

# MOTIVATING THE KNOWLEDGE WORKER

 **David E. Frick**

Commonly accepted economic theory suggests that workers are rational actors and make decisions that will maximize expected outcomes. As such, managers should be able to influence behaviors to meet business goals by manipulating the expectations of outcomes. Conversely, social science practitioners suggest that workers often make decisions that are irrational. Knowledge workers are a growing sector of the workforce and are the backbone for entire federal agencies. The acquisition community falls within this category. Identifying factors that influence the performance of knowledge workers may be critical to maintaining high levels of organizational performance. This research focused on identifying the factors that encourage knowledge workers to maintain high levels of performance.

**Keywords:** *Motivation, Knowledge Worker, Performance, Human Capital, Merit Systems Protection Board*

# Positive & Negative MOTIVATING FACTORS



“THERE IS ONE RIGHT WAY TO MANAGE PEOPLE—OR AT LEAST THERE SHOULD BE.”

—PETER F. DRUCKER

Conventional wisdom and commonly accepted economic theory suggest that workers are rational actors and make decisions that will maximize expected outcomes—maximize expected benefits or minimize expected harm. As such, managers should be able to influence behaviors to meet business goals by manipulating the expectations of outcomes. Etzioni (1971) argues that workers find this manipulation of behavior via incentives *alienating* and *dehumanizing*. Conversely, social science practitioners suggest that workers often make decisions that are irrational (from an economic perspective) and are based on cognitive biases (Santaniello, 2008). These beliefs have been formed over the last 100 years in an environment that has been dominated by agricultural, manufacturing, and industrial workers.

Knowledge workers are a growing sector of the workforce (Haag, Cummings, & Phillips, 2008). They are individuals valued for their ability to gather, analyze, interpret, and synthesize information within specific subject areas to advance the overall understanding of those areas and allow organizations to make better decisions. The knowledge worker is the backbone of many professions. Within the federal government, entire agencies are comprised mainly of knowledge workers. The members of the acquisition community principally fall within this definition.

Creating environments to encourage high performance among knowledge workers is an area long neglected by researchers. To date, no published research exists on knowledge workers in the federal government. Even the term knowledge worker was not defined until 1999 (Drucker, 1999). As a consequence of this lack of evidence, the executive branch has been forced into making strategic human capital decisions based upon theory and experiences that may not apply to the knowledge worker.

Collins (2001) looked at high-performing companies to see if he could find patterns within the cultures of the respective workforces. His methodology was questionable and his conclusions were not particularly useful, but he did make two statements that are quite provocative: “...expending energy trying to motivate people is largely a waste of time” (p. 74) and “You cannot manufacture passion or ‘motivate’ people to feel passionate. You can only *discover* what ignites your passion and the passion of those around you” (p. 109).

Public Service Motivation Theory (Crewson, 1997; Houston, 2000; Perry, 1996; Porter & Perry, 1982; Perry & Wise, 1990) suggests that individuals who self-select into government service are

motivated by a set of factors (self-sacrifice, desire to serve the public, desire to serve a higher power) that is more intrinsically centered than the set of factors that motivates private sector workers. Small contingency-based rewards, such as the insubstantial pay increases common in government pay-for-performance systems, tend to crowd out these intrinsic factors.

Public administration literature also makes a distinction between employee motives and work motivation. Motives are the rewards that workers would like to receive for their jobs, while work motivation is defined as the drive workers have to perform their jobs well within the rewards offered by the government and private sectors. Workers self-select into either the public or private sector based on whether the incentive structure is aligned with their individual values and motives (Rainey, 1982).

A significant weakness in the civil service is the inability, in practice, of managers to weed out inferior performers. In 2008, the federal government only fired 11,165 employees (0.57 percent of the workforce) (Losey, 2009). Compare this with the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) estimate that 3.7 percent of the federal workforce are poor performers (Office of Personnel Management [OPM], 1999, p. 1). For business, especially those in “employment at will” states, the process of eliminating substandard performers is significantly less arduous than in the civil service. The danger of frivolous claims of discrimination always remains, but on balance, business has a flexibility that the government does not have...in practice. Yes, the civil service rules do allow for removing nonperformers, but the process is labor-intensive for supervisors, extremely drawn out, and subject to a number of administrative reviews that tend to encourage supervisors to use an alternate method for eliminating inferior performers—in other words, “passing the trash” (Shuger, 1999).

