, it should come as no surprise that it is also critical to a positive work life.

Variety can take many forms, from different direct work assignments to diversion via participation on an ad hoc "project team". A project team might have the task of coming together to rapidly improve a process or solve a problem. This requires the involvement of appropriate subject matter experts who may not normally work together.

Variety has an interesting side effect. It can broaden employee knowledge and interaction, which increases interest and communication. People feel better and more informed about what they are doing. They want to know more and do more. In essence, variety gives the employee a heightened sense of contribution, self worth, and personal pride. This naturally generates improved personal confidence, which leads to increased motivation and contribution. People enjoy their work and look forward to getting out of bed in the morning. After all, if people enjoy what they do, they will never "work" a day in their lives.

Have you tried to give your employees greater job variety – and generate these side benefits for your company?
- *Cross training*
- *Team based process improvement*
- *Absentee backup/coverage*
- *Broadening of workforce knowledge and effectiveness*

4. Feedback and Positive Reinforcement

This one factor is the most underused and yet most powerful method to motivate a workforce. Interestingly enough, it is also the easiest and most inexpensive to implement. All it typically takes is a little time and effort.

When Napoleon was asked how he was able to motivate his men to be so courageous and spirited in battle, he replied, *"I have come to realize an amazing fact… men will die for ribbons."* Today "ribbons" can take many forms, some physical and some mental. There are many ways to give constructive feedback and simultaneously provide positive reinforcement and recognition.

Any feedback must be genuine in nature and intent. Therefore, it will contain both good and bad. Why not correct the negative but dwell on the positive? As Tom Peters says, *"Celebrate what you want to see more of."* As time passes and good behavior is positively reinforced, it will become dominant, and you will see much more of it. Naturally, this leaves less and less time for negative behavior.

The return generated from positive reinforcement is huge! In most cases, all it takes is a few minutes of focused time. That time can be made much more effective with a few proven methods and tools supported by a consistent strategy. It truly generates a "win-win" scenario for everyone in the organization.

When was the last time you celebrated a job well done at your company – and how many have been missed? Isn't the small time investment for positive recognition worth the huge return it can generate? Catch people doing something "RIGHT"!

5. Wholeness and Meaning

This motivational need depends on two important elements, customer focus and cascaded organizational goals. The first element, "customer focus", requires employees to understand their primary customer (internal to the company or outside of it). They must also be aware of what makes up the customer chain leading to the final end user of the company's goods or services. This understanding clarifies the necessary internal and external customer-supplier relationships. It defines the critical links for all business processes that lead to the company's success.

Customer awareness is essential to give a person a true sense of significance and importance at work. After all, a customer-focused chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and no one wants to be the "weak link". Employees gain a solid perspective of their importance in a customer-focused organization and acquire an incredibly powerful sense of meaning for their job. They clearly understand their significance to the whole organization and the responsibility that their role carries.

The second element necessary for a feeling of wholeness and meaning, "cascaded organizational goals", requires employees to understand how their individual contribution supports the goals of the entire organization. Company goals and objectives must be clearly articulated. Divisions, departments, and individual employees must then generate supporting goals. As a result, corporate goals are effectively cascaded down through all levels of the organization.

Employees then feel that by achieving their individual objectives, they are directly contributing to the success of the organization. Understanding their contribution reinforces the employees' sense of wholeness and meaning.

The combination of these two elements – customer focus and cascaded organizational goals – generates internal drive and motivation in each employee. Peak performance results because the employee feels that *"what I do truly matters!"* Direct line of sight feedback is also generated, which helps them determine what they need to do or improve to *"make a difference"*.

There is no substitute for the benefits of a feeling of wholeness and meaning. It separates high performing organizations from average performers.

Do your employees understand how their objectives tie to the corporate and customer priorities? Do they realize what a critical role they individually play in the company's success?

6. A Team-Based Environment

A team-based environment promotes mutual support and respect among all individuals in an organization. Made up of a cross section of levels and responsibilities, teams can reduce fear. Fear is typically the biggest barrier to exceptional performance for most adults.

In this type of environment, people look out for their teammates and do what is right for team success. An envelope of protection develops which eliminates playing it safe and promotes healthy innovation, creativity and risk taking. Mediocrity is abolished and high performance is the norm.

The team-based environment reduces perceived barriers of level or status and creates a feeling of unity. Employees feel that they are in this together. In other words, it creates a "family environment" typically lost in today's day and age.

