Careers

People with Talent (Like Us)
10 Pillars to Build Your Dream Career

Part 2
What Motivates You?

By
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Leaders For What's Next

"A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be. This need we call self-actualization."
Abraham Maslow (1908-1970)

What Motivates You?

Motivation is a complex subject. Several researchers have sought to explain the phenomenon and its influence on human behavior. We've all heard of one theory or another. It's normal to take an interest in better understanding what motivates us, pulls us out of inertia and gives us the strength to overcome the difficulties of everyday life, as opposed to giving up and doing nothing.

A number of studies have addressed motivation and several theories and approaches seek to explain how it is forged, how the 'energy' that moves us is born. We'll touch on four authors: Abraham Maslow, Frederick Herzberg, Douglas McGregor, and Daniel Pink, the contemporary best-selling writer we visited in the previous chapter.

Pyramid-building - the origins of motivation theory

In a succinct, even simplified way, Maslow's Pyramid relates motivation to a set of needs: from physiological and security to social, esteem and self-actualization. This 'Hierarchy of Needs' provides us with an analytical framework. Maslow observed that satisfying basic needs is a pre-condition to satisfy the higher-order needs related to wellbeing and self-actualization.

In other words, when our basic physiological needs such as food, safety or health are not met, higher needs such as love, esteem and self-actualization won't be completely satisfied. Dissatisfaction will result due to an absence of motivational stimuli.

Self-actualization

Esteem

Love & belonging

Safety needs

Physiological needs

Born in the early twentieth century, Abraham Maslow was the first human behavior researcher to conceive and present a motivation theory. Even today we often think of it when we're trying to understand differences in behavior and the allocation of energy to an objective, according to whether basic needs are met or not.

Consider the isolation caused by the pandemic. Someone confined to his house with access to a garden and swimming pool and who has no economic constraints is in a very different position to someone in a liberal profession with no guarantee of income, burdened with a mortgage or other loans and unable to see a way to feed his children should the quarantine continue.

In the first case, the person's basic needs are completely satisfied. His main deprivations are travel, live entertainment and culture, with the cancelation of the opera and ballet seasons, for example.

In the second case, traveling and going to shows at the Gulbenkian museum are hardly top of this person's list. What worries him is the fact that he cannot properly feed himself and his family. He may have to hand over the house he loves and descend into a level of poverty he never experienced before, with restrictions on even water and energy use. For the time being at least, he is tied to basic needs.

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Hygiene and Motivation: Herzberg's Two-factor Theory

Herzberg's theory also addresses motivation and satisfaction. He relates satisfaction to the challenging or stimulating nature of our tasks or our function in terms of content or related activities: 'motivation factors'.

Dissatisfaction arises when there is a misalignment between our personal values and needs and our environment: the leadership style, for example, or the personalities of our colleagues and the general context of our function (our responsibilities and other aspects). These are the *'hygiene factors.'* In field studies Herzberg found empirical evidence for *hygiene* and *motivation* factors, two distinct items that must be taken into consideration in fulfilling any function.

Hygiene factors refer to tangible and environmental working conditions: wages, social benefits, company policies, supervisory and leadership style, the climate of our relationships, internal regulations, opportunities, and so on. Organizations traditionally used them to create employee motivation. For Herzberg, however, hygiene factors only have a limited ability to influence behavior. His choice of the term 'hygiene' reflects their preventive character. It illustrates the fact that they are simply intended to avoid sources of environmental dissatisfaction, or potential threats to the equilibrium of important environmental factors. Hygiene factors cannot increase satisfaction in any substantial or permanent way. On the other hand, when they are compromised, they can actually cause dissatisfaction.

Motivation factors refer to the content and purpose of functions and tasks. They produce lasting satisfaction and have a positive effect on productivity, stimulating above norm levels of excellence.

For Herzberg, the term 'motivation' involves feelings of accomplishment, growth and professional recognition, expressed through performing tasks and activities that offer sufficient challenge and meaning.

At an optimal level, motivation factors substantially increase satisfaction; when compromised, they result in the absence of satisfaction.

In a nutshell, the Two-factor Theory states that satisfaction is related to challenging or stimulating professional content or activities — motivation factors. Satisfaction also requires a fit with the environment, the leadership style, the values of colleagues and the general organizational context - hygiene factors.