Workforce mobility in the civil service is rooted in the “Peter Principle”—primarily centered on upward mobility. The way to get promoted is to find a job vacancy at a higher grade and compete against other applicants. In most hiring processes, performance evaluations are a consideration in the hiring decision. Some low-performing supervisors have been known to artificially inflate the performance evaluations of inferior supporters with the goal of passing the trash to someone else (Shuger, 1999; Peter & Hull, 1969). Yes, this is unfortunate and not in the best interest of the public good, but it happens at all levels.

Additionally, the civil service exhibits a characteristic that many workers find invaluable, especially Baby Boomers and, to a lesser extent, “Gen X’ers”—job security (Alsop, 2008). Job security has a value (Crewson, 1997; Houston, 2000). It is reasonable to concede

to the employer, the taxpayer in the case of civil service, something of equal benefit for the benefit of job security. Historically, that has been a pay structure that has, arguably, lagged behind the free market. Job security is the tradeoff for a lagging pay policy. Pay for performance appears to be a technique to solve the “lagging pay” issue that does not have an equitable tradeoff for the employer (the people of the United States).

## Purpose of the Study

The author designed a study to gather the opinions of a group of independently identified, high-performing federal civilian employees from multiple agencies to develop a rank-ordered list of factors that may be most effective in establishing an environment that motivates high-performing knowledge workers to maintain high levels of performance. All participants in this survey appear to meet the definition of knowledge worker.

## Theoretical Framework

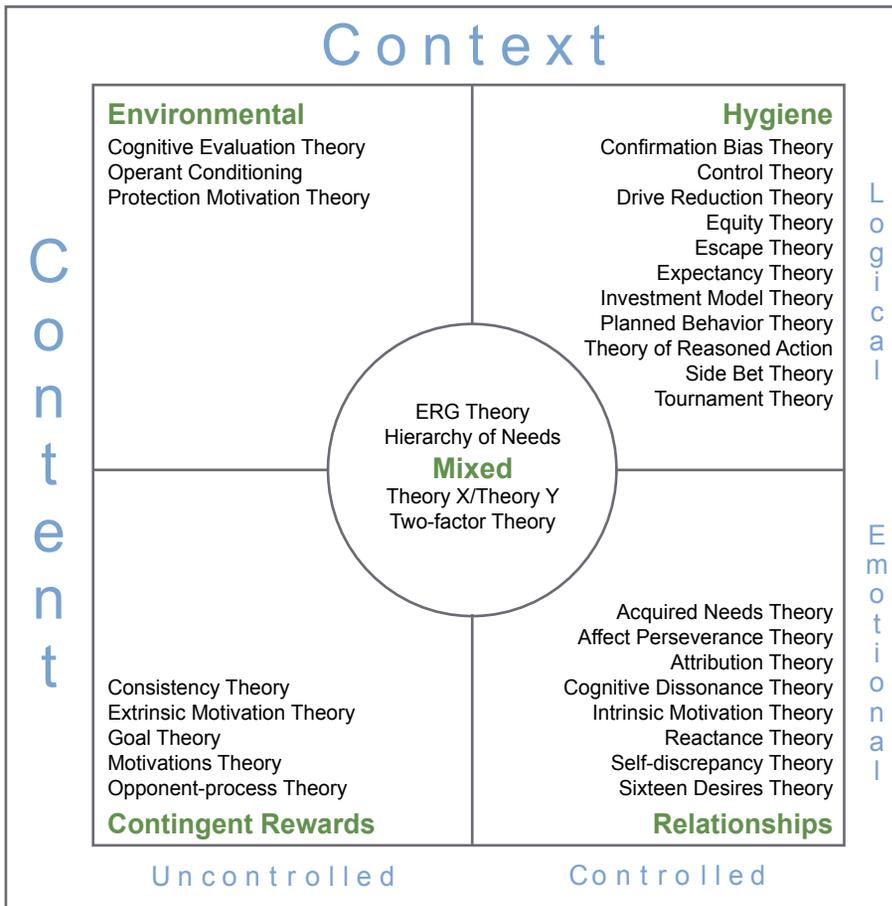
No universally accepted model of motivation is inherent to a business environment. To facilitate a structured approach to the analysis of the various theories of motivation and the data collected from this effort, the author developed a two-dimensional model of the factors that motivate workers (Table 1).

