

exception of punishment). To induce short-term compliance, behavioral manipulation is the best we've got.

If, however, your goal is to tap your employees' intrinsic interest in doing quality work, or to encourage your students to become lifelong, self-directed learners, or to help your child grow into a caring, responsible, decent person, then it makes no sense to ask "What's the alternative to rewards?" because rewards never moved us one millimeter toward *those* objectives. In fact, rewards actively interfere with our attempts to reach them.

The goals for parents, teachers, and managers that I have just described are the goals that interest me — and, I hope, you. But since dangling goodies in front of people doesn't help us to attain these goals, we shouldn't find ourselves in the position of having to be convinced to trade in rewards for something new. We are, in effect, starting from scratch. So what *can* help us reach these ambitious goals? Here, finally, is a meaningful question. My attempt at an answer is contained in the three chapters that follow.

10

THANK GOD IT'S MONDAY: The Roots of Motivation in the Workplace

A high wage will not elicit effective work from those who feel themselves outcasts and slaves, nor a low wage preclude it from those who feel themselves an integral part of a community of free men. Thus the improvement of this element of the supply of labour is an infinitely more complex and arduous task than if it depended upon wage alone.

— D. H. Robertson
"Economic Incentives" (1921)

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS JUDGE a book by its cover, but you can sometimes feel justified in discarding one on the basis of its title. Anything called "How to Motivate Your Work Force," "Making People Productive," or something of the sort can safely be passed over because the enterprise it describes is wholly misconceived. "Strictly speaking," said Douglas McGregor, "the answer to the question managers so often ask of behavioral scientists — 'How do you motivate people?' — is, 'You don't.'"¹

Of course, it is possible to get people to do something. That is what rewards, punishments, and other instruments of control are all about. But the *desire* to do something, much less to do it well, simply cannot be imposed; in this sense, it is a mistake to talk about motivating other people. All we can do is set up certain conditions that will maximize the probability of their developing an interest in what they are doing and remove the conditions that function as constraints.² This chapter offers a very brief review of those conditions, a summary

of what research and experience suggest are useful ways of providing an environment conducive to motivation in the workplace.

Step One: Abolish Incentives

To challenge the pay-for-performance approach is to invite the question, Well, then, how *should* people be paid? What must be stressed immediately is that this question, while a reasonable one to pose, is not nearly as important as most managers seem to think. Although some alternative plan for compensation will have to be devised, nothing we come up with is going to help people become motivated.

W. Edwards Deming distills half a century's worth of experience observing and advising organizations as follows: "Pay is not a motivator." Frederick Herzberg amends this declaration by reminding us that money can nevertheless be a demotivator. This means that compensation systems often act as barriers to achieving productivity, quality, and intrinsic motivation, but they do not — they cannot — help us reach these goals. The implication is that books emphasizing the importance of paying people "correctly" distract us from the issues that really matter, and consultants peddling elaborate compensation schemes are selling a bill of goods.

Here are the basic principles I would propose to those responsible for setting policy: Pay people generously and equitably. Do your best to make sure they don't feel exploited. Then *do everything in your power to help them put money out of their minds*. The problem with financial incentives is not that people are offered too much money; earning a hefty salary is not incompatible with doing good work. Rather, the problem is that money is made too salient. It is pushed into people's faces. Moreover, it is offered contingently — that is, according to the principle "Do this and you'll get that."³ To end this practice is to take the first step — but only the first step — toward fixing what is wrong with organizations.

Let me be autobiographical for a moment. Each time I address a business audience about the harms of rewards, there is always one man who, after sitting through the talk with his arms folded and a derisive look on his face, rouses himself to challenge me as follows: "I guess you won't be accepting any money for this lecture, then, huh?" This reaction tells me that I haven't been successful in explaining the relationship of money to motivation. I try to find another way to say that the trouble is not with money per se but with the

way people are made to think about money and the way it is used to control them.

When someone contacts me about giving a lecture or writing an article, I ask how much money is involved and often negotiate for the maximum amount that seems to be fair and that the organization can afford to pay. Then, assuming we have come to an agreement, I do my best not to think about the money again. I do this because I fear the consequences of construing what I am doing in terms of what I am being paid: eventually I might find myself thinking, "A is paying me twice as much as B, so I'd better do twice as good a job for A." If I ever reach that point, my integrity will be gone, and my intrinsic motivation will have fled along with it.

What I attempt to do, in other words, is *decouple the task from the compensation*. Since I am self-employed, this is largely a matter of how I think about my work — what I attend to, and when, and how. But for people who do not work for themselves, it is imperative that the act of decoupling be facilitated by the organization. This is done mostly by avoiding certain practices — specifically, anything that encourages people to become preoccupied with what they will get for what they are doing.

Other than well and fairly, how should people be paid? Different organizations have experimented with different arrangements. The most ambitious try to compensate employees on the basis of need, or else they pay everyone equally. A less drastic approach is to take into account such factors as how long an individual has been with the organization, what special training and skills she has, and how time-consuming or complex her job is. If the company has had a profitable year, I see no reason those gains should not be distributed to the employees; after all, their work is what produced the profit.⁴ These recommendations accord, more or less, with those of Deming⁵ and, as I understand it, with the practice of most companies in Japan and elsewhere.⁶ Some major U.S. corporations — a minority, to be sure — are beginning to move in this direction because of Deming's influence or because of a gradual realization that pay-for-performance is an inherently flawed concept.⁷

Step Two: Reevaluate Evaluation

After abolishing merit pay, we need to take a hard look at its first cousin, the performance appraisal. This is typically a stressful annual

ritual in which employees are ranked, rated, or otherwise judged—a tradition that should have been retired long ago in light of how misleading its results are and how predictably it generates resentment and impedes cooperation.

