

The Four Pillars That Support Effective Motivation Initiatives

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



You'd think it would be easy—offer rewards and recognition for top-notch performance, and business results will follow. Truth is, it's just not that simple.

Putting People at the Center of Strategy

The belief that people make choices based primarily on rational self-interest is quickly being replaced by a deeper understanding of the emotional and social nature of human decision-making. In fact, fresh insights about human motivation are surfacing every day that trigger the need to reconsider the traditional “do this, get that” approach to eliciting desired behaviors and outcomes.

At Maritz, we continue to evolve our approach to the design of next-generation motivation initiatives for employee recognition, business performance, channel loyalty and customer loyalty programs. We believe that the journey to better design begins, simply, by asking the right question.



The Question Is the Answer

To move people, you have to understand people. To design compelling, effective motivation initiatives, organizations must first make a fundamental shift in how they view stakeholders like employees, business allies and customers. They must be seen as people first. This means changing the question from “*How do we get them to do what we want?*” to “*How can we create an approach that delivers mutual benefit?*”

Achieving true mutual benefit requires gaining a deeper understanding of the people who participate in a motivation initiative. It requires knowing who they are. What they want. How they make choices. Armed with these insights, organizations can then begin to engage their stakeholders along a path of common purpose and toward desired outcomes and shared benefit.

Maritz Design Framework

Maritz has developed a framework for motivation initiative design that is firmly grounded in human behavior theory and informed by the latest human science discoveries. This framework includes four core elements or “pillars” that are essential to create a truly engaging program experience:

- **A head-turning attention strategy** that keeps purpose, shared vision and goals top-of-mind.
- **An actionable goal commitment strategy** that ensures the right goals are established and internalized, and that a commitment is made to their accomplishment.
- **An effective feedback strategy** that conveys progress and maintains engagement.
- **A compelling rewards strategy** that not only provides positive consequences for achievement, but also adds meaning and social value to the participation experience.

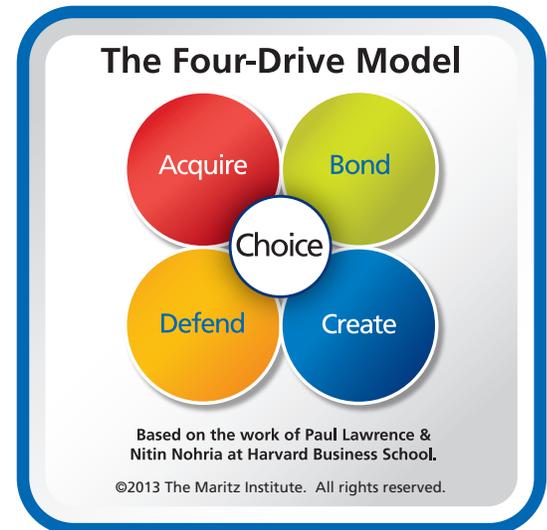
While each pillar serves a distinct and vital function, it's when they work in unison to create a singular, coherent experience that they deliver the greatest benefit.

A Solid Foundation

All four pillars have as their foundation Four-Drive Theory, the seminal explanation of human behavior proposed by Paul R. Lawrence and Nitin Nohria of Harvard Business School. Four-Drive Theory, which integrates scientific study across multiple disciplines, states that the choices people make are driven by four biological drives: the drives to Acquire, to Defend, to Bond and to Create or Comprehend. Each of these drives is underpinned by powerful emotions that serve to prioritize and influence choice-making. And, while they may not be the only human drives, Lawrence and Nohria's theory suggests that an individual's desire to satisfy and balance these four greatly influences his or her motivation to reach goals related to personal achievement, social connection, learning and well-being.

Traditional motivation programs often focus exclusively on satisfying the drives to Acquire and Defend by providing the opportunity to earn tangible rewards and increased personal status in ways considered both fair and transparent. Next-generation programs acknowledge the importance of these drivers of human behavior and also engage the drives to Bond with others and to Create through learning and self-expression. By taking a more balanced approach to experience design, next-generation programs move well beyond “do this, get that” to authentically engage the whole person.

Maritz uses Four-Drive Theory as the first and most important design lens when building strategies for each of the four pillars: attention, goal commitment, feedback and rewards. This approach ensures that the latest scientific understanding is combined with the expertise-driven art of motivation initiative design. Each of the pillars plays a distinct and vital role in the success of a motivation initiative—and Four-Drive Theory helps ensure that participant needs are met in ways that are most meaningful to them.



