Can a manager really motivate others?
Engines of Disharmony
by Martin Powell

This is an important question especially during these challenging times. There is one school of thought that says that motivation is a reaction or chosen response by an individual. Imagine that a manager offers two different team members a trip to an international sporting event if the project they are working on is delivered successfully. One of them changes the way she is behaving towards difficulties; some people even comment on how motivated she is; the other one continues as before. They both chose their personal response to the trigger by the manager.

So what can a manager do? Simply, he or she needs to create an environment where people will choose to be motivated towards really helping the organisation to achieve its goal. There are a few businesses where such an environment exists.

Usually we find these are newer businesses in newer business sectors, which were set up by a passionate individual who placed purpose as more important than profit and attracted people to work for them personally as well as the purpose and ethos of the business. Maybe Steve Jobs and Apple are an example.

So why do we not see this as much in more traditional businesses and business sectors? Why is it so much more difficult for many managers to trigger higher levels of motivation? Eli Goldratt analysed this and coined the phrase “Engines of Disharmony”.

Eli wrote:

“Every manager is well aware of the impact of increasing the motivation, initiative, synchronization, willingness to collaborate and communication among his people. All those “soft” issues are actually the hardest, most important ingredients that determine the capabilities of a company.”
Unfortunately, the prevailing approach to improving these issues revolves around dealing directly with the people. Let’s take motivation as an example. As long as we think that the way to increase a person’s motivation is to talk with him, don’t we actually assume that the cause for his lack of sufficient motivation resides with the person himself?”

In reading this we have to consider one of Eli’s fundamental assumptions that all TOC practitioners adopt – “People are good” – they come to work wanting to do a good job and it is the system that gets in the way!

Unfortunately, in traditional businesses, this is often not the mindset of many managers or owners, using words like “uncooperative”, “stubborn”, “resistant”, “misguided” even “lazy”. This also emanates from senior managers about middle managers or supervisors. They say “the culture is not right”. This means that in fact it is the system that is broken and not fit for purpose.

Why?

Eli continues:

“Experience and analysis both indicate that the root cause for insufficient motivation (or communication, or synchronization, etc.) is the existence of engines of disharmony. One type of these engines of disharmony is the existence of conflicts. Of course, putting a person under a conflict doesn’t contribute much to his motivation.”

He explains that by implementing a TOC application (such as Critical Chain Project Management (CCPM) or Operations SDBR or Pull-Demand-Replenishment) several of the core conflicts are removed. This is not always the case with other improvement approaches such as LEAN, AGILE or Six Sigma. As an example he refers to the Introduction in the bestselling book in Japan on CCPM.

“Although there are multiple cases documenting "several hundred million yen profit increase in a few months", many of them don’t regard making money itself as the success. Actually, many readers' comments are along the following lines: “Of course I am surprised and happy with the dramatic profit increase in such a short time. But far more important for me is people’s personal and professional growth. Widely spreading teamwork, motivation increasing across the company: I have always wanted our company to be like this!” (CCPM, by Yuji Kishira)”
Apart from these “core conflicts” that are addressed directly by TOC there are many more conflicts and other engines of disharmony that have developed over the history of the business and not been resolved.

**Engines of Disharmony**

1. Many people don’t really know (cannot clearly verbalize) how what they are doing is essential to the organization. *Would you be motivated if you were in that position?*

2. Most people don’t really know how what many of their colleagues are doing is essential, or at least contributes to the organization. *Would you be collaborative if you were in that position?*

3. People are operating under conflicts. *Do you really have the energy to fight others every day?*

4. Many people are required to also do tasks for which the reason no longer exists. People’s intuition is always strong enough to feel it, but not always is it strong enough to convincingly explain it to their superiors. *How satisfied would you be if you were in that position?*

5. Gaps between responsibility and authority. You, like any other manager, know firsthand how frustrating it is to have something you are responsible for accomplishing, but you do not have the authority for some of the actions that must be taken. *Would you be motivated if you were in that position?*

Eli wrote:

“The experience gained in removing (even partially) those type of engines of disharmony is more than enough to realize that if we systematically remove the above engines, we are bound to get the desired culture change. The huge positive ramifications are obvious.”

He said that in order to get the motivation needed, the first set of actions were for a manager to remove the things that de-motivate people - these engines of disharmony. Naturally, Eli rarely revealed his analysis of a subject without also revealing his solution.
The tool to use to handle the first 3 engines is the Strategy & Tactics tree (S&T). This relatively new Thinking Process tool, launched in 2002, is viewed by many of the executives and managers who have been exposed to it, as one of the most important breakthroughs in ensuring that holistic business or organization strategies are defined, properly validated, communicated and implemented to achieve harmony within organizations. The S&T, they believe, can for the first time provide them with a practical process and logical structure for defining and communicating all the necessary and sufficient changes as well as the sequence of implementation of these changes to achieve the goals of the organization.


The S&T tree details how to remove the core conflicts. The consensus process associated with the multi-level S&T tree highlights and overcomes the first and second engines. Following the steps of the S&T during implementation will reveal the other conflicts, which can be resolved with other TOC Thinking Processes. (Cloud or NBR – Negative Branch Reservation)

The consideration of Engines 4 and 5 is expanded in a later article: “Engines of Disharmony #4 and #5”

If you want to change the culture of your organisation, then working “on the people”, the soft side, is going to be a long and unrewarding process unless you first fix the system by removing the Engines of Disharmony!

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**Engines of Disharmony by Eliyahu M. Goldratt**

Lisa Scheinkopf presents what Dr. Eliyahu M. Goldratt mean about the Engines of Disharmony and the importance they have in companies.

[Watch the video >](http://www.toc.tv?id=693)