So what do we do instead? Rather than just shopping for a new technique, we might begin by asking why people are being evaluated. So often the changes in procedure we implement have no lasting impact because we never pause to reflect on our goals and motives. In this case, some critics have suggested that the performance evaluation persists because it is “a very effective tool for controlling employees . . . [that] should not be confused . . . with motivation of employees.”⁹ Others argue that its appeal consists in allowing superiors to shift the responsibility for solving problems to their subordinates.¹⁰ Whatever the accuracy of these charges, performance evaluations are most commonly defended on the grounds that they are needed to

1. determine how much each employee is paid or who will receive various awards and incentives;
2. make employees perform better for fear of receiving a negative evaluation or in the hope of getting a positive one;
3. sort employees on the basis of how good a job they are doing so we know whom to promote; or
4. provide feedback, discuss problems, and identify needs in order to help each employee do a better job.

I have already argued at some length that the first and second justifications make no sense, since pay-for-performance plans as well as a carrot-and-stick approach to motivation are counterproductive.¹⁰ The third motive raises a host of complex questions, and I will content myself here with just two paragraphs on the subject.

In thinking about promotion, we take for granted that an organization must be shaped like a pyramid, with many people clamoring for a very few desirable and lucrative jobs at the top, as if this arrangement had been decreed by God. In fact, both how many such positions are available and how many people want them are the result of institutional decisions. We create a climate in which employees are made to feel like failures if they are not upwardly mobile,¹¹ and we arrange the majority of jobs so that those who hold them are given very little money and responsibility. Were these things to change, the competitive scramble for promotions might be eased and we would be obliged to rethink the whole issue of who does what in an organization.

Even within the standard hierarchical arrangement, the use of performance appraisals to decide on promotions is based on three dubious assumptions: first, that someone's achievement in his current job is a reliable predictor of how successful he will be in another, very different position;^{*} second, that how much someone has achieved is a more important consideration in deciding whether and how his responsibilities will change than what sort of work he prefers and finds intrinsically motivating; and third, to the extent that performance does matter, that it is best judged by the evaluation of a superior rather than by one's peers or oneself.

Clearly, much more could be said about evaluating people in order to sort them like so many potatoes. Like the first two justifications for appraisals, using them to calculate pay and to “motivate” employees, basing promotions on performance evaluations is basically a way of doing things *to* people. Consider, by contrast, the fourth rationale, which is that evaluations are useful as a way of helping employees do better work. This seems altogether legitimate, in part because it offers the possibility of working *with* people. If our overriding concern really is to foster improvement, then the contours of a program for evaluation begin to take shape:

- It is a two-way conversation, an opportunity to trade ideas and ask questions, not a series of judgments about one person pronounced by another. In effective schools, for example, evaluations of teachers exist “to find reasons for the strengths and weaknesses they identify, and they treat teachers as equals in exploring solutions.”¹²
- It is a continuous process rather than an annual or quarterly event.
- It never involves any sort of relative ranking or competition.
- Most important, it is utterly divorced from decisions about compensation. Providing feedback that employees can use to do a better job[†] ought never to be confused or combined with controlling them

^{*}It is possible that performance appraisals are used as the basis for promotion not because we think they give us information about who will do well in a new job but in order to reward someone for how well she performed in the old one. Apart from all the other weaknesses of behaviorist thinking, this sets people up for failure after they have been promoted.

[†]A number of writers have justified conventional performance appraisals, including those tied to rewards, on the grounds that they serve to communicate expectations to employees and to offer useful feedback about performance. If these really are our goals, we need to think about how to create the most positive context for providing this information. People are least likely to be receptive to feedback when they are fearful of being judged, when they are forced to compete against others, and when extrinsic motivators are involved.

by offering (or withholding) rewards. "Using performance appraisal of any kind as a basis for reward is a flat out catastrophic mistake," says consultant Peter Scholes.¹³ Back in the 1960s, Herbert Meyer sounded the same warning, pointing out that it is "foolish to have a manager serving in the self-conflicting role as a counselor (helping someone improve performance) when, at the same time, he or she is presiding as a judge over the same employee's salary. . . ." ¹⁴ And from yet a third source:

By linking compensation to performance appraisal . . . the exchange between superior and subordinate is then not about performance but rather about pay, and it is only likely to produce de-motivators. . . . [A discussion about] progress and performance without the prospect that such a review must result in a penalty or an award to the employee [means that] the communication is more likely to stay open and honest.¹⁵

This recommendation does not amount merely to saying that supervisors should refrain from talking about money during an evaluation; it means that the entire process of providing feedback, assessing progress, and making plans ought to be completely separate from salary determinations. If such sessions are to be productive, there must be no reward or punishment hanging in the balance. The fact is that no matter how sensitively conducted and constructive an evaluation may be, it becomes a counterproductive force if how much people are paid depends on what is said there.

Step Three: Create the Conditions for Authentic Motivation

Alan S. Blinder, a Princeton University economist, recently edited a research anthology entitled *Paying for Productivity: A Look at the Evidence*. He summarized its findings as follows: "Changing the way workers are treated may boost productivity more than changing the way they are paid."¹⁶ This makes sense because treating workers decently allows them to become motivated, and motivation in turn boosts productivity.¹⁷ If motivation and productivity are in short supply in our workplaces, this may just have something to do with the way workers are treated there.

When employees are asked to describe the conditions they need, or when reflective and experienced managers are asked to describe the

conditions they try to create, a variety of suggestions are offered. But there is substantial overlap in the ideas, a consensus that people in managerial positions ought to do these things:

Watch: Don't put employees under surveillance; look for problems that need to be solved and help people solve them.

Listen: Attend seriously and respectfully to the concerns of workers and try to imagine how various situations look from their points of view.

Talk: Provide plenty of informational feedback. People need a chance to reflect on what they are doing right, to learn what needs improvement, and to discuss how to change.

Think: If one's current managerial style consists of using extrinsic motivators, controlling people's behaviors, or simply exhorting them to work hard and become motivated,* it is worth thinking carefully about the long-term impact of these strategies. It is also worth asking where they come from: A preference for using power in one's relationships with others, or a reaction to being controlled by one's own superiors, raises issues that demand attention.