“These four drives, while not necessarily the only human drives, are the ones that are central to a unified understanding of modern human life.”

—Paul R. Lawrence and Nitin Nohria,
academics and authors



Pillar #1: A Head-Turning Attention Strategy

Imagine your stakeholder is sorting through a stack of mail or plowing through her inbox, and your message immediately captures her attention and piques her curiosity. It's visual, surprising and memorable. She feels energized and optimistic ... driven to act. **It's all possible.**

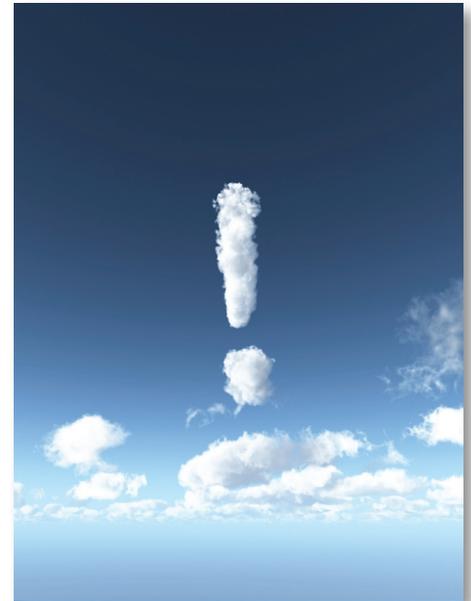
To have impact, a motivation initiative must first earn the attention of those who have the opportunity to participate. Getting and keeping attention over time requires a thoughtful approach to messaging based on how the brain processes and retains information.

Attention itself is a scarce resource, and neuroscience confirms that the selection of stimuli is at the very core of attention. At any given moment, an individual can only attend to a fraction of the stimuli to which they're exposed. The brain—both consciously and unconsciously—selects chunks of those inputs to process. And, because each individual is unique, this selection process explains how people in the same situation can have significantly different perceptions of and feelings about what they experienced.

A well-thought-out attention strategy takes into account the emotions that underpin each of the four human drives. Messaging should work to elicit positive emotions, such as optimism, anticipation and gratitude, and help people make mental connections to previous experiences where they were at their best.

Telling stories that spotlight success in action is an invaluable way to humanize information and boost attention through social proof and connection to a greater meaning. Using novelty to deliver messages—in ways both expected and unexpected—also helps to make information “sticky.” Messaging can be particularly powerful when it incorporates endorsements from trusted associates who help point the way to success.

Finally, a well-designed attention strategy creates a positive social context for an initiative by reinforcing the mutual benefit that comes from increased collaboration, strengthened networks and an energized culture.



“Everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought.

It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others.”

– William James, psychologist and philosopher

Pillar #2: An Actionable Goal Commitment Strategy

Imagine that your stakeholders adopt program goals as their own personal goals. They consider goal achievement important and develop a vision of success and commit to the actions required to achieve it. Ahead of schedule. With results beyond what you'd hoped for. **It's all possible.**

So, your messaging has earned people's attention. Now what? While goal-setting and goal-getting are necessary ingredients for any motivation initiative, the reality is that creating participant intention through goal commitment is often overlooked. That's why it's vital for initiative designers to create a strategy that actively promotes goal attainment during every phase of an initiative.

A program goal might be increasing market share through distribution channel partners. It could be recognizing employee behaviors that support an inspiring brand experience for customers. Or, a goal could be to create true customer loyalty for a product or service. Whatever the goal, insightful designers must consider how people choose goals for themselves and take action that leads to achievement.

Goals tend to be either internally or intrinsically motivated (i.e., goals that are self-chosen based on wants and needs) or externally or extrinsically motivated (i.e., those that are given and incentivized by others). Here again, Four-Drive Theory can be an invaluable lens for helping stakeholders align external and internal goals so they are persistently attended to.

