

## Business Special: Employee Motivation

### The different impact of rules versus distinctions

A topic that keeps popping up in organizations is the motivation of employees and the question of how this motivation can be maintained or increased. However, a much more dangerous question is what actually endangers or destroys motivation and performance. The factors for that are manifold. Yet one important factor consists of rules and complicated systems of rules.

In many companies it is very common to put up rules in order to guarantee seemingly smooth processes. In this case management tries to set up a certain structure by applying rules. However, rules are actually one of the main reasons impairing the motivation of employees, since rules try to force a certain behavior or change of behavior. They are mostly determined by the CEO or people occupying a higher position in the hierarchy. According to the level of hierarchy employees then attach value to the forced on rule. If the answer to the question “Who invented this rule?” is clearly „The boss did.“ Then employees tend to quickly be silent. Rules often work through hierarchical power, which is nothing else but manipulation of employees through the generation of subtle fear. As soon as rules are set from „top management“ a lot of employees react either like a deer in headlights and follow the rules mechanically for fear of provoking a conflict situation if they didn't. Or employees give away their own authority and power to the boss and develop a certain kind of indifference following the motto “I can't do anything about it anyway. So I will do this stuff.” This kind of indifference is based on unconscious anger, which over the time turns into consistent resentment. What both reactions have in common is the fact that the employees behave completely adaptive.

Rules very often provoke resistance and thus kill motivation. Rules are rigid and inflexible. They don't allow for deviation. They have instead a similar energy like laws which are unalterable and they don't pick employees up from where they are. The latter is mainly based on the fact that rules exclusively address the intellect. Logical (or not so logical) words are put together to form a rule, which has to be followed. Either the employees understand the rule intellectually or they don't. If a person doesn't understand a rule, a very common comment is “You actually don't have to understand it. Just follow it.”

Rules tell employees how something has to be or how they have to behave. Behind Regeln geben vor, wie etwas zu sein hat oder sich Mitarbeiter zu verhalten haben. Oftentimes the secret side sentence comes along „Don't even think about questioning this rule.“ Those who are allowed to put up rules have power. Fact is however that rules are anything else but beneficial with regard to the motivation of employees. But what would be another option for moving employees to behave in a certain way?

One possibility is to provide employees with distinctions instead of rules. A distinction separates a mass of things into different categories. What does this mean specifically? If you take for example “sounds” as the mass of things, then you have the experience at a certain point of time that there are different kinds of sounds, e. g. car noise, voices, sounds of nature, music, etc. That's the first distinction you get. If in a next step you take the category of music as “new” mass you will

experience that there is Rock, Pop, classic etc. Then – if you go with the classic music – you will probably learn that there is piano music, violin music, musicals, operas, operettas etc. If you keep going with the piano music you will hear one day that there is a difference between Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and other composers and so on. Through more and more distinctions you perceive finer and finer details.

In contrast to rules distinctions can be experienced. This means that they do not only address your intellect but land completely in your body so that you have a new inner reference point afterwards. An essential difference is in addition that distinctions build so called matrix. Matrix is the energetic structure on which consciousness can grow. The example of rambler roses offers a valuable comparison at this point. If these roses had no grid on which they could grow, they would poorly crawl about the floor. It is the grid that helps them prosper and radiate in their full blossom. Distinctions lead to the fact that an energetic grid – called matrix – is built in a person so that they can hold more and more consciousness. If consciousness grows than the result is automatically different behavior. In that case a change in behavior is driven by own, inner impulse and the experience that something else works better than the usual thing.

Here is an example:

Supposed that in a company it came to the surface that some employees of the production repeatedly use their mobile phone for private calls during their working hours and the management now wants to stop this. Out of the hierarchy it would be the easiest way to determine the rule that the use of mobiles is not allowed during working hours and that people would have to bear legal consequences if they infringed upon this rule. Bang-boom. Done. No discussion. Yet, what does this do to the employees? Especially to someone who used his mobile so far only in emergency situations, e. g. when a family member was seriously sick. Such a rule would produce resistance on every level. Those who hardly used their mobile would build resentment against those who are the root cause and the seemingly “guilty” build resentment because they feel being cut back in their freedom. The result is resentment in the team, resentment towards the management and a lack of motivation. In addition to that the side effect will be that those who used to make a lot of private phone calls will find other ways to do so, be it on the toilet, hidden behind a machine or in any other secret place.

When you address this topic instead by giving the employees distinctions you keep the door open for teamwork and motivation. In the specific example mentioned above the distinction for the employees in a mid-sized company looked like this:

The entire team was invited to a meeting and the bright principles that were most important for the production were determined by the team. The 3 pillars were Teamwork, Quality Awareness and Discipline. The entire team agreed on these 3 bright principles. The second step consisted of the question whether each individual of the team could identify with these principles and was willing to take a stand for them. For all participants this was self-evident and they clear about taking a stand for that. This was in fact their job, they said. To corroborate this commitment they were also asked the counter question: „Is there anybody who does not want to fully commit to these principles?“ and each of them answered with no (only through clarifying this counter question do you get a clear commitment). In a third step the link to the original problem of the private mobile use was made.

