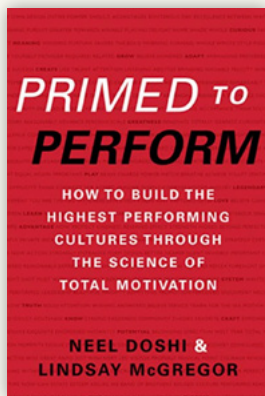# Primed to Perform

How to Build the Highest Performing Cultures Through the Science of Total Motivation

Published 2015   BOOK AUTHOR: **NEEL DOSHI AND LINDSAY MCGREGOR**

Some companies stand out when it comes to culture. Their employees consistently produce incredible results, all the while genuinely enjoying the work they do. In *Primed to Perform,* authors Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor describe strategies to build these types of high-performing and adaptive cultures. Their Total Motivation (ToMo) approach takes hold of a powerful combination of inspiring people to find "play, purpose, and potential in their work."

Key Quote

"Most organizations – even legendary ones – have a hard time building, maintaining, and strengthening their cultures. Absent a systematic, psychologically informed understanding of culture, their leaders have relied on intuition and replication. They have tried to copy Apple, Southwest Airlines, Zappos, or the Ritz-Carlton, only to find that the cultures they built weren't consistent and didn't feel genuine. They didn't motivate in the right ways, so they didn't stick." — *Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor*

Key Concepts

The Motive Spectrum: The Six Reasons We Work. Researchers have found there are three direct and three indirect motives for work. The direct motives – play, purpose, potential – tend to enhance performance, and the indirect motives – emotional pressure, economic pressure, and inertia – frequently harm performance.

The Total Motivation Factor: Introducing the Ultimate Culture-Building Tool. The Total Motivation ("ToMo") metric calculates the level at which employees have direct motives (positive scores) and subtracts the level to which employees have indirect motives (negative scores). Not coincidentally, companies with high ToMo scores make it on such lists as Fortune's "Most Admired Companies."

Rethinking Performance: To Understand How Total Motivation Drives Performance, You Need to Look at Performance Through a New Lens. Certain elements which are sometimes tied to performance – the authors call these the "distraction effect," the "cancellation effect," and the "cobra effect" – may seem to increase tactical performance initially, but these can actually hurt long-term performance.

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The Yin and Yang of Performance: The Balanced Culture, Fueled by Total Motivation, Is the Ultimate Competitive Challenge. Tactical performance (performance born of strategy) and adaptive performance (performance born of culture) are the two fundamental aspects of a balanced organization.

The Blame Bias: Our Bias to Blame Causes Us to Lead Through the Indirect Motives. People are inclined to inaccurately assign blame to people and expectations can drive performance. When a leader's expectations change, performance goes up.

Frozen or Fluid: When We Most Need Fluid Organizations, We Freeze Them Instead. With a total motivation approach, companies are neither frozen nor chaotic, but fluid and adaptive. An adaptive culture not only heightens performance but keeps organizations from plateauing when success is reached.

The Total Motivation Factor: By Measuring the Magic, You Can Make Magic. "What gets measured gets done," said organizational theorist Mason Haire (p. 106). The ToMo approach uses five metrics: "measure the total motivation factor for your organization, identify issues, set an aspirational ToMo goal, and develop the business case for investment" (p. 107).

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Fire Starters: The Secrets of High-Performing Leadership Have Been Unlocked. Different leadership styles have various degrees of success. The "fire starter" leader is the type of leader who encourages and creates a culture focused on direct motives.

Identity: Your People's "Why?" Depends on Your Organization's "Why." Leaders who want to create balanced, adaptive cultures start with themselves, working on one leadership behavior at a time and setting themselves on their own "continuous improvement cycles" (p. 144).

The Playground: The Most Overlooked Key to Culture Is Also the Most Powerful. The direct motivational tool of "play" is often undervalued, but it transforms the employee experience. "Play" starts with making sure each job description has a five-step performance cycle which includes the following: theory of impact, inspiration, prioritization and planning, performing, and reflection (pp. 174-175).

The Land of a Thousand Ladders: Your People Can Either Fight Each Other to Survive or Fight Their Competitors to Win. Your Culture Drives the Choice. Encourage and find ways for your people to succeed in more ways than just climbing the corporate ladder.

Compensationism: The Most Misunderstood Key to Culture. Paying for performance can sometimes increase motivation – and "sometimes it dramatically decreases motivation" (p. 214). However, it depends, in part, on the culture of your organization.

The Hunting Party: At First, You Shape Your Organizations. Thereafter, They Shape You. Within an organization, there should be a goal to create societies of "citizens" (versus a climate of Darwinian competition) connected to one another and working in "lean" teams of peers in "confident relationships" (p. 241).

The Fire Watchers: Every Flame Needs Fanning. Fire watchers are people in an organization tasked with making sure the culture continues to be an adaptive one driven by direct motivators. Their job has six dimensions: the mandate (building the culture), adaptive performance metrics (measuring the motivational state of a company), budget and return on investment, the team (members from different functions), apprenticeship and skill building, and habits (a rhythm of regular opportunities to build and evaluate culture) (pp. 250-254).

Performance Calibration: Don't Change the Player, Change the Game. Getting past simple "rank and yank" performance reviews can help free up individuals to work for the good of the company instead of focusing on simply surviving the next review.

