

**M**otivation – particularly in a dismal month like January – is extremely hard to define.

At the end of 2006, HR consultancy Getfeedback conducted detailed telephone interviews with 22 HR directors in leading private sector companies to try to pin down how they measure and manage motivation at work, and the impact of engaged employees on the workplace.

The results came as a surprise. Although HR directors understood the difference between 'extrinsic' motivation (salary and employee benefits, for example), and 'intrinsic' motivation (what inspires us to go to work every day), few had formal procedures in place to measure either.

Only two respondents could quote their average cost-per-hire, and the same number had calculated the cost to the business of employees not performing to their optimum level. Only three respondents used specific tools to assess on-the-job motivation. And only one could cite the amount their company spent on rewards and benefits in a bid to keep their employees motivated.

Last week, *Personnel Today* and Getfeedback brought together a panel of HR professionals, academics and consultants to give their thoughts on what motivates employees, and how HR can not only identify motivation, but use it to help workers be more productive. Here are the highlights of the discussion.

**Chris Bones (CB):** In HR, we have a delicate balance to strike when it comes to motivation. We're either at odds with the organisation because we are supporting our people, or we're at odds with the people as we implement HR policy. How do you manage this?

**Barbara Duffy (BD):** Often, particularly in poor-performing businesses, the focus is on achievement of short-term results. That makes it more difficult for HR to drive longer term employee engagement strategies. Line managers may have the desire to improve motivation, but it may have been quashed by more pressing commercial objectives. Creating an environment where people are comfortable to challenge and influence leaders' thinking in this area is crucial.

**Diana Breeze (DB):** You can make the mistake of identifying engagement as 'soft' while performance is 'hard'. When things go wrong, many organisations tend to adopt a command and control style. But engagement isn't soft. It's about painting a picture of what you want.

**Paul Peplow (PP):** When you get the right people first it helps – if you hire the wrong people, or you have a group of people who've been there too long and their goals





# question of motive

What motivates staff and how can HR manage and make the best of staff engagement? We brought together HR, academia and motivation specialists from a range of industries to find some answers.

no longer align with the organisation's, you're in a vicious circle of decline. I think all the HR and legal issues around moving people in and out of the organisation means many managers shy away from the challenge.

**Jane Basley (JB):** There are people who have been in BP for a long time, but their passion for the business is amazing. We have someone with a PhD in paleontology working in recruitment, for example. He had a passion for this and found a job where he could get paid to do something he loved. In other organisations, people may have studied one thing at university only to follow a career in something completely different.

**Dilys Robinson (DR):** Professionals as a group tend to have a high level of motivation and job satisfaction, but they don't have the same level of engagement with their employer. This is a challenge for the organisation because you don't want to lose someone's expertise if they get a better offer from somewhere else. It's not pay, but the opportunity to practise their profession, that they're looking for.

**CB: Would it be fair to say that motivation comes from you, but engagement comes from the organisation?**

**Ali Gill (AG):** I think there are two questions to consider: what are you motivated to do, and how quickly do you want to get there? Motivation to do a certain job and speed of ambition are two different things, measured differently. Lots of organisations focus on the people who want to move the fastest but

aren't so good at detecting whether they are motivated. If you can't manage the two approaches, it's difficult to manage the progress of different types of people.

**Andrew Armes (AA):** You can make people more self-aware. But then you can lead them to water, but not always get them to drink. Many people have life-changing events that make them more self-aware but then do nothing about it.

**CB: Could we suggest that, actually, as a manager your job is not to motivate staff? Rather, you engage and understand individual motivations and drivers, and create pathways for individuals to follow them?**

**PP:** I agree. Some people are motivated to work for big corporations; others want to work a different way. It's hard to motivate people if there's no spark, but what you can do is avoid demotivating them.

**DB:** A lot of jobs are defined by standard routines, so you have to hook into what staff enjoy outside work. That's the route in.

**JB:** If outside the workplace someone loves travelling, for example, and they also love what they specialise in at work, you can satisfy both by giving them a job where they can travel with their specialism.

**CB: Some people simply want their employer to organise their life. What can you do for these people, particularly in times of change?**

**DR:** When you join an organisation you're

## OUR PANEL



■ Chairman: Chris Bones, principal, Henley Management College



■ Andrew Armes, head of career development, AstraZeneca



■ Jane Basley, head of global recruitment, exploration and production, BP



■ Diana Breeze, director of organisational development, Sainsbury's



■ Barbara Duffy, group talent director, Centrica



■ Ali Gill, director and co-founder, Getfeedback



■ Paul Peplow, sales training and development manager, O2



■ Dilys Robinson, principle researcher, Institute for Employment Studies



motivated and keen. Managers can do a lot to demotivate people. There's also an assumption that if you've been around for a long time you've become demotivated. In our research, it's actually the youngest and oldest groups that are the most engaged.

**CB:** People create myths in organisations and we allow that to continue. We don't go out and confront them. People leave because of myths, not always managers.

