

The Gamification principles within Daniel Pink's Book, Drive

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"*Drive*" is the fourth non-fiction book by Daniel Pink. The book was published on December 29, 2009 by Riverhead Hardcover. In the text, he argues that human motivation is largely intrinsic, and that the aspects of this motivation can be divided into autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Daniel argues against old models of motivation driven by rewards and fear of punishment, work models which are dominated by extrinsic factors such as money.

Funnily enough, Pink's *Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose* Framework which is outlined within "*Drive*" is also used by another author and book we at Gamify have already read and reviewed, Brian Burke's "[Gamify- How gamification motivates people to do extraordinary things](#)".

Gamification, especially as it applies to enterprise applications, is all about engagement, and quality, and helping people achieve their goals. Or, to put it another way, it's about motivation. There's another approach to thinking about motivation, especially for knowledge workers, and that's exemplified in Daniel Pink's "*Drive*".

Before diving into the motivational principles addressed in the book, let me ask you a question. Why do you work? Push all necessities aside, along with societal expectations and just consider why you do the job that you do, what's your motivation? (I hope I haven't triggered any existential crises)

Now, with that answer in mind, can you honestly say that you're performing both your daily tasks and overall goals to the best of your ability? Is it the prospect of that end-of-year bonus that motivates you? The promotion that you've been promised? Or do you just, quite simply, love what you do?

Many people work in environments that are dominated by "stick and carrot" motivation: do well and you'll get a reward, but do badly and you'll be punished. However, with this approach, the satisfaction of doing a job well can often get lost in the drive for praise and promotion.

The question of how to avoid meaningless labor and instead find fulfilling work brimming with a sense of purpose is an enduring but, for many, elusive cultural ideal.

Pink shares the counterintuitive results of two studies that reveal the inner workings of what influences our behaviour — and the half-truth of why money can't buy us satisfaction:

"The best use of money as a motivator is to pay people enough to take the issue of money off the table: Pay people enough so that they're not thinking about money and they're thinking about the work. Once you do that, it turns out there are three factors that the science shows lead to better performance, not to mention personal satisfaction: autonomy, mastery, and purpose."

In *Drive*, Pink goes on to illustrate why the traditional carrots-and-sticks paradigm of extrinsic reward and punishment doesn't work, pointing instead to his trifecta of intrinsic motivators: *Autonomy*, or the desire to be self-directed; *Mastery*, or the itch to keep improving at something that's important to us; and *Purpose*, the sense that what we do produces something transcendent or serves something meaningful beyond ourselves.

Pink sets out a new vision for workplace motivation, which he labels "Motivation 3.0." So called, he explains, because it's an upgrade from primitive survival (Motivation 1.0) and from the culture of reward and punishment that we find in most businesses (Motivation 2.0).

Pink's theory is drawn from research undertaken by psychologists Harry Harlow and Edward Deci in 1971. They discovered that rewards can fail to improve people's engagement with tasks, and may even damage it. Another study was carried out more recently by professors at MIT in 2017, and recorded similar findings.

Pink argues that traditional *"carrot and stick"* approaches to motivation are becoming outdated, and do not adequately address the needs of the creative and innovative workplaces of the 21st century. Despite this, heavily extrinsic motivated work, is often deep-rooted, particularly among older employees who are accustomed to it.

In contrast, intrinsic motivation is increasingly common in modern workplaces, where routine work is often outsourced. In these kinds of environments, innovation and creativity are key. So, it's essential that people are allowed to thrive by doing work that they are truly passionate about.

Based on the previously mentioned study at MIT amongst other university studies of the same findings, higher pay and bonuses resulted in better performance **ONLY** if the task consisted of basic, mechanical skills. It worked for problems with a defined set of steps and a single answer. If the task involved cognitive skills, decision-making, creativity, or higher-order thinking, higher pay resulted in lower performance. As a supervisor, you should pay employees enough that they are not focused on meeting basic needs and feel that they are being paid fairly. If you don't pay people enough, they won't be motivated. Pink suggests that you should pay enough *"to take the issue of money off the table."*

The Three Key Components of Intrinsic Motivation

So how do you attain that intrinsic motivation? When the following three elements are applied in workplaces where people are paid fairly, the trifecta drives, engages, and stimulates us to do our best work.

1) Autonomy

Autonomy is the need to direct your own life and work. To be fully motivated, you must be able to control what you do, when you do it, and who you do it with.