**TABLE 1. FRAMEWORK AXES**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>Logical</i>	Associated with a process either inductive or deductive. Elements tend to be more tangible than intangible. Cognitive.
<i>Emotional</i>	Associated with responses that are based upon intuition, prior learning, perceptions, and desires.
<i>Controlled</i>	Elements, decisions, or expectations can be formed by the individual. The world tends to be defined by internal filters.
<i>Uncontrolled</i>	Elements, influences, conditions, and constraints are established by either the environment or an outside actor. The world tends to be defined by external filters.

The *horizontal axis* represents the universe from a contextual viewpoint. The *vertical axis* takes the content viewpoint. Context, from the viewpoint of the worker, can be either controllable or uncontrollable. Content is either logical (tangible-cognitive) or emotional (intangible-instinctual). The four quadrants represent environmental and hygiene factors, contingent rewards, and relationships. The central area is reserved for those theories or factors that have mixed characteristics or do not clearly fit into a quadrant (Figure).

**FIGURE. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**



### Significance of the Study

As the U.S. economy and those government agencies that support the nation’s institutions become more dependent upon knowledge workers, the need to fully understand those conditions

that encourage continued high performance among knowledge workers becomes more important.

This research identified a set of conditions that are effective in cultivating a state of positive motivation among knowledge workers of the federal workforce. Identifying those factors that this one specific subset of the workforce believes are most motivating may provide strategic leaders with the empirical information needed to make more effective decisions. Likewise, allowing managers to more effectively commit organizational resources will further the goal of improving overall performance of the entire workforce.

## Method—Highlights

The target population was the 2009 Fellowship of the Council for Excellence in Government (CEG) of the Partnership for Public Service. This population, which represented a high-performing subset of the federal workforce, was selected for convenience. A precise definition of, and contact information for, the entire population was available to the author.

There were 132 federal workers in the population. The sample was self-selected. All subjects were volunteers. Sixty-four members of the cohort agreed to participate in the study. The sample suffered from self-selection bias.

A survey instrument was created for this study. A wide range of structured, demographic information was collected. Opinion questions were open-ended, but included a forced distribution system. A number of uncommon demographic categories were included in the hope of serendipitous findings and to ascertain whether the sample was similar to the entire federal workforce or the general population.

The author was able to infer that the subjects were high-performing by their participation in the highly competitive CEG program. The cost to the agencies to participate was \$10,000 per participant. Replicating this study by assembling a similar group comprised only of high-performing workers in any other environment would prove difficult.

While this study may show clear preferences of the workforce, it was not able to show a causal relationship between identified factors and workforce performance.

Questions self-report preferences; therefore, problems of self-report bias need to be taken into account, as responses may not be completely accurate (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). Additionally, appropriate group norms in this research area to interpret measures were not available.

In-depth validity and reliability studies of the survey instruments were not conducted.

The sample used in this study was relatively small and admittedly atypical of the entire federal workforce. Generalization to all federal knowledge workers or the acquisition workforce, in particular, was not possible.

## Knowledge Worker

Knowledge workers are generally professionals such as teachers, lawyers, architects, physicians, nurses, engineers, and scientists. As businesses increase their dependence on information technology, the number of fields in which knowledge workers must operate has expanded dramatically.

The term was first coined by Peter Drucker in 1959, and later refined in 1999, as one who works primarily with information or one who develops and uses knowledge in the workplace (Drucker, 1973, 1999). Some tasks that are performed by the acquisition community do not fall within the definition of knowledge work; however, those aspects that involve making judgments and trade-off decisions clearly do.

Drucker (2001) added to the definition of knowledge workers by describing their fundamental tasks.