The distinction was this: „These are the bright principles the production, which you just said you are committed to. An excessive private use of a mobile phone opposes the principle of teamwork as well as the principles of quality consciousness and discipline and undermines these principles and thus the entire team considerably. How do you want to align this?“ Total silence in the room. “How would it feel like to undermine the team and not fully support your colleagues? Would you want somebody to work against you?“ You could have heard a needle drop. It was sensible how the distinction landed in each of the team members. The distinction and the link with the bright principles of the production team gave the employees new clarity and power. Consequently they agreed on the so called mobile deal: As soon as a colleague acted irresponsibly and started using their mobile too much the team would react in real-time. This meant that a single team member or the entire team would address the colleague and remind them of their commitment to the team principles. Should the colleague no longer want to serve the bright principles and thus no longer support the team, they would realize that they were at the wrong place.

With regard to the distinction in the above case it was not about the actual use of mobiles, but about that the employees committed to certain principles that set a certain context in the production, which again excluded the use of mobile phones. The employees appreciated this kind of process. In advance most of them were afraid that „someone from the management came with a new rule“ and thus came to the meeting with a certain lack of motivation and resistance. They were very much surprised that neither the team nor individuals of the team were accused and reprimanded. The principles of community, teamwork and creativity were in the space. By working on the bright principles together they were all on board and at the same time made the experience of teamwork. Since then the problem of the private mobile use has not occurred again. Thanks to the distinction the employees had gained a new level of consciousness with regard to their department and their work.

Distinctions are neither rules nor beliefs. Distinctions can be experienced, raise awareness empower the person getting the distinction and give them new possibilities.

Here is another simple example:

Supposed a colleague usually is late for meetings and has the habit of leaving the door open when entering the meeting room. What do you do? One possibility would be to approach the colleague throwing a rule at his head: “The door of the meeting room has to be closed.” Or even more reproachful: „Man we already told you a hundred times to close the door.“ This rule produces bad mood immediately, separation (we against him), the colleague probably reacts with resistance and a part of him might not even take seriously what was said. It is very likely that he will therefore continue leaving the door open out of protest that somebody tried to reprimand him. This would be a classical defiance reaction which oftentimes happens when rules are determined.

The alternative could look like this: Supposed you are one of the people who feel disturbed by the open door. You could e. g. go the colleague right after the meeting and say: „I realized something and have a distinction that I would like to share with you. Do you have a minute?“ If he says yes stay with him in the meeting room and close the door behind you. Ask him to sit down so that he can see the door and sit across from him. Then start talking about your experience during the meeting: “Today I realized what effect little changes in the room can have on a meeting. For



example, earlier today the door of the meeting room was open after we had started. Shortly after that I perceived a certain turbulence in the team, because the space became insecure due to this little change. As soon as somebody closed the door again, the turbulence was gone. Did you realize that, too?" He will very likely say no, since it was an unconscious act of his Gremlin (the Gremlin is the king of your own underworld, who loves to act irresponsibly and sabotage). Now invite him to a short experiment. "I would like to quickly explore this perception once again together with you. Let's assume the two of us had an important meeting right now. How do you experience the space right now? Is it safe enough for having an important meeting here?" He will very likely say yes. Also share your experience with him. Then go to the door, open it and sit down again. Ask him how it was for him now and what he perceived. In most of the cases the other person will become aware of the subtle difference not only intellectually, i. e. the door is open, but they will have a physical and/or energetic experience that the room becomes insecure due to the open door. Again also share your experience. Then you end the experiment by saying: "Cool, thank you for experimenting with me. Thank you for your time." It is very likely that the colleague will close the door in the future, since he now has a physical and/or energetic experience what an open door does to the space.

These are just two examples for distinctions. It does not mean that it has to go like this. As is very often the case in life, it is a question of timing and choice of words when to put out a distinction. One thing is however for sure: distinctions include, give clarity, build matrix and increase the motivation of employees to be more aware.

In the following you find again the most important differences between rules and distinctions.

| <b>Characteristics of rules</b>  | <b>Characteristics of distinctions</b>                   |
|--|--|
| Address only the intellect   | Land fully in the body                                   |
| Cannot be experienced. Don't produce a new inner reference point   | Can be experienced. Generate a new inner reference point |
| Don't build matrix   | Build matrix   |
| Are rigid / inflexible   | Are holistic / flexible                                  |
| Try to force behavior change   | Create a change in behavior based on own impulse         |
| Produce resistance and/or defiance   | Produce clarity  |
| Are based on hierarchical pressure / are determined from people in top positions. Imply legal consequences | Are not related to hierarchy. Work without pressure      |



| Characteristics of rules                         | Characteristics of distinctions                                    |
|--|--|
| Are motivation killers                           | Support motivation   |
| Separate / exclude                               | Connect / include  |
| Don't pick up employees where they are           | Pick up employees where they are                                   |
| Manipulate employees using subtle fear           | Don't imply any manipulation                                       |
| Produce adaptive behavior                        | Support and empower people   |
| Lead to positioning / are based on „being right“ | Lead to community / Promote teamwork                               |
| Produce „sleeping, following sheep“              | Sharpen the awareness. Employees perceive finer and finer details. |

It is not necessarily easy to let go of rules and shift to distinctions. To do so you need attentiveness, presence and the willingness to let go of known thinking and behavior patterns. In the end the difference lies in the acceptance and the satisfaction of employees. And that's what is worth taking a stand for.

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