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Hygiene factors

Motivation factors

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Control

Self-Direction
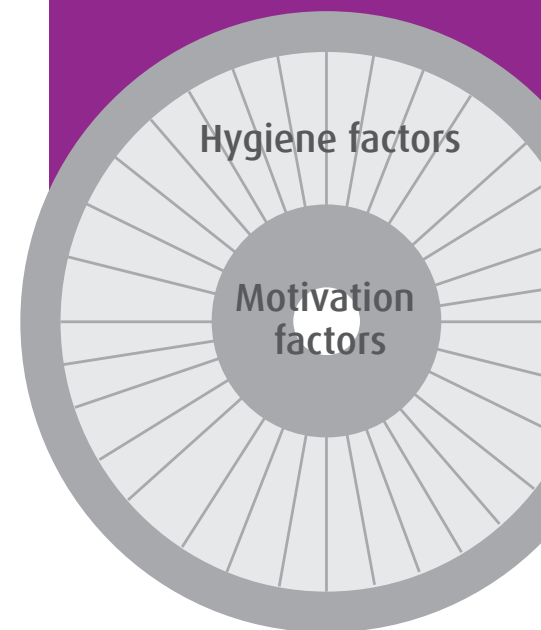
X or Y? MacGregor's Theory

Let's now turn to McGregor's theory, actually a set of two opposite extremes of assumptions. These were named X and Y (hence Theory X and Theory Y). For McGregor, if we accept Theory X and behave accordingly, people will be demotivated. On the other hand, if we accept Theory Y and behave accordingly, people will be motivated.

Theory X: Humans don't like work and do their best to avoid it, so they need to be forced, controlled and directed. People prefer to be directed and by default have little ambition, seeking only safety.

Theory Y: Expending effort at work is natural; external control and threat are not an adequate way of obtaining better results; people will exercise self-control and self-direction if their needs are met; they usually seek to take responsibility for what they do; anyone will exercise and apply their mastery when given self-direction and self-control.

— 20th century reward mechanisms, which we once thought were a natural part of business, only work in a surprisingly narrow range of circumstances.

— This kind of reward often destroys creativity.

— The secret for high performance is not reward and punishment, but people's invisible, intrinsic desire to independently do the things that matter.
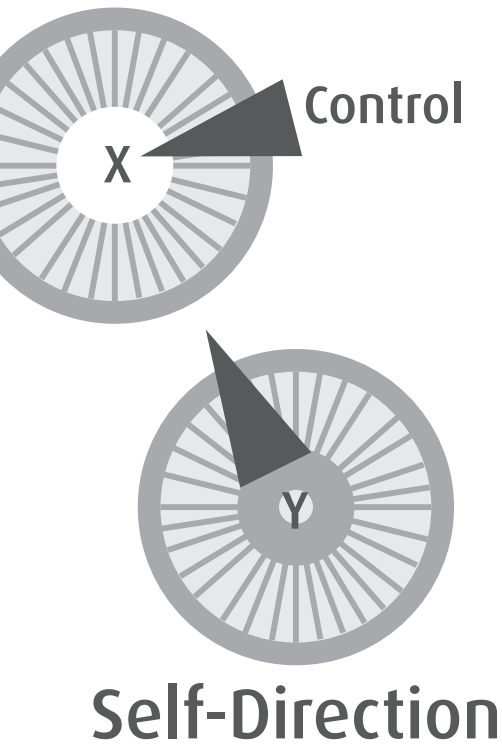
Frederick Herzberg and Douglas McGregor lived during the 20th century and their theories were very inspiring at the time. These authors perceptively took a more elaborate and organizational approach than had previously been the case.

Thanks to their work it has been found that leaders of people and organizations need to understand and provide for pressing hygiene factors. However, motivation will only be present if people are autonomous and committed to an objective. In practice, we need good working conditions, adequate compensation, an esthetically-pleasing workplace (or home office) and even a fun environment. However, feeling part of a body with a common goal is an unavoidable necessity.

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> When it comes to cognitive tasks, experiments reveal that the greater the reward, the worse the performance. Reward can even cancel out creativity.