Most of all, a manager committed to making sure that people are able and willing to do their best needs to attend to three fundamental factors. These can be abbreviated as the "three C's" of motivation — to wit, the *collaboration* that defines the context of work, the *content* of the tasks, and the extent to which people have some *choice* about what they do and how they do it. The remainder of this chapter explores these three ideas: in the following chapters, I will argue that the same model is also a useful way of thinking about what happens at school and at home.

Collaboration

By now, enough has been written about teamwork that it is probably unnecessary to construct an elaborate defense of the importance of helping employees work together.¹⁸ On most tasks, especially those that involve some degree of complexity and require some degree of ingenuity, people are able to do a better job in well-functioning groups

*This is sometimes done by hiring "motivational speakers" to come lecture to one's employees. At best, the result is a temporary sense of being re-energized, much like the effect of eating a doughnut. When the sugar high wears off, very little of value is left in the system.

than they can on their own. They are also more likely to be excited about their work. Both effects are due to the exchange of talent and resources that occurs as a result of cooperation — and also to the emotional sustenance provided by social support. People will typically be more enthusiastic where they feel a sense of belonging and see themselves as part of a community than they will in a workplace in which each person is left to his own devices.

Anyone who judged the status of U.S. corporations on the basis of their rhetoric would assume that cooperation was an integral feature of American business. The truth is that it's much easier to find people saying all the right things about the importance of teamwork than to find a genuine commitment to the practice. Some executives confine their efforts to issuing "Let's all pull together" memos.¹⁸ Some companies actually do assign people to teams, but without providing the training needed to make teamwork work. (The inevitable failure can then be blamed on how uncooperative the individuals in question are, or how it is just "natural" to want to work alone.) Sometimes employees are given the chance to cooperate within their division or department, but nothing is done to establish the cross-functional connections required for coordination among departments. Finally, some managers undermine the value of cooperation by simultaneously perpetuating competition, either by explicitly setting one team against another or by using compensation systems that have the same effect. As usual, McGregor's observations are incisive:

Most so-called managerial teams are not teams at all, but collections of individual relationships with the boss in which each individual is vying with every other for power, prestige, recognition, and personal autonomy. Under such conditions unity of purpose is a myth. . . . [However,] the limits on human collaboration in the organizational setting are not limits of human nature but of management's ingenuity in discovering how to realize the potential represented by its human resources.¹⁹

Of course, simply putting people in groups does not ensure that cooperation will take place. Considerable effort and organizational commitment are required to make that happen. Instead, though, many managers simply fall back on the usual gimmick for getting people to do things: bribery. Apart from everything else that is wrong with

¹⁸Even worse is the tendency to talk about being a "team player" — a phrase that seems to suggest a commitment to cooperation but actually, on closer inspection, is apt to constitute a demand for simple obedience and conformity.

rewards, they are ineffective at developing and sustaining successful collaboration. As one professor of business administration comments, "Pay should not be an active ingredient in promoting teamwork and motivating performance. . . . Telling people you are going to change the compensation system rallies them around compensation when what you want them to do is rally around making teams work."²⁰

Content

Even at a workplace with the most enlightened management practices imaginable, including an emphasis on cooperation, employees will not be motivated if what they are doing all day holds no interest for them. "Idleness, indifference and irresponsibility are healthy responses to absurd work," said Herzberg.²¹ Elsewhere he issued this challenge to executives: "If you want people motivated to do a good job, give them a good job to do."²² These acid aphorisms point the way to making a revolutionary improvement in people's work lives.

What is a good job? Let us start by aiming high: at its best, it offers a chance to engage in *meaningful* work. The sense of doing something that matters is not the same as a feeling of intrinsic motivation. It isn't just that the process of working provides enjoyment, but that the product being made (or the service provided) seems worthwhile and even important, perhaps because it makes a contribution to a larger community. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who has spent much of his career describing the pure pleasure of "flow" experiences, points out that beyond such enjoyment "one must still ask, 'What are the consequences of this particular activity?'"²³ The question is not just "Are we having fun yet?" but "Are we making a difference?"

If all jobs that did not meet this standard were eliminated, an awful lot of people would be thrown out of work. I offer it as a long-range consideration, a star by which to navigate as we think about the ultimate value of our activity. The meaningfulness of jobs has obvious moral implications, but it ultimately pertains to the question of motivation as well: most people who have the chance to engage in work they think of as important are profoundly committed to what they do.

Even if we set this criterion to one side, the central point remains: that work consists of — the content, not merely the context, of a job. Motivation is typically highest when the job offers an opportunity to learn new skills, to experience some variation in tasks, and to acquire

and demonstrate competence. Different people, it goes without saying, prefer different levels of challenge and a different balance between predictability and novelty. But the basic points are essentially universal. Again, Herzberg put it well:

Managers do not motivate employees by giving them higher wages, more benefits, or new status symbols. Rather, employees are motivated by their own inherent need to succeed at a challenging task. The manager's job, then, is not to motivate people to get them to achieve; instead, the manager should provide opportunities for people to achieve so they will become motivated.²⁴

How can such opportunities be provided? The possibilities range from making relatively minor adjustments in a given organization, at one end of the continuum, to working for an overhaul of our economic system, on the other. The easiest change for a manager is, whenever possible, to let people work at the jobs that they are most likely to find interesting. That means hiring people (and reassigning them) not only on the basis of what their resumes say they are most qualified to do but also on the basis of what they *like* to do. It means giving employees a chance to sample a variety of jobs in an organization until a good fit is found, and allowing them to transfer periodically in order to keep things interesting. As management theorists Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham have noticed, "When people are well matched with their jobs, it rarely is necessary to force, coerce, bribe, or trick them into working hard and trying to perform the job well. Instead, they try to do well because it is rewarding and satisfying to do so."²⁵

A more difficult, but also more meaningful, step is to restructure jobs so they become more interesting to more people. (Few employees, after all, want to be matched to tedious, unchallenging assignments.) "Work motivation often can be enhanced by increasing the levels of responsibility, meaningfulness, and feedback that are built into jobs," Hackman and Oldham argue. Their formula for doing so includes making sure that each worker has some knowledge of the results of what she is doing, experiences responsibility for these results, and sees the work as valuable (at least in the sense of offering the chance to use a variety of skills). Making such changes in the content of work is critical, they argue, because "motivation at work may actually have more to do with how tasks are designed and managed than with the personal dispositions of the people who do them" — a viewpoint that clashes directly with the tendency to blame individuals when something goes wrong.²⁶

But these changes, welcome as they might be, still leave us with jobs that seem by their very nature to be devoid of interest. What can be done about inherently boring work? One answer, offered implicitly by some social reformers, is to take the content of these jobs as a given and insist that people who do them get paid more. This seems to me unsatisfactory. Our concern that people receive adequate compensation must not distract us from the question of how their day-to-day quality of life can be improved. This calls for attention to job content, which again can be tackled on two levels — changing work design in order to minimize monotony and effecting large-scale social transformation.