To be sure, the fundamental task of management remains the same: to make people capable of joint performance through common goals, common values, the right structure, and the training and development they need to perform and to respond to change. But the very meaning of this task has changed, if only because the performance of management has converted the workforce from one composed largely of unskilled laborers to one of highly educated knowledge workers. (p. 4)

Even if employed full-time by the organization, fewer and fewer people are 'subordinates'—even in fairly low-level jobs. Increasingly they are 'knowledge workers.' And knowledge workers are not subordinates; they are 'associates.' For, once beyond the apprentice stage, knowledge workers must know more about their job than their boss does—or else they are no good at all. In fact, that they know more about their job than anybody else in the organization is part of the definition of knowledge workers. (p. 78)

## Literature

How do the best managers in the world build the foundation for a strong, high-performing workplace? No clear answer can be found. In 1975, 200 books were published on the topic of management and leadership. By 1997, that number had tripled (Buckingham & Coffman, p. 53). A quick search today of the website *Amazon.com* with the keywords “management and leadership” yields over 350,000 results.

With respect to people, Reiss (2000) suggests that there are 16 distinct basic desires that “make our lives meaningful.” He claims that everyone displays each of these desires either strongly, moderately, or weakly. If his hypothesis is valid, then there are a possible 43,046,721 distinct possible personality types, while Myers and Briggs claim 16 distinct personality types (Myers & Myers, 1995).

A little closer to home, my own mother unhesitatingly classified workers into two distinct personality preferences. “There are two kinds of people—those who do the work and those who take the credit,” she would often say. She did not realize she was quoting Indira Gandhi, who went on to add, “Try to be in the first group; there is less competition there.”

But whether there are 2, 16, or 43 million different types of people, finding a single model to portray how all people are motivated has proven to be extremely difficult.

## Theories of Motivation

Business is constantly looking for *the* best practice and often engages an expert to demonstrate the *one best way*. Drucker (2001) often spoke of the futility of management practitioners in finding the one right theory or the one right way to manage, and the belief that one exists.

*Basic assumptions about reality* are the *paradigms* of a social science such as management. They are usually held subconsciously by the scholars, the writers, the teachers, the practitioners in the field, and are incorporated into the discipline by their various formulations. Thus, those assumptions by this select group of people largely determine what the discipline assumes to be *reality*. (p. 69)

These assumptions underlie practically every book or paper on the management of people.

Regrettably, in motivating workers, *there is no best practice*; there is no *Grand Theory on Motivation*; there is no commonly accepted model of motivation.

At least 34 principal theories of motivation have some application to business. Most are contradictory. The reason is simple... people are complex animals. Business practitioners have long searched for the *one right* business model, the *one right* organizational structure, the *one right* management style, and the *one right* way to treat employees (Drucker, 2001). So far that search has been in vain.



One way to look at these theories is to classify them by motivating factors from the perspective of the worker. These factors represent the worker's preference, e.g., for a given worker, contingent rewards might be more effective in achieving desired behaviors than personal relationships. The figure represents the author's interpretation of each of these theories with respect to the framework.

An examination of all of these theories is well beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, the following discussion focuses on motivational theorists of some note.

### Theorists in the Business Environment

The theories of Maslow, McGregor, and to a lesser extent, Herzberg, are the most commonly accepted in business literature. At lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, such as physiological needs, money is a motivator; however, it tends to have a motivating effect on employees that lasts only for a short period. At higher lev-

els of the hierarchy, praise, respect, recognition, empowerment, and a sense of belonging are far more powerful motivators than money.

McGregor (1960) asserted that management must choose between two and only two different ways of managing people—“Theory X” and “Theory Y”—and then asserted that Theory Y is the only sound one. Drucker (2001, p. 77) points out a few years later that Maslow suggested in his *Eupsychian Management* (1965), republished as *Maslow on Management* (1998), that McGregor was wrong. He showed conclusively that “different people have to be managed differently.”

Herzberg differentiated hygiene factors from motivators in the *length of time* the particular factor continues to drive behaviors. Salary (base pay) has a short motivational time span. “An employee might receive a pay raise today, and 30 days later begin to question when the next raise will be forthcoming. Meanwhile, the current salary has little influence on...willingness to improve performance” (Henderson, 2002, p. 391).

Maslow has money at the lowest level of the hierarchy and shows other needs are better motivators to employees. McGregor places money in his Theory X category and considers it as a poor motivator. Praise and recognition are placed in the Theory Y category and are considered stronger motivators than money. Likewise, McClelland (1987) noted that workers could not be motivated by the mere need for money—in fact, extrinsic motivation (e.g., money) could extinguish intrinsic motivation such as achievement motivation, though money could be used as an indicator of success for various motives, e.g., keeping score.

