

Why managers should consistently reward progress

To assess contemporary awareness of the importance of daily work progress, Amabile and Kramer administered a survey to 669 managers of varying levels from dozens of organisations around the world. They asked about the managerial tools that can affect employees' motivation and emotions. The respondents ranked five tools—support for making progress in the work, recognition for good work, incentives, interpersonal support, and clear goals—in order of importance. Results indicated that only 5% of managers understood that supporting progress is the primary way to elevate motivation.

The researchers came up with the concept of inner work life. Inner work life is the mix of emotions, motivations and perceptions over the course of a workday. The quality of a person's inner work life is the central driver of creative and productive performance. Given inner work life's importance to performance, the researchers wanted to understand what factors create good and bad inner work life. Two major factors were found to be key to people's inner work lives and progress:

1. Catalysts

1. The catalyst factors include events that directly enable progress in the work. Catalysts include things like providing clear goals for the work and providing people with sufficient resources to accomplish those goals.
1. The inhibitors factors make progress difficult or impossible. They are the mirror image of the catalysts, and include giving unclear goals, micro-managing, and providing insufficient resources.

2. Nourishers

1. The nourishment factors directly support people's inner work lives and include actions like showing respect and providing emotional support.
1. Their opposite is toxins, which include being disrespectful or creating a hostile work environment.

Nourishers and catalysts work

together to provide a work environment where workers can thrive and be fully engaged in their work, and where they can feel the sense of accomplishment that comes from making progress on meaningful work. This has certain implications on manager's behaviour. Select implications are discussed below:

1. By supporting people and their daily progress (small wins) in meaningful work, managers improve not only the inner work lives of their employees but also the organisation's long-term performance, which enhances inner work life even more.
2. Managers should not worry too much about complex incentive schemes to ensure motivation and happiness of employees. As long as they show basic respect and consideration, they can focus on supporting the work itself.
3. Managers should break big goals down into smaller, achievable ones, so they can maximize the sense of progress that employees can experience. If you focus only on some momentous end goal, then you will not achieve the sense of progress that can come from a series of small wins.

References

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