Igniting a Movement: Creating ToMo through ToMo. Even the process to rebuild your company's culture and make it more aligned with a Total Motivation outlook must be done in a "high ToMo" way – "You have to lead change in ways that create play, purpose, and potential" (p. 275).

DIRECT AND INDIRECT MOTIVATORS

Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor write that the **why** behind someone's motivation to work determines the quality of their work. In fact, they believe that the best way to motivate is not by using rewards or threats. Rather, true motivation comes by understanding how direct and indirect motivators affect performance and then taking hold of the types of motivators that make a company's culture truly adaptive and high performing for the long term.

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Direct Motivators: Increase Performance	Play: Your job is fun and leaves plenty of room for creative space.	Purpose: Your job serves a higher purpose. It may be difficult and rough going at times, but you know what you do is important.	Potential: Your job might not be fun or very important, but it's the path you need to take to reach a second-order outcome.
Indirect Motivators: Decrease Performance	Emotional Pressure: Your motivation lies in not wanting to disappoint someone (parents, boss, or yourself).	Economic Pressure: You work because of financial pressures. If you didn't have your job, you wouldn't be able to afford your life.	Inertia: You don't have a reason for doing your job other than having done it yesterday.

PLAY: IS YOUR WORK FUN?

Having fun at work doesn't mean taking breaks to play ping pong or sitting on beanbag chairs during the workday. Instead, the work itself should have an element of "play" in the sense that workers enjoy exercising their creativity while doing it. Of all the direct motivators, play is the most directly related to the work itself and thus is the most powerful for building motivation (p. 7).

A study conducted by the authors found that the biggest improvement a call center can make is to remove scripts. Employees sold more inventory and built better relationships with customers when they were allowed to steer the conversation wherever they felt was best (p. 14).

The quickest way to inhibit adaptive performance and eliminate employee creativity is to enforce rules around how to do things, including creating sales and performance targets. Creating a false target for employees – for example, "Keep each customer on the phone for at least three minutes" – will result in employees finding ways to cheat the system, so they meet their numbers and avoid termination. A better goal would be: "Build the best relationship you can with every client." This allows employees to innovate creative ways to add value to customers.

Southwest is a good example of creating "play." The only goal for employees is to deliver "POS" (positively outrageous service). Thinking of themselves as "a customer service company that happens to be an airline," Southwest aims to create an environment where anything goes, as long as it is in service of the customer (p. 26).

PURPOSE: HOW'S YOUR CITIZENSHIP?

If people think something is important, they don't need to be coached, bribed, or forced into doing it. They'll simply do it on their own. For example, Wikipedia has cultivated an enormous database of information that is curated by volunteers who believe that free and accessible knowledge serves a greater purpose. This sense of purpose drives Wikipedia's editors to be good citizens that, of their own initiative, improve articles and fix errors (p. 64).

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The motivation to be a good citizen can be cultivated by the smallest differences. If you were walking out of a phone booth and saw a man drop a large stack of papers on the floor, would you help him pick them up? Researchers in a 1972 study found that only 4% of people who saw this happen stopped to lend a hand. Later, the study was repeated with one minor difference: a dime was left in the change receptacle of the phone booth for the study participants to find. This time, 88% of people stopped to help pick up the dropped papers (p. 72). Even finding a dime – a sense of being the recipient of mere good fortune – can make the difference in creating the feeling of citizenship.

Pay has no correlation to purpose. Pay has been shown to increase tactical performance but decrease adaptive performance in certain cases. In a study, two groups of MIT students were paid to hit computer keys as quickly as possible. A group that received a $30 payout hit the keys slower than a group that received $300. However, when those groups were then asked to solve basic math problems, the $300 group performed 32% worse than the $30 group. Economic pressure distracts from the task at hand because it draws too much attention to the stakes (p. 39).

Zappos doesn't want anyone working just for the money. Leaders at the company offer a month's salary to any employee who quits. This quickly weeds out anyone who is simply there for the money. Zappos loses a bit of cash in the short term but avoids keeping someone on their team who isn't truly invested in the work they do (p. 13). Eliminate economic pressure, and people will show you what they are really made of.

POTENTIAL: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

General Electric has a history of attracting high talent by branding itself as a stepping-stone organization. GE has churned out many CEOs through its system which is branded "The Leadership Factory." Both GE and employees benefit from this model. Employees have the opportunity to develop themselves, and GE gets to employ some of the brightest minds in the workforce.

The best leaders set their employees up for success now and in the future. They let you know that when you work hard now, you're making an investment in yourself to be better in the future. The leader that is an expert motivator does a few simple things (listed on p. 131), including:

1. "Actively links the work with your personal goals"

2. Gives you time to focus on developing your strengths versus focusing on weaknesses

3. Offers more responsibility as you grow

The best leaders also do whatever they can to eliminate emotional pressure, economic pressure, and inertia through strategic behaviors (listed on p. 132), some of which are:

1. Creating fair and reasonable objectives

2. Cultivating avenues for friendships at work

3. Providing holistic feedback and evaluations

4. Making it "easy to get things done" and avoiding wasted time and effort

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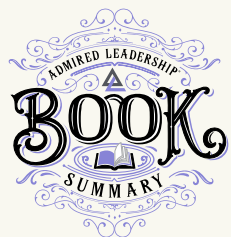
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