In *The Peter Principle* (Peter & Hull, 1969), we were warned that if managers follow the path of conventional wisdom without question, they tend to promote each person to his or her level of incompetence. It was true then, and it is true now.

Buckingham and Coffman (1999) note little or no change to this conventional wisdom.

Unfortunately, in the intervening years, we haven’t succeeded in changing very much. We still think that the most creative way to reward excellence in a role is to promote the person out of it. We still tie pay, perks, and titles to a rung on the ladder: the higher the rung, the greater the pay; the better the perks, the grander the title. Every signal we send tells the employee to look inward and upward. ‘Don’t stay in your current role for too long,’ we advise. ‘It looks bad on the resume. Keep pressing, pushing, and stretching to take that next step. It’s the only way to get ahead. It’s the only way to get respect.’ (p. 178)

## Public Service Motivation

“The theory of public service motivation (PSM) suggests public employees are more likely than private sector employees to hold pro-social values and seek opportunities to help others benefit society” (Wright, 2007, p. 5). The term seems to have been coined by Perry and Wise (1990, p. 368).

“The public administration literature argues that individuals employed by the government have a unique sense of public service that leads them to value intrinsic rewards more keenly than extrinsic rewards, although few studies have investigated the concept empirically” (Santaniello, 2008, p. 1).

According to Perry (1996, p. 6), PSM is defined as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations.” Attraction to policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice are all identified as key components of PSM as opposed to extrinsic motivations (specifically pay) that are central to many rational choice models of motivation and provide the basis for pay-for-performance structures. This theory contradicts the conventional wisdom of economic theory (Santaniello, 2008, p. 3).

Public administration literature makes a distinction between employee motives and work motivation. Motives are the rewards that individual employees would like to receive for their jobs, while work motivation is the drive employees have to perform their jobs well within the context of their organizations (Wright, 2007).

## Poor Performers in the Federal Government

The best estimate of the proportion of poor performers in the federal workforce is 3.7 percent. While no good benchmarks exist in the private or public sectors, such comparison is undoubtedly lower than conventional wisdom. Supposedly, the federal government has no serious performance problems (OPM, 1999, p. 1).

Nonetheless, the prevailing perception about public service employment is that poor performance is a big problem. Moreover, civil service employees are among the first to speak up about the situation. In questionnaire after questionnaire, civil service employees express disdain for a management team that they say cannot or will not remove from their midst coworkers who are not carrying their share of the load. In a 1997 report entitled *Adherence to the Merit Principles in the Workplace*, the MSPB reported that, among the 9,700 federal employees it surveyed, the issue of handling poor performance was the deepest area of concern. Nearly half of the respondents said that agencies had a major problem correcting

poor performance, and even more said the same thing about the firing of poor performers (OPM, 1999, p. 3).

As part of its Fiscal Year 1998 oversight program, the OPM examined the foundation for the suspicion that the government has too many poor performers. To do this, they identified a random sample of employees and interviewed their supervisors. For those employees identified as “poor performers,” the supervisors were asked what caused the employee’s poor performance, what was done to address the problem, and what had been achieved as a result. In a separate interview sample, OPM contacted supervisors who had successfully taken a formal action to deal with a poor performer, to obtain descriptions of their experiences, and to record the lessons they learned. Finally, OPM looked at the private sector and public sector for points of comparison. The implication is that these problems are less prevalent outside the federal government (OPM, 1999, p. 4).

To exacerbate this prevailing perception, surveys find that most federal workers do not believe that the best qualified people are the ones receiving promotions (MSPB, 2001, p. 7). Sometimes, the motivation to retain poor performers is rooted in the federal hiring process. The White House has noted that it can often take 18 months or longer to fire employees, thus requiring a major commitment of time and effort from managers (Edwards & DeHaven, 2002, p. 2).

Most managers try to work around bad employees or try to reassign them to other groups. OPM surveys consistently find that managers think that “procedures dealing with poor performance are too complicated, time consuming, or onerous; they do not get higher management support; and they perceive their decisions will be reversed or that they will be falsely accused of discrimination in their actions” (OPM, 1999, p. 1). Those fears are justified given that federal workers lodge discrimination complaints at 10 times the rate of nonfederal workers (OPM, 1999, pp. 3, 11).