The moderate response is to deal with jobs more or less as they are and try to make them more palatable. In chapter 5, I reviewed Deci's three-pronged strategy for doing so, which includes acknowledging frankly that the task may not be fun, offering a meaningful rationale for doing it anyway (in terms of its indirect effects, for example),* and giving people as much choice as possible about how they perform the task (see page 90 and also Csikszentmihalyi's thoughts on the subject on page 304 note 78). Another research psychologist, Carol Sansone, has described how people "regulate their motivation to perform necessary activities over time," artificially enhancing the level of difficulty to keep things interesting, adding variety however they can, and attending to incidental task information.²⁷ (Here, of course, the burden is on the person doing the job to make it *seem* more appealing rather than on the supervisor to make it more appealing in reality.)

One sociologist, studying a group of garbage collectors in San Francisco, discovered that most of them were quite satisfied with their work because of the way it — and the company — was organized. Relationships among the men were highlighted, tasks and routes were "varied enough to break the monotony of the work's routine," and the company was set up as a cooperative, meaning that each worker owned a share of the business and felt a "pride of ownership." Clearly, it is premature to assume that certain categories of work are inherently distasteful and will be pursued only for extrinsic reasons.²⁸

*Compare the use of explanation, an appeal to reason, with an approach that appeals to power, such as controlling people by the use of incentives or threats. The contrast recalls a point made by developmental psychologists (reviewed in chapter 12) to the effect that the purpose of requests can be explained to children instead of relying on the assertion of power to get them to obey.

The radical response to this problem is to question the necessity of making people do wretched work in the first place. It would seem that some tasks that are even more disagreeable than garbage collection simply cannot be avoided. But what interests me are the unpleasant jobs that do not have to be done in order for society to function, those whose existence reflects the premise of our economic system that if something sells, it has value by definition and should be produced. Should convenience foods or luxury appliances be made available if the human costs of preparing or assembling them are severe? Our answer may be yes, but the question needs to be asked: If the issue is rarely addressed, it is partly because many people are forced to choose between working at such jobs and not working at all — a choice framed not by “life” but by our economic system. These people are expected to be grateful that any employment is available, regardless of the psychic and physical toll of doing such work.

What it comes down to is this: we who benefit from someone else’s mind-numbing labor — we who defrost our frozen dinners without ever considering what life is like for those invisible others who spend eight grueling, repetitive hours a day preparing them — are quick to say such work must be done. From one perspective, this reflects another facet of the sharp division between the haves and the have-nots; the latter are left with the work that lacks interest. From another perspective, it could be said that what we collectively gain as consumers we lose as producers: our shelves are full of goods, while our lives are empty of meaningful work.²⁹

The central point, though, is that in any responsible discussion of intrinsic motivation, and especially of the role played by the content of tasks, we must remind ourselves of the social context. If work is to be improved, it must first be made bearable for those who endure injuries of body, mind, and spirit for our convenience.

Choice

We are most likely to become enthusiastic about what we are doing — and all else being equal, to do it well — when we are free to make decisions about the way we carry out a task. The loss of autonomy entailed by the use of rewards or punishments helps explain why they sap our motivation. But managers must do more than avoid these tactics; they need to take affirmative steps to make sure employees have real choices about how they do their jobs.

To describe much of what is wrong with our workplaces is to enumerate the effects of restricting people’s sense of self-determination. This situation is more egregious the lower we are in the hierarchy. By and large, those who do the least interesting work and receive the least compensation are those who should, at a minimum, have the consolation of being able to make decisions about how they carry out their assignments. Instead, they are the most carefully controlled.

Regardless of the organizational level, though, the difference between success and failure, enthusiasm and apathy, even health and sickness, can often be traced back to this issue:

- Why do so many employees become burned out and bitter? Burnout is not a function of how much work they have to do so much as how controlled and powerless they feel.³⁰
 - What kind of job is associated with high levels of psychological stress and coronary heart disease? Not the “success oriented,” managerial or professional occupations (where Type A and high incomes are most prevalent)³¹ but those where “individuals have insufficient control over their work situation.”³¹
 - Which characteristic of an organization is most likely to kill creativity? Not inadequate pay or tight deadlines, but “a lack of freedom in deciding what to do or how to accomplish the task, lack of sense of control over one’s own work and ideas.”³²
 - Why do people so often mutter and groan when a change in policy is announced? Not because it is a change but because it is announced — that is, imposed on them. (This distinction forces us to reconsider assumptions about the alleged conservatism of “human nature.” As Peter Scholtes has observed, “People don’t resist change; they resist being changed.”)³³
 - What makes workers look for or invent reasons to stay home from work? One answer suggests itself when we notice much lower rates of absenteeism in workplaces where employees are able to participate in making substantive decisions.³⁴
 - Which middle managers are most likely to act in an autocratic fashion toward those below them in the hierarchy? Very likely those who are restricted and controlled themselves.³⁵
- People are most motivated when they are able to participate in making decisions about organizational goals (and, of course, are given the necessary information and resources to do so). Even when those goals are determined by others, it is critical that employees be able to decide how best to reach them, that they hear from a supervisor, “Here’s where we need to get; you decide how we get there.” For example,

jobholders can be given discretion in setting schedules, determining work methods, and deciding when and how to check on the quality of the work produced. Employees can make their own decisions about when to start and stop work, when to take breaks, and how to assign priorities. They can be encouraged to seek solutions to problems on their own, consulting with other organization members as necessary, rather than calling immediately for the supervisor when problems arise.³⁶