According to Pink, autonomy motivates us to think creatively without needing to conform to strict workplace rules. By rethinking traditional ideas of control – regular office hours, dress codes, numerical targets, and so on – organisations can increase staff autonomy, build trust, and improve innovation and creativity.

Deci, and his colleague Richard Ryan, have continued to explore the nature of what's called self-determination theory, a **theory of motivation** that takes into account people's psychological needs. They discovered in a study of workers at an investment bank that managers who offered **"autonomy support"** — which means helping employees make progress by giving meaningful feedback, choice over how to do things, and encouragement — resulted in **higher job satisfaction and better job performance**.

Giving users a level of autonomy will help them to feel that they have at least some control of what they are doing. Within a gamified enterprise situation, it is the difference between micromanagement and leaving your employees to get on with their job in the way they feel is best. It shows them that they are trusted and can not only give you happier people but may also surface some great innovation.

Motivation by autonomy is often used by software companies, many of which give their [engineers time](#) to work on their own development projects. This gives them the freedom to try out and test new ideas, which can deliver benefits to the organisation, such as improved processes or innovative solutions. Workplaces can support autonomy by giving people real control over various aspects of their work — whether it's deciding what to work on or when to do it.

2) Mastery

Mastery is the desire to improve. If you are motivated by mastery, you'll likely see your potential as being unlimited, and you'll constantly seek to improve your skills through learning and practice. Someone who seeks mastery needs to attain it for its own sake.

For example, an athlete who is motivated by mastery might want to run as fast as she possibly can. Any medals that she receives are less important than the process of continuous improvement.

We want to get better at doing things. It's why learning a language or an instrument can be so frustrating at first. If you feel like you're not getting anywhere, your interest flags and you may even give up. A **sense of progress**, not just in our work, but our capabilities, contributes to our inner drive.

Employers should look at calibrating what people *must do* by looking at what they *can do*. If the must-tasks are too difficult, people will become worried and feel out of their league. If the must-tasks are too easy, they'll will get bored.

Looking at an enterprise situation through the lens of gamification, it is important to consider that if you do not continue to challenge employees, then they will begin to feel less motivated. In the same way, if you do not encourage them to improve or even change their skills over time through a gamified pathway, then it is likely to see employees halt in their growth and progress, or worse yet, degenerate in work quality.

The trick is not to give tasks fitting a person's exact capabilities, but to **give them space and support** to reach a little higher to **foster improvement**, continual mastery, and growth. What this requires of employers is more attention to how employees are doing and feeling about their tasks. We want to avoid keeping square Bob or triangle Mary from pushing themselves into round tasks.

3) Purpose

People may become disengaged and demotivated at work if they don't understand, or can't invest in, the "bigger picture."

But those who believe that they are working toward something larger and more important than themselves are often the most hard-working, productive and engaged. So, encouraging them to find purpose in their work – for instance, by connecting their personal goals to organisational targets – can win not only their minds, but also their hearts.

That also means people who have purpose are motivated to pursue the most difficult problems. Elizabeth Moss Kanter, Professor at Harvard Business School, has formulated her own trio of motivating factors, one of which is meaning, which helps people go the extra mile and stay engaged. "People can be inspired to meet stretch goals and tackle impossible challenges," she writes, "if they care about the outcome."

What can employers do? Help employees connect to something larger than themselves. Get them out of mere measurement by numbers and figures, and connect work to people and values. Providing patient photos, for example, to radiologists, who have little direct contact with patients, improved their performance.

Another example of fostering a sense of purpose in staff through gamification can be seen in giving people the opportunity to give to charities from within gamified systems, especially in point collecting style platforms. Rather than getting just a badge, give them the chance to donate to a charity of their choice when they hit certain thresholds.

This again is an area where we need to break down traditional thinking that financial rewards are the best and only motivator. If you can design your user engagement to tap into these **intrinsic motivational drivers and partner them up with extrinsic motivational drivers**, you will discover that the balance of the two, leads to far greater outcomes.

Extrinsic motivators are great for simple cognitive tasks, but they alone will not allow you to achieve sustained motivation. This only comes when something (e.g. learning new skills) is so important to you that it acts as the motivator to keep you coming back. **Intrinsic motivators** are by far the most powerful. For example, 'meaning' may motivate you. As

such, it is likely that insight into how your actions are contributing to the success of a greater team or corporate goal will be highly motivational to you. Designing user interactions to tap into intrinsic motivations is therefore an imperative for long-term success.