**DB:** But so much of our motivation is down to what the line manager does. In a time of change, if that person can't paint a picture of what the change means, staff feel like it's being imposed on them.

**JB:** It also depends on how that manager feels about that message, and whether they've had the opportunity to discuss it themselves. How can an organisation be confident that line managers have the skills to manage a message, both upwards and downwards within the organisation?

**CB:** How can we help people recognise their own motivations?

**BD:** There are pockets of our organisation that are very motivated and engaged, and we should learn from these. One area has a leader who is consistently effective and engaging. He is willing to stand up and display his vulnerabilities, and say: "This is what I learned from my mistakes". His people are more motivated, open and more willing to have 'real' conversations. He is seen to be more open to the diversity of motivational needs within the workforce and tailors his approach accordingly.

**CB:** So how do we get leaders to demonstrate these qualities?

**PP:** We look for a link between individuals' improvement and business performance.

**AA:** It should be holistic. The programme starts with your employer branding, right through recruitment – making sure you get people with the right level of self-awareness, then leadership programmes internally, and performance management. This can take years. It's not just a tick-box exercise where you send someone on a course and that's it.

**DB:** You need to understand where your centre of gravity is. This is where you get the biggest bang for your buck. We realised that it wasn't only in the top team. It's on the shopfloor and with our first line managers.

**DR:** We always find the role of the line manager is key and that investing in them is crucial. It's a lot for new managers to take on. They're expected to know everything about company procedures when they're just getting their heads round the job itself.

**AA:** Let's take it a step further. If you don't have people in HR and organisational devel-

opment who understand this, then how on earth do you expect line managers to learn how to motivate people? If they're not self-aware themselves about what they do, how can they bleed this into the rest of the organisation?

**CB:** Whatever happened to basic management training? People in leadership roles today did not go through some of the basic training that we did.

**PP:** You only have so much money to spend. If you get your first line management right and spend money on that, then that impacts on the biggest bulk of people. Your first management job is always the hardest thing you've ever done. Often companies invest heavily in programmes for top executives. You need mechanisms in place for them to take it down through the organisation.

**AG:** Customers play a role. They give people very quick feedback and are assertive about what they want. You face criticism every day, so a manager needs to have a supportive role. You don't always want to give employees more critical feedback.

**JB:** What do we expect from people coming into our organisations from school and university? How does that prepare them for the world of work? Before, our choices were much narrower. I'm not sure the education system today supports conversations around people being aware of their own motivations.

**CB:** Our education system is still based on the 1960s-70s model, where our career options were limited. It doesn't recognise management as a vocation in its own right. You could also say that our HR systems haven't changed to accommodate the shift.

**DR:** I think people are actually better

equipped for the world of work when they come out of education. They're given coursework, they work in teams, and they work collaboratively.

**PP:** It seems to me that when people don't live up to the measures we've put in place, organisations keep on giving them another chance. Does this link back to the quality of HR, or is it to do with the legal system?

**CB:** Is it a mutual responsibility between employer and worker, then, if someone has made the wrong decision about a direction in their career and has become demotivated?

**BD:** A number of factors affect this, including the recruitment process, the role, culture and environment, learning and development, the person and the manager. It is HR's role to influence the business to see these as all important factors in increasing motivation and performance. It is important that you have the right HR people in place to affect this.

**CB:** What can HR do to help these different motivations? What systems can make these things better?

**DB:** Different groups have different motivations/requirements, and if you're careful about where interventions will have the most value, you will get the best results.

**AA:** At AstraZeneca, we articulate the psychological contract – what our commitment is to the employee, and what we expect of them. They have this the minute they come into the organisation. For some, the motivation is simply to come to work and get paid; for others it's about nourishing their soul. The important thing is that they are honest about their aspirations.

**CB:** The best contract you can have is where the individual does not ask the organisation to do the impossible and the individual does not expect the impossible of the organisation.

**BD:** One issue is that the people who are really valued often don't know who they are, especially in times of change. If managers regularly give positive feedback to key performers, it increases their confidence to undertake greater challenges and reinforces their commitment.

**CB:** To conclude, we need a balance of intuition and measurement. We should use metrics not to justify, but to help people understand why they come to work.

## WIN A READER TRIAL

Talent management consultancy Getfeedback is offering 25 *Personnel Today* readers the opportunity to receive a free copy of their detailed report on motivation (*Motivation at Work*) and to trial Intrinsic – a new psychometric test that measures not what an individual 'can do' but what they 'will do' – what really gives them a buzz at work.

Intrinsic helps predict a person's future performance in a job by matching their deep-rooted internal drivers to a particular role. The test will be launched in February.

The test can be completed online in a lunch hour and a qualified business psychologist will provide a detailed interpretation of the results.

To qualify please contact Heather Sommerville at [intrinsic@getfeedback.net](mailto:intrinsic@getfeedback.net), or call 01491 845532. For more information visit [www.getfeedback.net](http://www.getfeedback.net)

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