To give employees the chance to make decisions is not to manage by inaction. Like parents who cannot see an alternative to harsh, punitive control on the one hand and total permissiveness on the other, some organizational theorists assume that supervisors are either making all the decisions or else doing nothing. The truth of the matter is that creating structures that support worker autonomy is itself a challenging job.³⁷

When managers become aware of a problem, either one arising within the organization or an external challenge to it, their first impulse should be to bring every employee into the process of working out a solution. As McGregor says, nothing "can justify excluding the individual from . . . active and responsible participation . . . in decisions affecting his career."³⁸ That commitment extends to devising ways of coping with hard times and searching for alternatives to laying people off.³⁹

The importance of choice has a direct bearing on the sorts of changes described throughout this chapter. It informs the decision to eliminate incentives, since rewards and punishments are methods of control. It guides our attempt to reconfigure performance appraisals.⁴⁰ It is an integral part of any effort to change the content of jobs.⁴¹ And it must accompany the use of cooperation, since teams will not function effectively if they are denied any real authority over what they do and how they do it.⁴²

But it would be more than a little ironic if we simply imposed such changes on workers by fiat. The principle of self-determination that lies behind the content and motive of these reforms must also inform the method of implementing them. If we try to force a new idea, even a very good idea, down people's throats, they will cough it back up. Besides being more respectful and consistent, working collaboratively with employees can also be justified on purely pragmatic terms.

When implemented as a systematic program, increased choice sometimes goes by the name of "participative management."⁴³ A number of case studies suggest that when such plans are adopted by

companies, both in the United States⁴⁴ and in other countries, such as Japan and Sweden,⁴⁵ they are successful by several measures. At a recent conference in which economists reported on research pertaining to profit-sharing programs, the most striking and "totally unexpected" finding to emerge from the various presentations was that worker participation both enhances the success of such programs and "also has beneficial effects of its own."⁴⁶ And a review of forty-seven studies that quantified the extent to which participation in decision-making affected productivity or job satisfaction found a positive effect on both, regardless of the kind of work people did. The effect was stronger in real-world research than in laboratory simulation studies.⁴⁷

This is not to say that every participative management program ever attempted has been successful. But where such plans have failed, it has typically been because there wasn't *enough* participation: too few employees were included, the program didn't last long enough to do any good, the decisions workers were permitted to make were relatively inconsequential, or the recommendations made by employees were essentially ignored by upper management.⁴⁸

Such limitations on employee participation programs may well be the rule rather than the exception in U.S. corporations. One large survey found that such systems were in place at about half of the organizations polled, but the median proportion of employees actually involved in these programs was less than 15 percent. Even if they were not formally excluded, most workers stayed away because they were "skeptical of the real importance of the program to the organization."⁴⁹

Is such skepticism justified? William Foote Whyte recalls the days when it first became fashionable to talk of humanizing the workplace. Quite a few managers were

willing to listen to information and ideas that might give them some new gimmicks. The question that they frequently asked revealed the nature of their interest: "How can we make the workers *feel* that they are participating?" We sought to explain that, in the long run, workers would not *feel* that they were participating unless they had some real impact upon decisions important to management as well as to workers. This generally ended the conversations.⁵⁰

Trying to create a subjective sense of control, or to avoid the appearance of manipulation, amounts to an effort to deceive, not to make real change of the kind that helps people become excited about their jobs. Besides being unethical, it ultimately doesn't work: people figure out pretty quickly when they are being manipulated.⁵¹

Even managers who are sincere about providing genuine choice to employees may handicap such programs by hanging on to the premises and practices of behaviorism. This residual commitment manifests itself in two ways: offering employees the chance to make decisions as a reward for doing something else, and offering some other inducement for taking part in a participative management program.⁵² Until the theory of motivation advances, the new management techniques cannot take hold.

Taking choice seriously also requires us to question the hierarchical nature of organizations. "So-called participative programs that merely make employees feel good but don't actually change the power relationships in the workplace probably have not actually increased the amount of the employees' responsibility."⁵³ To put this another way, giving people responsibility for, and control of, their own work is tantamount to introducing democracy to the workplace, and democracy in any arena is profoundly threatening to those who exert undemocratic control.⁵⁴ To this extent, it makes perfect sense that executives would typically implement participative management programs in a halfhearted, temporary, or partial fashion, if at all.

Americans love to talk about democracy. Even in the economic realm, where it is conspicuously absent, few repudiate the concept explicitly. Instead, the preferred justification for depriving people of control over their work is to argue (without evidence) that an organization cannot be run efficiently without top-down management — or to claim that most workers don't really want to make decisions. The latter is sometimes said to be the reason that participative management plans often fail: the majority of employees would rather take orders.⁵⁵

Show me an employee who has to do what she is told, who has learned to distrust smiling assurances that the boss's door is always open for someone with a suggestion or complaint, whose intrinsic motivation has evaporated in the face of a regimen of rewards and punishments, and I will show you an employee who may well shrug off an invitation to participate in a brand-new, memo-driven Worker Involvement Program. To say that such workers are uninterested in having a say over what they do all day is, to put it gently, a contrived conclusion. When management earns their trust, when it provides the time and resources necessary to make informed decisions, they are generally only too happy to take steps to manage themselves and begin to take control of their lives.

To talk about people taking control of their lives, though, raises larger questions about our ultimate goals. Are we principally con-

Thank God It's Monday / 197

cerned to increase the return on investment for the owners of a company or to provide a better quality of life, including meaningful tasks, a sense of empowerment, and healthy, supportive relationships, for everyone who works there? Obviously the latter goals are consistent with — indeed, are powerful contributors to — better performance. But at some point we may have to decide what matters most. Any number of managers and consultants have made it clear that, in their view, the psychological well-being and motivation of the vast majority of people who go to work in the morning are important only insofar as they contribute to higher productivity for the organization.⁵⁶ Most research on "worker satisfaction," for example, is conducted only because of, and only in terms of, its status as a contributor to performance.

