

Type I for Organizations:

Nine Ways to Improve Your Company, Office, or Group

Whether you're the CEO or the new intern, you can help create engaging, productive workplaces that foster Type I behavior. Here are nine ways to begin pulling your organization out of the past and into the brighter world of Motivation 3.0.

TRY "20 PERCENT TIME" WITH TRAINING WHEELS

You've read about the wonders of "20 percent time"—where organizations encourage employees to spend one-fifth of their hours working on any project they want. And if you've ever used Gmail or read Google News, you've benefited from the results. But for all the virtues of this Type I innovation, putting such a policy in place can seem daunting. How much will it cost? What if it doesn't work? If you're feeling skittish, here's an idea: Go with a more modest version—20 percent time . . . with training wheels. Start with, say, 10 percent time. That's just one afternoon of a five-day workweek.

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(Who among us hasn't wasted that amount of time at work anyway?) And instead of committing to it forever, try it for six months. By creating this island of autonomy, you'll help people act on their great ideas and convert their downtime into more productive time. And who knows? Someone in your operation just might invent the next Post-it note.

ENCOURAGE PEER-TO-PEER "NOW THAT" REWARDS

Kimley-Horn and Associates, a civil engineering firm in Raleigh, North Carolina, has established a reward system that gets the Type I stamp of approval: At any point, without asking permission, anyone in the company can award a \$50 bonus to any of her colleagues. "It works because it's real-time, and it's not handed down from any management," the firm's human resources director told *Fast Company*. "Any employee who does something exceptional receives recognition from their peers within minutes." Because these bonuses are noncontingent "now that" rewards, they avoid the seven deadly flaws of most corporate carrots. And because they come from a colleague, not a boss, they carry a different (and perhaps deeper) meaning. You could even say they're motivating.

CONDUCT AN AUTONOMY AUDIT

How much autonomy do the people in your organization really have? If you're like most folks, you probably don't have a clue. Nobody does. But there's a way to find out—with an autonomy audit.

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Ask everyone in your department or on your team to respond to these four questions with a numerical ranking (using a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning “almost none” and 10 meaning “a huge amount”):

1. *How much autonomy do you have over your tasks at work—your main responsibilities and what you do in a given day?*
2. *How much autonomy do you have over your time at work—for instance, when you arrive, when you leave, and how you allocate your hours each day?*
3. *How much autonomy do you have over your team at work—that is, to what extent are you able to choose the people with whom you typically collaborate?*
4. *How much autonomy do you have over your technique at work—how you actually perform the main responsibilities of your job?*

Make sure all responses are anonymous. Then tabulate the results. What’s the employee average? The figure will fall somewhere on a 40-point autonomy scale (with 0 being a North Korean prison and 40 being Woodstock). Compare that number to people’s perceptions. Perhaps the boss thought everyone had plenty of freedom—but the audit showed an average autonomy rating of only 15. Also calculate separate results for task, time, team, and technique. A healthy overall average can sometimes mask a problem in a particular area. An overall autonomy rating of, say, 27 isn’t bad. But if that average consists of 8 each for task, technique, and team, but 3 for time, you’ve identified an autonomy weak spot in the organization.

It’s remarkable sometimes how little the people running organizations know about the experiences of the people working around them. But it’s equally remarkable how often many leaders are willing to do things differently if they see real data. That’s what an auton-

omy audit can do. And if you include a section in your audit for employees to jot down their own ideas about increasing autonomy, you might even find some great solutions.

TAKE THREE STEPS TOWARD GIVING UP CONTROL

Type X bosses relish control. Type I bosses *relinquish* control. Extending people the freedom they need to do great work is usually wise, but it's not always easy. So if you're feeling the urge to control, here are three ways to begin letting go—for your own benefit and your team's:

1. **Involve people in goal-setting.** Would you rather set your own goals or have them foisted upon you? Thought so. Why should those working with you be any different? A considerable body of research shows that individuals are far more engaged when they're pursuing goals they had a hand in creating. So bring employees into the process. They could surprise you: People often have higher aims than the ones you assign them.
2. **Use noncontrolling language.** Next time you're about to say "must" or "should," try saying "think about" or "consider" instead. A small change in wording can help promote engagement over compliance and might even reduce some people's urge to defy. Think about it. Or at least consider it, okay?
3. **Hold office hours.** Sometimes you need to summon people into your office. But sometimes it's wise to let

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them come to you. Take a cue from college professors and set aside one or two hours a week when your schedule is clear and any employee can come in and talk to you about anything that's on her mind. Your colleagues might benefit and you might learn something.

