A cheap and easy way to motivate people
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A considerable amount of science funding, such as NWO's 'Zwaartekracht' programme and the European Flagships and ERC synergy grants, nowadays goes to larger scale consortia. These large grants usually allow for a certain amount of freedom to allocate money. Obviously, the bulk of it is used to employ the researchers themselves — PI's, postdocs, PhD students — and to provide them with adequate facilities to carry out their research. But then there is a rest, a part that is spent on 'softer' items such as conferences in nice places, student rotations, outings, parties, Christmas presents, etc. A commonly used argument for spending money on rewards or activities that people experience as pleasant is that these will contribute to their motivation.

This brings us to the question: how does one most effectively motivate people? What is the scientific basis for answering this? In 1968, Frederick Herzberg wrote an influential article entitled '*How do you motivate employees?*' (Harvard Business Review – reprinted twice, over 5000 citations and the most requested article from this journal). Herzberg studied the sources of employee motivation in a wide range of professions, including academic science, by distinguishing two sets of factors that influence employees: 'hygiene' (or 'extrinsic') factors that do not lead to motivation (although they can lead to demotivation if managed badly) and 'motivator' (or 'intrinsic') factors that do contribute to intrinsic motivation. He examined many different factors affecting job attitude, investigated into which set they belong and offered clear conclusions of what does and what does not intrinsically motivate people.

Three frequently used tactics that, according to this study, are *not* effective are:

1. Asking, telling or ordering someone to do something. This may get the person to do the task, but does not generate intrinsic motivation — it is a negative extrinsic factor.
2. Increasing salaries or offering fringe benefits. Perhaps surprisingly, these have no effect on increasing motivation. Rather than being motivators, these benefits in practice are often perceived as basic rights.
3. Providing 'environmental' factors such as great facilities, wonderful workspaces, good food, etc. No matter how brilliantly managed, this does not motivate anybody to work harder either.

What then *does* intrinsically motivate people? According to Herzberg's study, people at all levels of their careers are motivated by three things only: interesting work, challenges, and — above all — responsibility. Providing these three factors — for example by exerting less supervisory control while retaining accountability, granting additional authority to people in their tasks, or giving a person a complete natural unit of work and enabling him or her to become an expert — has the potential to instil an 'intrinsic generator' in a person.

Well — isn't this an optimistic theory? We can keep things sober, spend all allocated money on research, and motivate our people simply by giving them more responsibility. And all of this with the fringe benefit of alleviating our own tasks!

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This column has been published in the newsletter of the Kavli Institute of Nanoscience Delft in March 2015. All rights, including for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies, are reserved.