Such questions, of course, invite a fresh examination not only of the practices at some companies but of the foundations on which our economic system rests. The man who reacted to a criticism of incentive plans by blurring out "Well, isn't that communism?" undoubtedly sensed that something deeper than merit pay is at issue here. In the United States, to associate something with communism or socialism is generally just a way of discrediting it; the terms are epithets with emotional resonance rather than references to alternative systems. Nevertheless, to open an investigation into the practices associated with behaviorism is to find ourselves grappling with the much broader issue of democracy. And if we are committed to the latter, we may find ourselves calling into question our most fundamental (and least examined) institutions.

⁵⁴ I would include in this category the relatively daring thinkers who urge managers to abolish incentive plans, stop thinking about market share, and emphasize teamwork, but whose objective is simply to improve customer satisfaction and, ultimately, profits. Such reformers call to mind the sports coaches and consultants who urge athletes to focus on excellence rather than victory — in order to win.

10. THANK GOD IT'S MONDAY

1. McGregor, 1966, p. 208. On this point, see also Levinson, 1973, p. 19.
2. See McGregor, 1960, p. 41; 1966, p. 204.
3. In a broader sense, virtually all paid work might be thought of as contingent in that the worker is paid for doing something. But there is an important difference between what Robert Lane calls "*molar contingency*, as in earning a living, and *molecular contingency*, as in working for pay. . . . A person required to work for a living has many choices of just how to go about it; a person required to turn out so many units of an identical product or rewarded by tokens for a specified behavior has no discretionary left" (1991, pp. 360-61). Sales commissions, piece work, and bonuses are salient rewards, intended to function as motivators on a daily basis, and are therefore not really comparable to the concept of work per se.
4. In a very large survey of American organizations, "not one respondent reported that gain sharing has a negative impact on performance" (O'Dell, 1987, p. 13).
5. "Denning would pay every employee — right up through the chief executive — a straight salary or wages. Those in the same job would be paid roughly the same; some differences would be created by seniority, since everyone would get annual raises. Those raises would be uniform, not based on merit. Such a system, he argues, would encourage teamwork rather than encourage superstars. The one acceptable bonus plan to Denning is profit-sharing. But every employee would get an equal share. The chief executive getting the same bonus as a factory worker? 'Well, why not? Certainly,' says Denning, looking astonished by the question" (Linden, 1991, p. 211).
6. See p. 312n21.
7. "Companies as diverse as the General Motors Corporation and Eastman Kodak are . . . gradually being won over to the notion that rewarding a handful of 'winners' and holding them up as the keys to corporate innovation and success brands the majority of employees as losers, hurting morale and cooperation. . . . [Some divisions of GM have] tied compensation not to annual appraisals, but to a 'maturity curve' that consider[s] an individual's seniority, level of expertise and the overall market for his or her services" (Gabor, 1992, pp. F1, F6).
8. Halachmi and Holzer, 1987, p. 87. One useful diagnostic question, Lane suggests, is "For whose use is the feedback on performance desired? If for the performer, self-determination is protected. . . . If for a paymaster . . . control passes to others" (1991, p. 387).
9. The latter point is made by Haller and Whitaker, 1990, p. 133.
10. While performance appraisals sometimes use fear to motivate employees, one writer points out that abolishing them will not automatically improve things; the evaluation process may just be a symptom of a more general reliance on fear in the organization (see Gabor, 1990, p. 124).
11. "In some companies, the environment of attitude and practice is such that the individual who is not promotable is considered to be a failure. It is said of him that he lacks potential, or that he has reached his ceiling. Not only is this attitude in itself punishing, but the rewards for further growth — salary, status, recognition, etc. — are lacking [the formal machinery cannot encompass such exceptions]. This, despite the probability that he could, if adequate rewards were available, continue to grow and to increase his contribution to the organization at his present level. Can the individual

- who for personal reasons does not want to climb higher on the organizational ladder, but instead wishes to make his contribution to the enterprise an outstanding one at his present level, remain there without being punished in a variety of subtle ways for having made this choice?" (McGregor, 1960, p. 196; see also Scholtes, 1990, p. 48).
12. Bachrach et al., 1984, p. 25. See also Thomas Gordon's proposed alternative to the performance appraisal, which he calls a "periodic planning conference." His detailed description appears in Gordon, 1977, chap. 11.
 13. Scholtes, 1990, p. 46.
 14. Meyer et al., 1965/1989.
 15. Halachmi and Holzer, 1987, pp. 87, 89.
 16. Blinder, 1990, p. 13.
 17. This view, more or less, is the gist of Theory Y. In contrast to the assumption that people have to be bribed or coerced into doing anything, "Theory Y holds that 'the average human being does not inherently dislike work,' and that when people's basic needs are taken care of, they actively seek responsibility" (McGregor, 1960, pp. 47-48).
 18. See, in this connection, Tjosvold, 1986; Scholtes, 1988, esp. chaps. 6 and 7; Kohn, 1992a; much of the work of W. Edwards Deming; and many other sources.
 19. McGregor, 1960, pp. 228, 48.
 20. Michael Beer, quoted in Ehrenfeld, 1992, pp. 23, 22.
 21. Herzberg is quoted in Bosquet, 1973, p. 25.
 22. Herzberg, 1987, p. 30.
 23. Csikszentmihalyi, 1978, p. 215. Robert Lane warns that an exclusive concern with intrinsic work satisfaction might be described as "self-centered" (1991, p. 403).
 24. Herzberg, 1987, p. 87. Also see Levinson, 1973, p. 13. In the area of psychology concerned with motivation, an entire subspecialty has grown up around the idea that human beings have a basic need to feel competent.
 25. Hackman and Oldham, 1980, p. 71.
 26. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-68, 71-82; the quotations appear on pp. 66, 76-77. The premise here is that management *wants* to make work interesting, and it may well be argued that this is not always true. "At present, however, whether work is enjoyable or not ranks quite low among the concerns of those who have the power to influence the nature of a given job" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 154). In what may be a related point, two social scientists contend that those with power may themselves lack intrinsic motivation: "The vast majority of workers in higher levels of the hierarchy of production are by no means autonomous, self-actualizing, and creatively self-directed. Rather, they are probably supersocialized so as to internalize authority and act without direct and continuous supervision to implement goals and objectives relatively alienated from their own personal needs" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 145).
 27. Sansone, 1992; the quotation appears on p. 379. She offers several concrete examples: first, an inspector in a potato chip factory might try to "discover meaningful shapes — such as the image of Elvis Presley — in the nonuniform chips," and try to build "a collection of celebrated chips"; second, people doing tasks that don't require their full attention could use the opportunity to listen to music or try to beat their previous speed record (pp. 380, 389).
 28. Perry, 1978; the quotations appear on pp. 111, 119.