PLAY "WHOSE PURPOSE IS IT ANYWAY?"

This is another exercise designed to close the gap between perception and reality. Gather your team, your department, or, if you can, all the employees in your outfit. Hand everyone a blank three-by-five-inch card. Then ask each person to write down his or her one-sentence answer to the following question: "What is our company's (or organization's) purpose?" Collect the cards and read them aloud. What do they tell you? Are the answers similar, everyone aligned along a common purpose? Or are they all over the place—some people believing one thing, others something completely different, and still others without even a guess? For all the talk about culture, alignment, and mission, most organizations do a pretty shabby job of assessing this aspect of their business. This simple inquiry can offer a glimpse into the soul of your enterprise. If people don't know why they're doing what they're doing, how can you expect them to be motivated to do it?

USE REICH'S PRONOUN TEST

Former U.S. labor secretary Robert B. Reich has devised a smart, simple, (and free) diagnostic tool for measuring the health of an organization. When he talks to employees, he listens carefully for the

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pronouns they use. Do employees refer to their company as “they” or as “we”? “They” suggests at least some amount of disengagement, and perhaps even alienation. “We” suggests the opposite—that employees feel they’re part of something significant and meaningful. If you’re a boss, spend a few days listening to the people around you, not only in formal settings like meetings, but in the hallways and at lunch as well. Are you a “we” organization or a “they” organization? The difference matters. Everybody wants autonomy, mastery, and purpose. The thing is, “we” can get it—but “they” can’t.

DESIGN FOR INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Internet guru and author Clay Shirky (www.shirky.com) says that the most successful websites and electronic forums have a certain Type I approach in their DNA. They’re designed—often explicitly—to tap intrinsic motivation. You can do the same with your online presences if you listen to Shirky and:

- Create an environment that makes people feel good about participating.
- Give users autonomy.
- Keep the system as open as possible.

And what matters in cyberspace matters equally in physical space. Ask yourself: How does the built environment of your workplace promote or inhibit autonomy, mastery, and purpose?

PROMOTE GOLDBLOCKS FOR GROUPS

Almost everyone has experienced the satisfaction of a Goldilocks task—the kind that’s neither too easy nor too hard, that delivers a delicious sense of flow. But sometimes it’s difficult to replicate that experience when you’re working in a team. People often end up doing the jobs they always do because they’ve proven they can do them well, and an unfortunate few get saddled with the flow-free tasks nobody else wants. Here are a few ways to bring a little Goldilocks to your group:

- **Begin with a diverse team.** As Harvard’s Teresa Amabile advises, “Set up work groups so that people will stimulate each other and learn from each other, so that they’re not homogeneous in terms of their backgrounds and training. You want people who can really cross-fertilize each other’s ideas.”
- **Make your group a “no competition” zone.** Pitting coworkers against one another in the hopes that competition will spark them to perform better rarely works—and almost always undermines intrinsic motivation. If you’re going to use a c-word, go with “collaboration” or “cooperation.”
- **Try a little task-shifting.** If someone is bored with his current assignment, see if he can train someone else in the skills he’s already mastered. Then see if he can take on some aspect of a more experienced team member’s work.
- **Animate with purpose, don’t motivate with rewards.** Nothing bonds a team like shared mission. The more

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that people share a common cause—whether it's creating something insanely great, outperforming an outside competitor, or even changing the world—the more your group will do deeply satisfying and outstanding work.

TURN YOUR NEXT OFF-SITE INTO A FEDEX DAY

Behold the company off-site, a few spirit-sapping days of forced fun and manufactured morale—featuring awkward pep talks, wretched dancing, and a few “trust falls.” To be fair, some off-sites reengage employees, recharge people's batteries, and allow conversations on big issues. But if your organization's off-sites are falling short, why not try replacing the next one with a FedEx Day? Set aside an entire day where employees can work on anything they choose, however they want, with whomever they'd like. Make sure they have the tools and resources they need. And impose just one rule: People must deliver something—a new idea, a prototype of a product, a better internal process—the following day. Type I organizations know what their Type X counterparts rarely comprehend: Real challenges are far more invigorating than controlled leisure.