A winning team supports and encourages all team members to be the best they can be. Being part of the team creates a feeling of confidence, security, happiness, and inner peace. Employees enter the performance "zone". They are on the road to exceptional individual productivity. In addition, tremendous *synergy* is created that can only be achieved through teams. A high performance culture is formed that ensures sustained competitive advantage.

Are teams playing an important role in your company? What would your company's P&L be like if it were built on a foundation of high performing teams?

7. Room to Grow and Succeed

Human beings have an innate need to improve and advance. Organizations that offer an environment for learning, development, and advancement will attract and retain top-notch talent.

No one wants to be in a dead-end job where "it all pays the same no matter what I do". In fact, the most valuable, highest contributing performers will leave an organization before conforming to a stagnant environment – regardless of the level of pay and benefits. Even solid performers will become mediocre and complacent in an environment without challenge or the hope of future advancement.

Organizations can insure their current and future success by investing in the growth and development of their employees. Two factors are critical to this success. The first is to create an environment of continual training and development for the employee. The second is to formulate individual career paths and succession plans.

Successful organizations realize that humans have this growth and development need both personally and professionally. People want to grow in their professional lives, but they also want the same thing in their personal lives. To have an outstanding performer at work, there must be personal and professional balance in the employee's life. If the personal life is sacrificed for the work life, it will eventually lead to disaster for both the individual and the employer. Therefore, progressive companies help individuals grow and prosper in both areas of their lives. Through self-assessment and personal goal setting, an employee can achieve this balance.

This type of caring and support by a company not only improves the employees but also gives them a sense of trust and loyalty to the employer. It comes across as a belief that the company cares about them as a whole person and not just as an employee. Again, this is a feeling that cannot be bought but must be earned by the employer. However, once achieved, it is a priceless mindset - one that leads to incredible dedication and loyalty. Once this mindset permeates an organization, it creates an unbeatable team.

Do your employees feel they have a bright future to look forward to in
your company? Or are some just putting in time until retirement? How
could you improve this situation? Wouldn't it make an incredible
difference in the productivity of your workforce?

This completes an overview of the seven key human needs. Successfully fulfilling these needs isn't confusing and complex. It is actually dependent on good solid common sense and some focused attention.

When people seek to fulfill these needs but do not find the opportunity under organizational leadership, any or all of the following will result:

> Doubt, worry, fear, insecurity, anxiety, paranoia, rejection, exclusion, criticism, disapproval, embarrassment, rebuke, boredom, defensiveness, and a feeling of uselessness

What a devastating list of unproductive feelings! Good leadership generates a motivational environment that promotes the opposite feelings of:

> Passion, excitement, engagement, belonging, involvement, friendship, meaning, pride, access, honor, respect, mastery, recognition, and accomplishment

It should now be evident how critical the fulfillment of the seven needs is to the success of any organization. Further, it is certainly possible to drastically increase workforce productivity in 3 – 6 months by focusing on these needs! The result… a better bottom line and a better quality of work life for everyone involved.

Supporting Research

A recent study conducted in a wide cross-section of business and industry has confirmed both the significance and accuracy of the information presented in this article. The objective of this research was to determine the factors that had the most positive influence on job satisfaction and productivity.

You might have assumed without an understanding of the seven basic needs, that factors such as pay, fringe benefits, working conditions, and seniority rights would be the most effective in motivating on the job performance. However, these factors were found to play a "maintenance" function and little else. If they were not present, then dissatisfaction would rapidly rise. However, their presence served only to avoid dissatisfaction and did relatively little to stimulate high achievement.

Another set of factors, however, was found to be closely tied to job motivation and productivity. These factors included a sense of achievement, recognition of work done, growth, participation, variety, delegation, goal setting, and meaningful performance appraisal.