29. For a lucid essay on this point and, more generally, on the self-defeating, never-ending quest for more, see Wachtel, 1983.
30. For an interesting discussion of how this syndrome describes workers in the United States and the (former) Soviet Union for the same reason — that is, the inability to make decisions — see Naylor, 1990. The effects of being controlled are predictable and pervasive. For example, not long ago the top management of a big-city post office, pointing to problems with several employees, sharply curtailed the capacity of all workers to make decisions for themselves; precise job assignments were emphasized, and enforcement was tightened. The reaction on the part of the employees was to stop doing all the things they had taken upon themselves to do in order to make the facility run more smoothly, such as catch mistakes and solve problems they happened to notice, help out an inexperienced worker who was having trouble sorting mail, and so forth. Their attitude was, "If you're going to monitor and control us, we're going to do exactly what we're required to do and nothing else" (personal communication, 1990).
31. This was the finding of a major study of U.S. and Swedish workers in a range of occupations (Karasek et al., 1988; the quotations appear on pp. 915, 910). "Type A" refers to people who are impatient, competitive, and hostile.
32. Amabile, 1988; the quotation appears on p. 147. The research here consisted of surveying research and development scientists as well as people in the marketing, development, and sales departments of large organizations. When they were asked to relate an event from their work experience that exemplified high creativity, the most common single characteristic of that event was freedom. When asked to relate an instance of low creativity, the most common single factor was lack of freedom. Performance on less creative tasks in laboratory experiments is also enhanced as a rule when subjects believe they have some choice about which tasks they will work on (see a review of some of this research in Perlmutter and Mounty, 1977).
33. Scholtes, 1988, p. 1:21.
34. For example, whereas "absenteeism of 10 percent or more is not unusual in United States auto plants," the Ambrake Corporation, where workers are given more discretion about how they do their jobs (and where there are no time clocks), "enjoys an absentee rate of less than five-tenths of 1 percent" (Levine, 1992, p. D8).
35. See Kanter, 1977, pp. 189-90.
36. Hackman and Oldham, 1980, p. 138-39.
37. On this point, see Deci and Ryan, 1985, esp. p. 308.
38. McGregor, 1960, p. 103.
39. Companies with no layoff policies do everything possible to avoid throwing people out of work. They freeze hiring, transfer workers within the organization, offer attractive retirement packages to senior employees, and consider such options as leaves of absence and job sharing. More to the point, they work with employees to decide among these options (see Levine and Tyson, 1990, pp. 215, 226; Gabour, 1992, p. F6).
40. "Contrast the situation in which a subordinate is evaluating his own performance relative to specific targets which he set a few months ago with the situation in which he is listening to his superior evaluate his performance against the superior's standards and objectives. In the latter case, the stage is set for rationalization, defensiveness, inability to understand, reactions

- that the superior is being unfair or arbitrary. These are not conditions conducive to effective motivation" (McGregor, 1960, p. 87).
41. "Any effort to redesign work in a technology that permits little employee discretion is probably doomed to failure from the outset" (Hackman and Oldham, 1980, p. 122).
42. "Breakdowns occur because the new pattern of cooperative activity at the top level has not been accompanied by the development of a more participatory style of managerial leadership" (Whyte, 1983, p. 404).
43. For descriptions of various approaches to participative management, the rationales offered in its behalf, and a list of the characteristics that maximize the probability of success, see Mangulies and Black, 1987; Levine and Tyson, 1990, esp. pp. 205-14.
44. Five successful, if somewhat dated, examples can be found in Bosquet, 1973, pp. 25-26. A more recent and compelling case study involving a telephone equipment manufacturer called Tellabs appears in Holusha, 1991. Still more illustrations have been collected in Simmons and Mares, 1985. Finally, any number of organizations currently working toward Total Quality Management are, in effect, putting into place a version of participative management.
45. See Levine and Tyson, 1990, pp. 222-35 for a recent description of participative management in Japanese and Swedish companies. William Foote Whyte, describing W. Edwards Deming's mission to bring statistical methods of quality control to Japan in the early 1950s, comments that "Deming thought he was teaching methods to be used by engineers and other professionals in management. The Japanese apparently reasoned that, if these methods were good for management, they should also be good for workers. This represented a quantum jump from the system Deming presented to them and enabled them to involve workers in participation in decision making to a far greater extent than has occurred in the U.S., even though we originated some of the basic ideas" (Whyte, 1983, p. 403).
46. Blinder, 1990, p. 13. See, for example, the contribution to this symposium by Levine and Tyson, 1990, esp. pp. 183-204.
47. Miller and Monge, 1986. One interesting set of studies conducted with British companies found a marked and sustained improvement in performance (using various measures) when people who did a range of jobs were given more responsibility, authority, and autonomy (Paul et al., 1969). Still other research suggests that workplace participation may lead employees to become more politically active; involvement in decision-making on the job may be an antidote to apathy in other arenas, which in turn raises the possibility that undemocratic workplaces may foster such apathy (Elden, 1981).
48. On this point, see Melcher, 1976; Levine and Tyson, 1990; Deci, 1992. In particular, Quality Circles (Levine and Tyson, 1990, p. 197) and Management by Objectives (Blinder, 1977, p. 388) have been faulted for not going far enough toward enabling substantive participation — and even, in the latter case, for amounting to "systems of phony participation."
49. O'Dell, 1987, pp. 26-27; the quotation appears on p. 27. From another source: "Countless examples exist in which employees have been encouraged to solve company problems only to discover that management is not at all committed to taking their ideas seriously" (Loden, 1985, p. 130).
50. Whyte, 1983, pp. 396-97. Exactly the same point is made by McGregor (1960, p. 125) and Herzberg (1968, p. 56).

