

The Issue Of Incentives and Motivation

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posted September 2011, OLE Ghana

It is quite common to hear teachers talk about the need for motivation. In fact they are not alone in this quest for motivation. Every other worker needs it. The Free Dictionary (www.thefreedictionary.com/incentive) defines incentive as “Something, such as the fear of punishment or the expectation of reward, that induces action or motivates effort.” Kendra Cherry in her article, What Is Motivation? (<http://psychology.about.com/od/mindex/g/motivation-definition.htm>) defines motivation as “the force that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviors”.

It is interesting what teachers would list as ‘motivation’ when you engage them in a conversation on the topic. One such conversation I had with a group of teachers left me spell bound. What they wanted ranged from paying new entrants early, encouragement from heads, being appreciated, being given computer/laptops and TLMS, having conducive classrooms, good school community relationship, quick promotions, allowance for working extra, chalk allowance, increased salaries, academic sponsorship, leave – annual, casual maternity, teacher bungalows, equipment for personal use, flexible loans for personal issues, affordable housing, scholarship for children up to university level, car /motor/bicycle, television, shoes, shirts/free teachers’ uniform, motorable roads. A rather tall list indeed. I decided to go through the list with a fine comb and to group the items on the list. I came up with three groups: those that had to do with financial rewards, those that had to do with personal comfort and the third that had to do directly with improving the quality of the teaching profession.

This prompted me to take a closer look at what incentive is appropriate motivation for directly improving the output of the teacher in the classroom and for that matter improving the quality of the pleasurable learning experience created for the pupil which translates into quality life-long education.

Researchers have developed a number of different theories to explain motivation. Each individual theory tends to be rather limited in scope. However, by looking at the key ideas behind each theory, one can gain a better understanding of motivation as a whole. Kendra Cherry presents as the opportunity to get closer to some of these important Theories of Motivation listed below (<http://psychology.about.com/od/psychologytopics/tp/theories-of-motivation.htm>).

Instinct Theory of Motivation: According to instinct theories, people are motivated to behave in certain ways because they are evolutionarily programmed to do so.

Incentive Theory of Motivation: The Incentive Theory suggests that people are motivated to do things because of external rewards.

Drive Theory of Motivation: According to the Drive Theory of Motivation, people are motivated to take certain actions in order to reduce the internal tension that is caused by unmet needs.

Arousal Theory of Motivation: The Arousal Theory of motivation suggests that people take certain actions to either decrease or increase levels of arousal.

Humanistic Theory of Motivation: Humanistic theories of motivation are based on the idea that people also have strong cognitive reasons to perform various actions with the primary motivator becoming the need for self-actualization, or the desire to fulfill one's individual potential.

From the discussions so far it can be said that what teachers, and in fact many workers call for is invariably limited to in the main financial or physical rewards, and not that whole range of actions, inactions, goods and/or services that serve as a force that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviors

A video of a research posted on You Tube by The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgKKPQiRRag> makes for interesting study. In the video they talk of a study done in MIT and replicated in rural India (Madurai) which had to do with incentivizing performance. It came to light that for mechanical skills or algorithmic activities that follow a set of rules or where the carrot and stick approach works the higher the financial reward the higher the performance. However when the tasks involve cognitive and conceptual thinking the higher the monetary reward the poorer the performance.

What does this tell us? Money is a motivator. If you do not pay well people they would not work well. However there is a point beyond which it ceases to be a motivator. Labour Unions working with government therefore need to work at getting teachers and workers in general well in the context of what the economy can support to take the 'money issue' off the table and then look at what is needed to make performance improve.

So what then is the best motivating factor needed to be a good teacher, especially when teaching is more than a mechanical activity? We go back to the motivation theories. I will settle on a combination of drive and humanistic theory of motivation: drive to be a better teacher and be an agent of change and to level kinds one step better than you came to meet them and the human instinct for self-actualization, or the desire to fulfill one's individual potential. Factors that are needed then will not be mere financial rewards. That gives us a different list now from the list we started with isn't it? In the next edition of *Agenda 2015* we will look at the new list and explore those incentives that would lead to that kind of motivation needed by teachers to become higher and better performers