

A talk about motivation

Listen to the talk about motivation to practise and improve your listening skills.

Before listening

Do the preparation task first. Then listen to the audio and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–f) with the vocabulary (1–6).

Vocabulary

1. an incentive
2. to motivate
3. a promotion
4. complex
5. automated
6. a social psychologist

Definition

- a. having many related parts; difficult to understand or solve
- b. done by a machine or computer
- c. something that encourages a person to do something
- d. someone who studies how people behave in social situations
- e. to make someone want to do something
- f. the act of giving someone a job which is higher status than their current job

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. We try to motivate workers in the same way that we try to motivate our children.	True	False
2. In the Glucksberg experiment, the people who were offered a reward finished faster than people who were not offered one.	True	False
3. The people who were offered smaller rewards in Ariely's experiment performed better than those offered bigger rewards.	True	False
4. In Ariely's experiment, people were more creative when they were concentrating on achieving a goal.	True	False
5. In the future, jobs will require workers to be more creative.	True	False
6. People always work better when they start the day later and work into the night.	True	False

Task 2

Match the two parts of the sentences.

First part

1. Glucksberg's experiment shows that people solve a problem faster when
2. Ariely's experiment shows that people are less creative when
3. The same results as Glucksberg's experiment have been found when
4. An incentive works for people when
5. Incentives will no longer work for motivating people at work when
6. The example of the big tech companies shows that people work better when

Second part

- a. the experiment is repeated.
- b. they are not given an incentive.
- c. they can make choices about their work.
- d. they are doing a simple task.
- e. they are doing the jobs of the future.
- f. they are offered a bigger reward.

Discussion

What motivates you in your job or studies?

Transcript

So, we think we know how to motivate people, right? Offer them a reward. Do this and you'll get this. Do this faster, earn more money. Do this better than everyone else, here's a promotion. We offer incentives when we want people to do things. We do it at work, at school, even at home with our kids. Tidy your room and you can watch TV.

But when social psychologists test whether incentives work, they get surprising results. Sam Glucksberg, from Princeton University, America, set people a problem to solve and told them he was going to time them to see how long they took. Then he put them in two groups. He offered one group a reward for finishing fast. Five dollars for anyone finishing in the top 25 per cent and 20 dollars for the person who finished the fastest of all. To the other group he offered no incentive, but he told them he was going to use their times to calculate an average time.

The first group, the ones with the reward, solved the problem faster, you'd think, right? Well, no, they actually took three and a half minutes longer than the group who just thought they were being timed. Incentive didn't work. In fact, it made them slower. This experiment has been repeated, with the same results, many times. But in business we still offer bonuses, promotions and rewards to staff.

That's fine if we want them to do something simple, like chop wood. We'll pay you more if you chop the wood faster. An incentive works then. But if we want someone to do something complex, something creative, something where they have to think, rewards don't work. They might even have the opposite result, and make people perform worse. Another study, by Dan Ariely, showed that the bigger the reward, the worse the subjects performed on a complex task. The reward made them focus so hard on the result that they couldn't think creatively any more.

And this all matters because more and more simple jobs will become automated. We'll be left with creative, problem-solving jobs that computers will never do. And we need to find a way to motivate people to do those jobs when we've proved the traditional incentives don't work.

So what does work? Giving your workers freedom; freedom to work on the things they want to work on, freedom to choose when, where and how they work. Want to work from home three days a week, get up late and work into the night instead? Fine. Just do the job well. And evidence shows people who choose the way they work get results. Companies that give employees time during the week to work on things that interest them and are not part of their regular job achieve amazing things. Some of the big tech companies are good examples of this, with ping-pong tables and areas to relax in ...

Answers

Preparation task

1. c
2. e
3. f
4. a
5. b
6. d

Task 1

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. False

Task 2

1. b
2. f
3. a
4. d
5. e
6. c