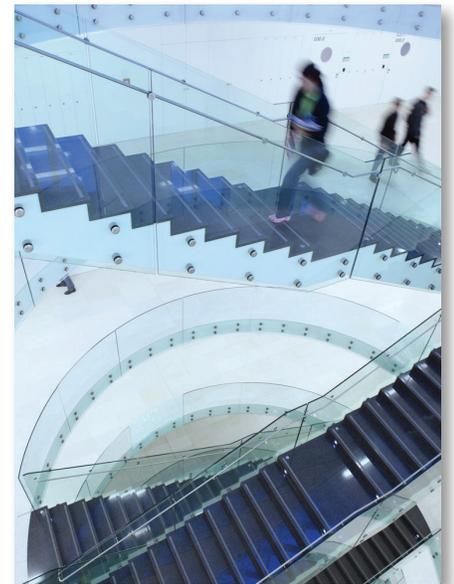
SMART goals—goals that are Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant and Timely—represent a standard approach for articulating business goals. An example of a SMART goal might be, "Our promotional campaign will generate 15 percent return on equity for the Midwest group by the end of Q3." The advantage of SMART goals is they avoid ambiguity. However, SMART goals might not be the smartest (Heath & Heath, 2010) because they presume emotional relevance rather than generating it. SMART goals also assume that everyone agrees the goal is a good idea, which is not always the case.

It can be useful then to consider whether a goal should be about proving (i.e., "be-good") or improving (i.e., "get-better"). In her book *Succeed: How We Can Reach our Goals*, Heidi Grant Halverson (2010) points out that be-good performance goals—where success or failure is black or white—are motivating only to the extent they are considered fair and not too difficult. She also cites studies that suggest get-better goals can be more effective in improving long-term performance and promoting enjoyment of the journey.

Four-Drive Theory reminds us that people are hardwired to defend themselves and others in the name of fairness. Before an individual creates an intention to act on a goal, it must be perceived as both fair and achievable. Too often, initiatives are designed with a one-size-fits-all goal structure in which all participants are given the same target or objective without a realistic chance for many to accomplish it. Such an approach dilutes program impact by engaging only those who see the goal as within reach.

Providing participants with choice in goal selection represents another powerful way to increase relevance and create the intention to act. For example, offering the ability to select one's own goal, target the level of attainment and determine their personal pathway for getting there helps foster autonomy that, in turn, increases commitment.

Finally, goal pursuit can be contagious when participants see others who have made a commitment and are taking action. Creating social experiences where goal commitment is shared with others can be powerful.



Pillar #3: An Effective Feedback Strategy

Imagine as your stakeholders work toward goals, the feedback they receive inspires creativity, promotes trust and accelerates effort. The feedback provides a sense of real progress toward meaningful outcomes, fueling positive emotions and social connection every step of the way. **It's all possible.**

People continually seek feedback and indications of progress toward the goals they perceive to be important—and this is nowhere more evident than in the workplace. According to research conducted by Teresa M. Amabile and Steve J. Kramer (2011), people's best work days are characterized by a simple, yet profound outcome: At the end of the day, people want to feel like they've made progress on meaningful work.

A progress feedback strategy should begin during the design phase of an initiative, when success measures are first established. And, since organizational success has a social context, it's vital to ensure that systems for social reinforcement, leadership support, coaching and encouragement be considered as elements of a comprehensive feedback strategy.

Progress reporting should include actionable information about the behaviors that support goal achievement, particularly with get-better goals. Because the brain is hardwired to be social, workplace goals, by their very nature, carry social meaning. Feedback that goes beyond raw numbers to reinforce teamwork and organizational progress can be particularly meaningful. At the individual level, receiving thoughtful, timely, personalized feedback from managers and having progress acknowledged by colleagues or other trusted associates serves to further bolster commitment.

Earning and accumulating reward points is both a form of feedback and is psychologically rewarding in itself. Because program points are essentially an abstract concept, the mind is free to subjectively assign value beyond financial benefit. In other words, people are able to assign their own meaning to points as a form of very real progress toward reward goals they've chosen for themselves.

And people like to play. The introduction of game mechanics—constructs or elements and features commonly used in a game experience and intended to produce fun, compelling participation—can be an effective way of increasing engagement, as well as communicating progress. In fact, an entire program can be designed with the principles of game science in mind, providing novel ways of both communicating progress and motivating action toward goal achievement.



Pillar #4: A Compelling Rewards Strategy

Imagine that every stakeholder can choose a reward they really want. And, beyond the tangible things they can earn, the experience of participating in the initiative is itself rewarding in every way. Personal benefit and organizational advancement are inextricably connected and pursued with equal vigor. **It's all possible.**

Rewards experienced as an outcome of participation in a motivation initiative can take on meaning that extends well beyond the acquisition of a tangible “thing.” And because meaning is personal, it's important that a rewards strategy provide the breadth of choices necessary to connect with a diversity of values and interests.