Autonomy

Mastery

Purpose
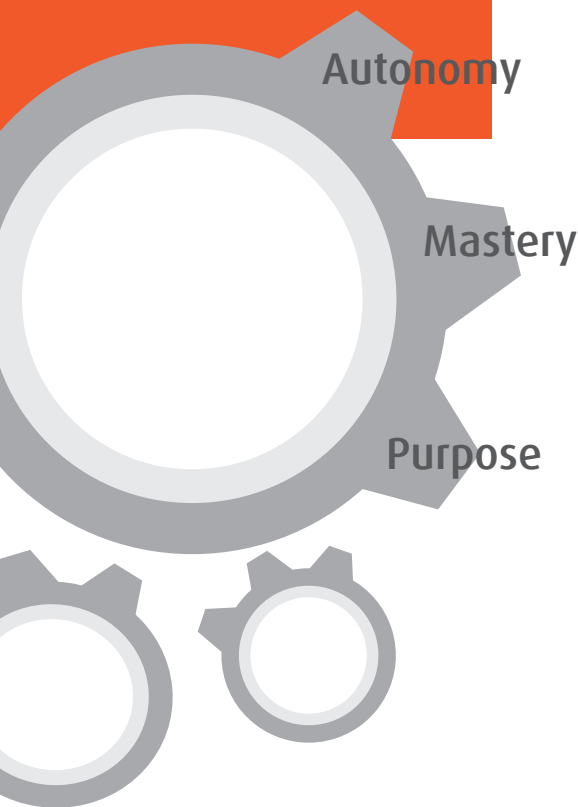
Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation: Daniel Pink's Drivers

Daniel Pink is writing and researching now. He is our contemporary. He explains how we can take advantage of our creativity and disruptive capacity, positioning ourselves within the purpose of organizations.

In his book *Drive*, he points us to global phenomena of work and knowledge-sharing such as Wikipedia, which exist without remunerative interest. He emphasizes the importance of autonomy, empowerment and purpose in gaining unlimited 'achievement energy', setting us on the path of self-fulfillment.

The author explains that new studies are now closing the gap between scientific theory and organizational practice by exploring the intrinsic motivation that enables us to perform, enjoy what we do and contribute to an objective in an interesting way.

When it comes to the two types of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic, it is the last one that interests us in the 21st century, a time in which where work is less mechanized and more based on creative processes. For Pink, extrinsic motivation might have worked for mechanical tasks (based on reward or punishment, carrot and stick). However when it comes to cognitive tasks, experiments reveal that the greater the reward, the worse the performance. Reward can even cancel out creativity.

This doesn't mean that money doesn't matter, of course it does, but once we're well paid, it is not a greater reward that will create motivation.

We are motivated because what we do matters, because we like what we do, because it contributes to a greater good.

Daniel Pink's theory of intrinsic motivation is based on three pillars: autonomy, mastery (or improvement) and purpose.

1. *Autonomy:* the desire to control our own lives.
2. *Mastery:* the desire to improve more and more, doing something that matters.
3. *Purpose:* the desire that what we do should serve something greater than ourselves.

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Carminho had just completed her degree at the School of Fine Arts. Whilst she liked several art forms, she began to feel particularly drawn towards a specialism in clothing design, fashion. Supported by her parents she went to London and managed to find the extra budget she needed to live there for a while. She got a part-time job as a sales assistant at Harrods. She also enrolled in the three-year Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Fashion at the Cambridge School of Visual and Performing Arts.

Carminho's story

No sooner had the BA course began than she was bursting with creative energy. She was inspired by everything she laid eyes on and passed by on the street. She would stare fixedly at the architecture of the Tate Modern and Millennium Bridge to the puzzlement and even suspicion of onlookers. She spent endless time sitting on some bench or other, looking at the passers-by and watching how they moved, trying to interpret why they dressed in a particular way, filling in the details of the persona someone adopts because of what they are wearing. As she studied and tried to understand the phenomena of costume and fashion, she drew — a lot.

She drew on paper, in CAD 2D and 3D, filling up physical and virtual spaces with creative (and always disruptive) ideas.

When friends and fellow students looked at her sketches, their first reactions were of astonishment and disbelief. Only a few, after a time, came to understand Carminho's avant-gardism.

Nor did teachers always comprehend her work. She performed far better when she faced an unconventional teacher. Equally, her performance would plunge to depths of mediocrity in the face of teachers who were more conventional and who tended to demand followership and value the predictable.