51. In a comic strip that appeared in 1991 ("Dilbert," by Scott Adams), a worker asks his boss, "What did you mean when you said all employees are empowered? Does that mean I can control my own budget, make decisions without twelve levels of approval, and take calculated risks on my own?" Replies the boss, "No, it's just a way to blame employees for not doing the things we tell them not to do." Looking chastened, the employee muses, "No wonder you needed a new word."
52. In the survey cited earlier, 29 percent of the respondents actually explained the disappointing failure of employees to play an active role in involvement programs on the grounds that they were not rewarded for doing so (O'Dell, 1987, p. 27).
53. Levering, 1988, p. 208.
54. This point has been made by Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 129; Bosquet, 1973, pp. 26-27. More troubling is the argument offered by some critics to the effect that the very programs recommended for enhancing worker participation may serve to legitimate and perpetuate systems of control by making them more palatable. "Pseudo-democracy . . . is currently pitched under such labels as 'employee involvement,' 'team production,' and 'jointness.' These programs have little in common with the autonomous expression of workers' hopes and aspirations. They are as much a product of management power and a manipulative ideology as the Communist unions of the Brezhnev era," one historian remarks (Lichtenstein, 1992). The "human relations" school of management and the reforms it engendered have also been criticized for "encouraging workers to identify with corporate goals" and serving to "reinforce managerial authority and confine the subordinate's role to that of highly motivated obedience and greater productivity" (Gillespie, 1991, pp. 268, 270). Such systems, along with the work of people like McGregor and Herzberg, may have the effect of deflecting attention from "the basic economic and political structure of the organizations in which individuals work"; indeed, they are sometimes recommended explicitly "as *not* changing management's authority in any way" (Nord, 1974, pp. 558-59).
55. For example, one organizational theorist, claiming that people with a "low need for independence react positively where little participation is used," comments "a nonparticipative approach would be acceptable and contribute to positive behavioral responses" (Melcher, 1976, p. 20).

11. HOOKED ON LEARNING

1. If employers help workers to acquire skills, this is generally intended as a way to build an effective organization; it isn't a goal in its own right. By contrast, helping students to acquire skills, to become good learners and good people, is the very point of school. Another difference emerges when we consider our response to a child who causes problems for others and compare that to our attitude toward an adult worker who does the same. Most concretely, the two arenas diverge in that money and grades are not analogous: people need to earn money to survive, while grades are unnecessary. The general point about differences between workplace and classroom will strike most readers as glaringly obvious, but some people working to import the methods of the Total Quality Management movement to the schools may not have considered the importance of these differences.

- Helping students become self-directed learners is fundamentally dissimilar to pleasing customers. Market models and metaphors simply do not belong in an educational context; when they are imposed by force, it is at the price of undermining the purposes of schooling (see Kohn, in press).
2. Wlodkowski is quoted in Kurner, 1990.
3. Adelman and Taylor, 1983, p. 385.
4. Silberman, 1970, p. 138.
5. "Business can . . . stop emphasizing the GPA [grade point average] during recruiting; if the school has certified that the student has graduated, such information should be enough. Business leaders must consider the fact that there is slight relationship between grades and postgraduation achievements in industry" (Milton et al., 1986, pp. 147-48). On the other hand, comments such as Albert Shanker think grades should receive even more emphasis than they do at present; businesses "should hire entry-level workers on the basis of their high-school transcripts and recommendations from teachers, and they should start the better graduates at higher salaries," he declares (1990, p. 21).
6. See the discussion, and research cited, in Kirshenbaum et al., 1971, pp. 55-57, 195-97.
7. Dressel, 1957, p. 6. I am indebted to David Langford for calling this quotation to my attention.
8. Milton et al., 1986, p. 224.
9. By the time children reach sixth grade, according to one study, grades are the criterion they cite most often for judging their own ability (Blumenthal et al., 1986, p. 98). Other research suggests that grades continue to play a more prominent role in children's understanding of competence as they get older (Sansone and Morgan, 1992, p. 258). Ruth Butler argues that it is when children come to see ability "as a stable trait best assessed by comparison with others" — usually at about age nine or ten — that they are most susceptible to the destructive effects of grades (1988, p. 3; see also R. Butler, 1989).
10. See Butler, 1988, esp. p. 11.
11. Tests, particularly the standardized variety, are sometimes criticized on the grounds that assessing competence is not the same thing as contributing to competence. "You don't fatten a steer by weighing it" is one rustic expression to get across the idea that evaluating students is different from teaching them. In fact, this criticism understates the problem. The more emphasis is placed on testing students, the more teaching becomes a preparation for these tests, which means that potentially innovative lessons must be set aside in order that children can be coached to fill in the right bubbles with their no. 2 pencils. Tests, in short, are not irrelevant to instruction; as Heisenberg discovered in another context, measuring affects what is being measured — in this case, for the worse. Notice how, once again, most criticisms of this practice fail to get at the root of the problem. If the question is how we assess children, our efforts will be restricted to devising more meaningful kinds of evaluation (which would I hasten to add, represent an improvement over the current standardized tests). But the more important question is *why* we want to assess children. Even the most cleverly designed assessment mechanism, the deepest and richest measure imaginable of what children know, is not a boon to learning if its purpose is to sort students or reward them.