

Drive by Daniel Pink

It was a Thursday and I was having lunch with a friend of mine who specializes in the field of creativity. She asked me if I had read 'Drive' by Daniel Pink. I bought the book on Friday and by Sunday evening I had read the book. Drive is a well written book and Daniel Pink has a writing style which keeps you engaged.

He explains how many organizations operate from outdated assumptions about personal performance and how successful organizations such as Google, 3M and WL Gore are moving beyond the flawed thinking of 'Reward and Punishment' and are now recognizing people's natural desire for self fulfillment.

The book is in three parts; Part 1 Flaws in reward and punishment. Part 2 How to use autonomy, self direction and the desire to grow. Part 3 A Toolkit

Through history we recognized two main drives that powered behavior. Internally we had the biological drive of hunger, thirst and sex and externally we had rewards and punishment. In the 1940's Harry Harlow at the University of Wisconsin conducted experiments which showed how rewarding actually increases the number of errors in our work! In 1969 Edward Deci at Carnegie Mellon University showed that "when money is used as an external reward for activity the subjects lose interest in the activity". In other words money provides a short term boost but, rather like caffeine, in the long term has a negative effect.

Pink's thesis, supported by a wide number of researchers is that we have an inherent desire to seek out novelty and challenges and to explore and learn. At the same time we want to be larger than ourselves and be in an organization

Using the software metaphor he describes three business 'Operating Systems'.

The first 'Operating System' was 'Motivation 1.0' and was based on the premise that 50,000 years ago we were just surviving. We would just take from others in order to live. Over time a more complex society led to co-operation and led to a second drive to seek reward and avoid punishment. This led to 'Motivation 2.0'. This Operating System (OS) led to economic progress and embodied 'Taylorism' or 'Scientific Management'. It treated workers as part of a machine and we have to this day configured our organizations around this 'bedrock assumption'

In the 1950's the work of Maslow with his 'Hierarchy of Needs' and in the 1960's McGregor's 'Theory Y' led to some relaxation of the reward and punishment concept and the creation of "OS 2.1". However, 'Theory X' of McGregor is still the fundamental start point of many people running companies and is based on the principle that 'employed' people disliked work.

If we then fast forward to the last decade OS 2.1 does not explain phenomena such as Linux or Firefox which were built by unpaid labor! The people who

participated in those developments have not taken vows of poverty but they got enormous enjoyment and fulfillment. In a different context, Artists producing 'commissioned' works have been shown to be significantly less creative than in their 'non-commissioned' works. We are recognizing today that creativity is widely available and 'Reward and Punishment' arguments do not fit with 21st century economics. In addition we are now in a world where creativity and innovation are vital for long term success.

An LSE analysis of 'pay for performance' plans has shown financial incentives actually had a negative effect on overall performance. Financial incentives designed to increase creativity actually dulled creativity. 'If -Then' rewards lead to a loss of autonomy. Pink describes 'seven deadly flaws' of carrot and stick and proposes that the 'billable hour' is why lawyers are so miserable and commission payment is why call centers have 35% turnover.

But this is not 'all bad'. Rewards do work in tasks where we follow simple instructions. However, to succeed, the task needs certain key components to be included. 1) An explanation of why the task is necessary and not the "'Just do it' approach. 2) Acknowledgement that the task is boring. 3) Specify the outcome that is needed and allow people freedom to do it 'their way'. 4) Praise and positive feedback during and after the task.

Even this does not work when we create and experiment. We are now starting to see new types of organization which are recognizing that our creative side does not respond rationally to external incentives. Motivation 3.0 depends on 'intrinsic reward' and personal satisfaction. Pink describes a type 'I' behavior which is fundamental to creative success. Motivation 3.0 does not disdain reward. It takes it off the table and makes the task the focus. We get success when we are able to control our own 'time, task, technique and team'. W.L. Gore has put 'Motivation 3.0' into action and at 3M and Google 15 to 20 % of the work operates this way

This recognizes that we want to be accountable but we are born to be players and not pawns. Control leads to compliance while autonomy leads to engagement. Later in the book Pink introduces the concept of 'flow' which is widely described elsewhere. If we bring 'flow' into tasks it leads to a 'mastery' mindset.

I have recommended this book to many of my friends and they have all spoken well of the book after reading it. We all have books on our shelves that are half read because the book runs out of steam part way. Drive keeps you engaged throughout. It makes you think. Daniel Pink writes on a subject in which we all inherently believe. We work better when we are masters of our own destiny. He shows how organizations who have grasped the concepts of Motivation 3.0 have made their organizations great places to work.