Think of extrinsic motivators as tangible rewards, well defined work pathways and structured principles, all of which are conceptually easy to grasp but only surface deep, yet intrinsic motivators are more abstract and theoretical in nature, calling from a place deep within each employee. While extrinsic motivators are easy to implement in the workplace, for them to carry any weight, they need to be used as a vessel to carry out more intrinsically valued motivation with employees.

A lot of talk in gamification turns to the relative values of Extrinsic vs Intrinsic Motivation. It often seems like a conversation about good and evil. I myself have been guilty of this way of thinking in the past! The truth is that both have their place, but intrinsic motivation is where longevity and true engagement will come from.

How to Build an Intrinsically Motivated Team

Making the change to a work culture that focuses on intrinsic motivation can be daunting, particularly for organisations that are built on traditional reward and punishment models. But, Pink argues that – over time, and with practice – Type I behaviour can be learned.

The following four strategies come straight from Pink's book and can help you to encourage your team to become more intrinsically motivated:

1. Try Out "20 Percent Time"

As Daniel Pink makes mention of within his book, Google are known for "20 percent time". This is the practice of giving your team members the chance to spend 20 percent of their working time on a project of their own choice.

These projects should fall outside of their day-to-day work, but offer benefits to your business. Fixing a software bug or finding ways to improve a process, for instance.

2. Take Steps towards giving up Control

Relinquish (some) managerial control in favour of giving your team members more autonomy. You can do this by:

- **Involving people in setting their own goals** – individuals will likely be more engaged in their work when they pursue goals that they have helped to create.
- **Reducing controlling language** – instead of saying "you must" or "you should," use terms like "consider doing" or "think about doing."
- **Having open-door hours** – set aside time when people can come and [talk to you](#) about business or personal issues, without fear of judgment or censure.

3. Develop "Goldilocks Tasks"

"Goldilocks tasks" are, as the name suggests, tasks that are neither too hard nor too easy, but "just right." They are team projects that encourage both focus and flow, this can bring about aid in the development of mastery.

These types of tasks resemble stretch goals – ambitious targets that challenge what people deem possible. They should stretch your team members and enable them to develop their skills.

Goldilocks tasks often involve collaborative work and have clear end goals. This helps to promote a sense of purpose. For example, you could ask your team to resolve bottlenecks in a product distribution system, or to improve your

organisation's customer service interface.

4. Promote Collaboration and Cross-Skilling

If your team has lots of skills to offer, you can put them to good use by allowing your team members to move between functions. And you can promote cross-skilling or up-skilling by encouraging them to share their skills and collaborate with others as part of your wider learning culture.

"Hot-desking" (where people have no fixed desk and can sit in a different place each day) is a good way to facilitate this. It enables people to choose who they work with, and promotes knowledge sharing between members of different teams.

However, think carefully before introducing hot-desking. There may be competition for space, and noise levels can sometimes build up and cause distractions. So, consider setting some ground rules before rolling out the business equivalent of musical chairs.

For instance, you could ask people to clear their desks at the end of each day to avoid a build-up of clutter. And, if a team is working on an important project where communication is essential, make sure that they are able to sit together.

Avoiding Potential Pitfalls

In many organisations, developing autonomy, mastery and purpose will likely involve a cultural shift. So, think carefully about how the framework fits with your organisation's activities and structure before introducing it.

Organisations that work to strict deadlines and protocols, and which consequently have a very strong Type X culture, may find this kind of motivational framework difficult, or even harmful. These could include, for example, law firms where professional standards are very important, or large production or manufacturing plants where process is key. Similarly, companies or teams that already have bonus schemes in place will likely find it hard to make the switch.

Even in the creative industries, which are Pink's primary focus, your people still need to know that their basic needs, such as security and safety, will be met. Avoid interpreting Pink's focus on intrinsic motivators as a green light to forget extrinsic ones.

Final Thoughts

According to Pink, the old-school model of carrots and sticks is becoming increasingly outdated, and according to lots of research, just plain wrong.

It makes sense that old-school organisational and personal frameworks of productivity just don't cut it in this age when knowledge work, creativity, and problem-solving are required to stand out and succeed.

Bear in mind that causes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction can be complex, and that Pink's framework isn't a "fix-all" remedy. Even if your team members love their jobs, they may still be demotivated by other factors, such as poor working relationships, for example.

Here's to building more **autonomy**, **mastery**, and **purpose** to produce not just a more productive and effective workforce, but a happier one!

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