"But can people actually wear what you're designing?' asked the people who had a pre-formatted vision.

Indeed, at times it seemed that she didn't really want to dress people. Sometimes, the work she presented was so straight-lined and stiff that it looked more like an architectural project. She rounded out any creative process with explanations, expansive calculations and formulae. Having been a very good student of descriptive geometry, she commented that her knowledge about equations and numbers came in very useful. Without it she would be unable to bring her work to life, beyond what went on in her imagination and disturbed her dreams.

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As always, the best seek out the best. From time to time a famous Antwerp design house visited the Cambridge School of Visual and Performing Arts on a talent-spotting quest.

Carminho's work got noticed. The person responsible for identifying a junior was struck by her line and invited her to think about a move to Antwerp. The package was too good to refuse. A wage far above average, bonuses for any collection in which she participated, accommodation, trips to Portugal every three months, and insurance. The working conditions were also great: a spectacular location, a wonderful atmosphere, and all the digital tools at her disposal.

The university's management was proud of her; its image as an elite arts school benefited from having yet another student with an alluring job offer such as this one. The university manages to attract very talented students and knows how to enhance their skills. Her friends were delighted too, and endlessly congratulated her. Carminho's parents, in turn, were full of pride at seeing their daughter so well-recognized and professionally referenced, despite yearning for her presence at home.
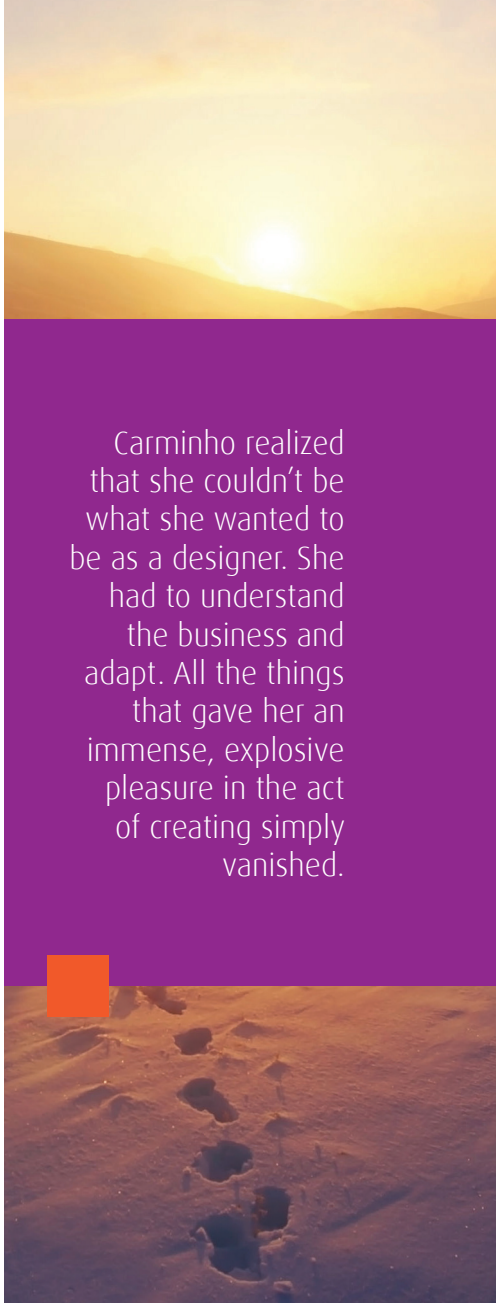
In Antwerp, collections came and went, and Carminho began to sense that she was stagnating. Carminho's dream went further. She wanted to interpret a costume from its contents. She wanted to understand why a piece of clothing positioned in a particular way could set someone apart. Where was the divergent or questionable thread in someone's dress sense, its aspiration? Why did some people prepare their look so carefully (even when they might not want it to appear as such) and why, for other people, did image not seem to remotely matter?

Do these people claim to be antisocial, or something along those lines? Where is the balance, the 'good taste', the elegance?

> Carminho realized that she couldn't be what she wanted to be as a designer. She had to understand the business and adapt. All the things that gave her an immense, explosive pleasure in the act of creating simply vanished.