A second study, done by the Labor Relations Institute, focused on the question: "What do people want to get from their jobs?" To answer that question, the Institute surveyed **ten thousand workers** in a cross-section of industries. The workers were asked to rank, in order of importance, ten different job factors. Below is the list of factors appearing in the rank-order of the workers' responses:

1. Full appreciation of work being done
2. Feeling like they really make a difference
3. Sympathetic help with personal problems
4. Job security
5. Good wages
6. Interesting work
7. Promotion and growth in the company
8. Personal loyalty to employees
9. Good working conditions
10. Tactful discipline

This study not only confirms ideas that have been previously presented, it offers an additional insight. At the same time the ten thousand workers were surveyed, the supervisors of these workers were also asked to rank the same ten factors as they thought their employees would rank them. The supervisors ranked as the top three:

1. Good wages
2. Job security
3. Promotion and growth in the company

These are not even close to the top three factors as ranked by the employees. Even more surprising, the factors ranked as top three by the employees were ranked last by their supervisors! In other words**, the things that employees wanted most were considered by their supervisors to be the things they wanted least!**

The implications of this are apparent and represent a huge potential pitfall for the leadership of any organization. Organizational leadership must insure the "satisfiers" are in place, but, more importantly, they must focus on the "motivators" if the organization is going to survive and excel in today's fiercely competitive and ever changing business climate.

Recommendations

Business owners and managers who desire to create an environment that addresses the motivational needs of their workforce must do three critical things:

1. Assess the environment that currently exists in their organization as it relates to the seven needs.

2. Determine their organization's strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the needs of their workforce.

3. Develop a strategy and implement a comprehensive plan to enhance the current motivational environment in their organization.

This activity requires clear and focused leadership throughout the management ranks of an organization, starting at the top. When these steps are properly completed, the return on the investment of time and effort is immense.

Summary

The following outline summarizes the information presented in this article.

- One of the greatest challenges in today's rapidly changing and intensely competitive business environment is that of balancing the three critical factors essential for business survival and success.
    - People
    - Processes
    - Technology
- The people element is often the most neglected of the three critical success factors. However, *people* represent a company's only true competitive advantage.
- A key question that must be answered in order for a business to prosper is:

    How does a business motivate, empower, and engage the human element (their human capital) to generate and sustain significant competitive advantage?

- Seven key human needs must be fulfilled in order for a business to leverage its human capital.
    1. Basic Survival
    2. Empowerment / Freedom to Act
    3. Variety
    4. Feedback and Positive Reinforcement
    5. Wholeness and Meaning
    6. A Team-Based Environment
    7. Room to Grow and Succeed
- Need 1) is a "satisfier". It is a need that must be fulfilled before all others. It consists of:
    - Fair and adequate pay
    - Job security
    - Benefits
    - Health and safety

    Satisfiers are factors external to the job that do not motivate but their absence can demotivate. In general, most people employed by an organization have their basic survival needs met.
- Needs 2) to 7) represent needs that are called "motivators". Once the "satisfiers" are fulfilled, people look to fulfill higher level needs that motivate them. Fulfillment of motivational needs is critical to organizational success.

There are two types of motivators:

- Optimal
- Maximal

Needs 2) through 4) represent "optimal" motivators. These are needs that must be optimally met because too much can be as bad as too little.

Needs 5) through 7) represent "maximal" motivators. Employees cannot get too much of these (the more the better).

- One human being cannot motivate another. They can only provide an environment for motivation. The role of management is to provide this environment.
- This information is not theoretical. It is grounded in solid research performed in the real world of business.
- Organizational leaders must do three things to create an environment that satisfies the motivational needs of their workforce.
  1. Assess the environment that currently exists in their organization as it relates to the seven needs.
  2. Determine their organization's strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the needs of their workforce.
  3. Develop a strategy and implement a comprehensive plan to enhance the current motivational environment in their organization.

  When these steps are properly completed the return on the time and effort spent is immense.

This article was written to explain substantiated motivational concepts in the context of today's business environment. It gives straightforward advice on how to implement these concepts in order to improve workforce productivity. The article shows that motivating and leveraging a company's human capital can create sustained competitive advantage in a relatively short period of time.

The one clear and consistent message throughout this article has been the following simple premise for business success:

People do not make a difference

They ARE the difference.

About the Author

Scott R. Playfair is the president and founder of P Squared (P^2) Management Consulting based in Houston, Texas.

Before founding P^2, Scott worked in business and industry for over 20 years. He held a multitude of management positions in Fortune 100 companies as well as several rapidly growing, mid-sized companies.

During the 8 years prior to the formation of P^2, Scott held senior executive positions responsible for corporate-wide HR, training and development, process improvement, organizational development, and change management.

P^2 is a nationally recognized management consulting firm that helps clients positively leverage their human capital to gain and sustain competitive advantage.

Contact information:
	Phone:	(936) 271-0712
	Email:	p2mc@wt.net
	Web Site:	www.p2mc.com