

Always Reward Good Performance – a Business Psychologists View

Some jobs and some tasks are intrinsically satisfying. That is, by their very nature they are interesting and pleasant to do. They can be enjoyable for a wide variety of reasons and much depends on the preference, predilections and propensities of individuals.

Intrinsic satisfaction implies that merely doing the job is, in itself, its own reward. Therefore, for such activities no reward and no management should be required. But the naive manager might unwillingly extinguish this ideal state of affairs.

Take the case of the academic writer scribbling at home on a research report. The local children had for three days played extremely noisily in a small park near his study and like all noise of this sort it was highly stressful because it was simultaneously loud, uncontrollable and unpredictable.

What should be done? (A) Ask (politely) they quieten down or go away (B) Call the police or the parents if you know them (C) Threaten them with force if they do not comply (D) All of the above in that order.

The wise don used none of the above. Unworldly maybe, but someone whose job depended on intrinsic motivation, the academic applied another principle. He went to the children on the fourth morning and said, somewhat insincerely, that he had very much enjoyed them being there the sound of their laughter, and the thrill of their games. In fact, he was so delighted with them that he was prepared to pay them to continue. He promised to pay them each £1.00 a day if they carried on as before.

The youngsters were naturally surprised but delighted. For two days the don, seeming grateful, dispensed the cash. But on the third day he explained that because of a "cash flow" problem he could only give them 50p each. The next day he claimed to be "cash-light" and only handed out 10p.

Cue to prediction the children would have none of this, complained and refused to continue. They all left in a huff promising never to return to play in the park. Totally successful in his endeavour the don retired to his study luxuriating in the silence.

This parable illustrates a problem for the manager. If a person is happy doing a task, for whatever reason, but is also "managed" through explicit rewards (usually money), the individual will tend to focus on these rewards, which then inevitably have to be escalated to maintain satisfaction.

There is considerable research on the types of job which give their holders the most satisfaction. Contrary to popular predictions, it is not merchant bankers or highly-flying company executives who report most satisfaction. Many in fact yearn for early but "comfortable" retirement. Nor is it social-workers, nurses or others in the care-business. It turns out that craftsmen and women report most job satisfaction. The "crafts" vary: mathematicians are very job satisfied, as are furniture makers. Goldsmiths, stone-wall builders, and other employed craftspeople report highest intrinsic satisfaction.

Craftspeople have intrinsic job satisfaction partly because of the pace, timing and control they have in their work but also because of their identification with the final product. However, once a fine furniture builder becomes a successful businessman he may lose his thrill in design and curving. That is why the best craftspeople have "agents" who deal with money matters. This is not only because they, the craftspeople, are frequently inexperienced at running a business, but also many do not like it despite the obvious monetary rewards.

Intrinsic motivation in part explains why some people continue at poorly paid employment. They do not need motivating in the usual way - through an astute mixture of carrot and stick - because they are intrinsically motivated. But, like all of us, they still respond to praise for the product or service that they supply.

For those limited few who enjoy doing what they do, working (like virtue) is its own reward.

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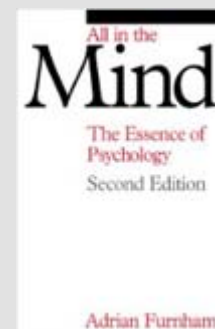
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This month's newsletter is written by Prof. Adrian Furnham. Adrian is fellow of the **British Psychological Society**, one of the world's leading psychologists, the second most productive psychologist in the world since 1980 (as 'counted' by number of articles published), a mould-breaking academic, a leading consultant on organisational behaviour, writer, raconteur and broadcaster. He is a Professor of Psychology at **University College London** and a founder director of **Applied Behavioural Research Associates (ABRA)** a management consultancy specialising in performance appraisal, personnel and corporate assessment.

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All in the Mind has been a successful but unusual textbook. It does not claim to be comprehensive, but it does cover important and currently controversial subjects critically and lucidly. Adrian Furnham's aim is to make the topic so interesting that the reader wants to read more, by providing the spark that leads to self-motivation. Much has happened in psychology and its related fields in the six years since the publication of the first edition, and these developments are reflected in the thirty percent of additional text which has been added, and in the updating of existing material.

All in the Mind remains the most popular alternative textbook at many universities because it is so different. It is also read by non-students who want an accessible guide to the discipline of psychology.

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