Despite the divergent aesthetics and disruptive environment of Antwerp's fashion scene, designs always had to be commercially successful. They must be creative but still on-trend, and trends sometimes go against creative disruption, the imaginative part of the creative process. In short, the substance.

The house of the famous designer for whom Carminho worked had to be economically and financially sustainable.

Carminho realized that as a designer she couldn't be what she wanted to be. She had to understand the business and adapt. All the things that gave her an immense, explosive pleasure in the act of creating simply vanished. She started to feel sad, struggling to keep going as the days went by. She thought hard about what she wanted, what she needed and what would make her happy. In the meantime, she decided to tell her employer that she would quit as soon as her replacement could be found.

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So she returned to Lisbon, leaving behind a highly-paid job and a brilliant chance of a successful career. In Lisbon, Carminho took advantage of the best that could be experienced at the time. She joined a circle of atypical friends with links to the arts, startups and the digital world.

As a curator she supported 'gentrification', whereby a place, especially part of a city, evolves from being a poor, to a wealthier area, where people from a higher social class live (Oxford English Dictionary).

She was associated with shifting the city towards riverside areas traditionally untouched by the erudite world of arts and intellectuals. She appointed the jury for prizes linked to creative and disruptive movements. It felt good being back in Portugal, it was as if she was reviving and being reborn thanks to all the positive things that go on in the country.

Her savings, however, were at breaking point. She lived for almost a year in Lisbon with intense activity but almost no pay. The funds that she had put aside thanks to her excellent salary in Antwerp were already running very low.

Once again she risked everything, just as when she had decided to go to London. She reorganized her ideas and was filled with a sense of courage and entrepreneurship.

She got some family support, re-connected with a friend who knew about her gift for creation and innovation, and founded a fashion brand. (This said, it wouldn't be quite right to call it a fashion brand — 'house of trends' would better describe it). To embody the project and create a space to communicate with her followers and customers, Carminho opened a store. Again, it would be unfair to simply call this space a store. What Carminho opened was an art gallery.

She moved to an old residential neighborhood and managed to create a trending culture there, which is still alive and well today. A decade after opening her gallery, this once quiet and monotonous district is now filled with bars, restaurants, galleries and art shows: painting, installations, sculpture and everything that inspires, motivates and gives us the soul and energy that only art can provide.

Carminho was a success and leaves a trendsetting legacy People from all over began to visit and she became a reference. As happens when you are successful, she received invitations to design for the world's most famous brands, but resisted the tempting offers. She knew that she would end up feeling the same way as she had in Antwerp a few years back. She would be hostage to other interests and lose her freedom — the same freedom that fed her soul and oxygenated her creative spirit.

She stayed at her 'gallery'. She achieved what many people desire: to transform her motivation into an activity that is loved and to embody it as a way of life. Her activity is profitable enough for her to lead a comfortable life and to provide for herself and the philanthropic movements that fuel her generosity. She travels constantly, out of pleasure and a need to keep up with the 'world'. We may find Carminho spending an afternoon on a terrace in Paris while drawing who knows what in CAD.

When asked what she is doing, she says she is working.

"Working?", "Yes, I watch how people move, how they dress, how they interact, and I design anything that comes to mind at that moment", she replies.

Carminho does what children do when they play: they set out on great ideas, based on dreams.

In this story we can find real inspiration about what motivated Carminho and how she was wise enough not to fall into the temptation of fame and fortune, destroying her own purpose. On the contrary, she achieved a sustainable way of life — on her own terms.

About Amrop

With offices in all world regions, Amrop is a trusted advisor in Executive Search, Board and Leadership Services. Amrop advises the world's most dynamic organizations on finding and positioning Leaders For What's Next: top talent, adept at working across borders in markets around the world.

Amrop's mission: shaping sustainable success through inspiring leaders.

About Maria da Glória Ribeiro

The Founding Partner of Amrop Portugal, Maria da Glória Ribeiro supports organizations in executive hiring, evaluation and development. She has a strong track record in strategic consulting and organizational behavior.

She is the author of two books: 'I Am My Biggest Project', and the recently-published 'People with Talent' on which this article series is based.

Maria was named one of the world's Top 200 Executive Recruitment Consultants (Nancy Garrison-Jenn).

She has an MA in Psychology with a specialization in Business Organizational Development.

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