In fact, offering a broad selection of non-monetary or experiential rewards has been linked with greater focus on goals, lasting associations with the behaviors for which they were earned, and the creation of deeper emotional connections with an organization or brand. A study conducted by Maritz indicates that companies that default to cash rewards may be ignoring the emotional connection participants have to the reward, and therefore to their goals and the company itself. And research by Scott Jeffrey and Gordon Adomdza (2011) discovered that people spent significantly more time thinking about tangible, non-monetary rewards than their cash equivalent.

Beyond tangible rewards, social acceptance, connection and enhanced self-image are all powerful motivators. Structured recognition opportunities that reinforce effort, behaviors and outcomes should be considered for inclusion in any initiative. And, because increased status is so innately rewarding, spotlighting the performance of top performers serves both as a potent reward and an opportunity to show others a pathway to success. Where superior performance is recognized as an outcome of competition among peers, it's vital to ensure that the process for earning top performer status is perceived as being both accessible and fair. It's also a good practice to supplement competitive, status-building recognition with opportunities for all participants to earn and be recognized based on milestone achievement or personal development.

During each step of the initiative design process, Four-Drive Theory provides a lens for creating reward experiences that extend beyond the drive to Acquire. By also engaging the drives to Bond and Create, a carefully planned rewards strategy engages on more dimensions and avoids tensions that can arise when one drive predominates.



Summary: Four Pillars Underpinned by Four Drives

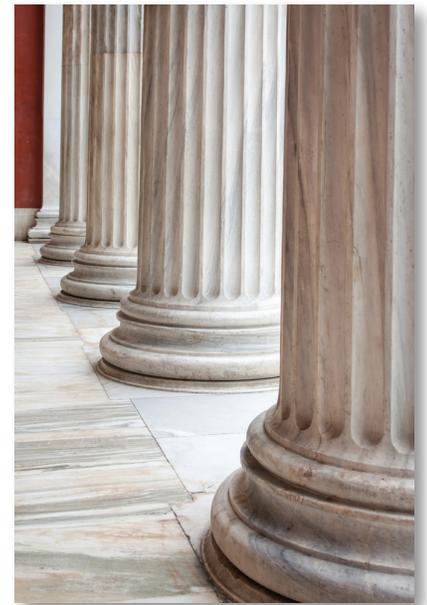
Whether they're employees, channel partners or customers, *people transform business*. And in today's ever-changing environment, progressive organizations realize they must treat their stakeholders as much more than a means to economic outcomes. The groundbreaking Four-Drive Theory provides an important way to understand the emotion-informed drives that determine human choice-making and behavior.

The Maritz approach starts by putting people at the center of strategy and leveraging both science and art to arrive at the right design. It helps organizations move beyond strategies anchored primarily in the drives to Acquire and Defend because it acknowledges the social and self-expressive dimensions of human nature.

The Maritz approach re-imagines the experience of participating in a motivation initiative. Here's how:

- Communications earn attention and create an experience that's compelling, informative and novel.
- Goals become more than a corporate directive when participants make them their own and fully understand how their attainment creates mutual benefit at personal, team and organizational levels.
- Feedback itself is rewarding because it not only looks back but illuminates the path forward through trusted guidance and stories.
- Reward earning opportunities include both tangible and experiential choices. Accomplishments are both encouraged and consistently recognized.

With Four-Drive Theory as the foundation for these four pillars, Maritz designers are creating experiences that are meaningful, motivating and memorable—and that advance organizations by leveraging the full potential of the people they touch.



Source Document

This executive summary is based on The Maritz Institute white paper: "The Four Pillars That Support Effective Motivation Initiatives" by Michelle Pokorny and Russ Frey with contributions and editing support from Melanie Mihal. All are members of The Maritz Institute network.

Further Reading

Amabile, T. M., & Kramer, S. J. (2011). *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Halvorson, H. G. (2010). *Succeed: How We Can Reach Our Goals*. New York, NY: Penguin Group (USA).

Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to Change When Change Is Hard*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.

Jeffrey, S.A., & Adomdza, G.K. (2011). "Incentive Salience and Improved Performance" in Human Performance.

Lawrence, P. R., & Nohria, N. (2002). *Driven: How Human Nature Shapes Our Choices*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

McEuen, M. B. (2011). *The Game Has Changed: A New Paradigm for Stakeholder Engagement*. Available at www.themaritzinstitute.com.

Related Maritz Research

2011 Maritz Employee Values Study. <http://www.maritzmotivation.com/Employee-Values-Study.aspx>

2010 Maritz Reward and Recognition Market Study. <http://www.hospitalitynet.org/news/4052768.html>

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