Another problem is that poor performers often receive good performance reviews from negligent managers who do not want to rock the boat. There is an ingrained federal culture to score virtually all workers highly—the MSPB has found that just 1 percent of federal workers are rated below “fully successful” in annual reviews (MSPB, 1999, p. 12).

The various theories of motivation are too contradictory to suggest the “one right answer.” The search for the one or two best ways to manage people has been in vain. When you add human nature with its myriad cognitive biases to the mix, management action often leads to outcomes that have a net negative effect. The lack of empirical evidence to paint a clear picture of the emerging knowledge worker makes the challenges of picking the right solutions

even harder. Understandably, business and government leaders of today may make strategic decisions that, only in hindsight, prove to be ineffective.

## Results of the Study

The following tables reflect the positive (Table 2) and negative factors (Table 3) as reported by the sample. Common definitions are assumed for all terms, although respondents perhaps had differing understandings of these common terms, e.g., insufficient resources could mean budget shortfalls, personnel shortages, insufficient physical facilities, or a combination of all.

These results are consistent with similar studies that looked specifically at work compensation. Total work compensation has an influence on worker motivation, but it is not a significant factor affecting the behaviors that lead to measures of performance for knowledge

workers in the federal workforce. The factors that are most influential are intangible, emotion-based, and intrinsic. The top 5 positive factors—meaningful work, belief in mission, sense of public service, opportunity to advance, and relationship with coworkers—are all highly personal and defined by the individual (Table 2). Conversely, the five most influential negative factors—insufficient resources, the “bad manager,” a perception of a lack of support from managers, an unwillingness to deal with substandard performers, and the difficulty of the daily commute (Table 3)—are principally influenced, if not defined, by external actors.

**TABLE 2. POSITIVE FACTORS**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Top Positive Factors</b>
1	Meaningful work
2	Belief in mission
3	Public service
4	Opportunity to advance
5	Relationship with coworkers
6	Relationship with supervisor
7	Personal work ethic
8	Education benefits
9	Great people
10	Flexible workplace policy
11	Empowerment
12	Organizational values
13	Teamwork
14	Supportive management
14	Recognition by others
16	Total compensation
17	Equitable awards policy
18	Job security

**TABLE 3. NEGATIVE FACTORS**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Top Negative Factors</b>
1	Insufficient resources
2	Bad managers
3	Lack of management support
4	Unwillingness to deal with substandard performers
5	Difficult commute
6	Ineffective technology
7	Lack of planning
8	Lazy coworkers
9	Abusive supervisors
10	Lack of teamwork
11	Lack of promotion opportunities
12	Corruption in the workplace
13	Management resistance to change
14	Negative organizational culture

## Conclusions

This group of federal employees expressed a preference for intrinsic (internal) factors. This is consistent with PSM Theory. Conditions that have the greatest negative effect appear to be those in which the workers have no direct control, e.g., how managers deal with substandard performers, the quality of supervisors, and the sufficiency of resources.

## Implications

Regrettably, this study does not help Drucker's search for "one right way to manage people." As previously discussed, emotional-uncontrolled (contingent rewards) and mixed theories appear to be the most relevant. This was most surprising as these two sections encompass relatively few of the major theories. Even more interesting, was the section logical-controlled (hygiene). In the model, this section includes the greatest number of discrete theories, which appear to have the least relevance. This result was unexpected by the author, who expected factors consistent with Equity Theory to dominate. However, the expected key words, e.g., fairness, equality, justice, deserved, were scarce in the responses. This suggests that the subjects believe that either the current environment is equitable and does not influence their performance or that equitability is not a significant factor.

The results of this study also support the assertion that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-factor Theory, and McGregor's Theory X/Theory Y are highly relevant to this population and to business in general.

**Maslow.** Since employment satisfies physiological and safety needs, love/belonging (relationships with coworkers, relationship with supervisors), esteem (opportunity to advance, empowerment) and self-actualization (belief in mission, meaningful work) become more important.

**Herzberg.** The Two-factor Theory asserts that motivators and de-motivators are mutually exclusive sets of factors. This research supports this assertion. A weak argument can be made that some of the factors are not true opposites, but are strongly related, e.g., great people—lazy coworkers, relationship with supervisors—bad managers; however, further investigation would be needed to support this argument.

**McGregor.** These findings suggest that public sector knowledge workers are self-motivated and will perform at the highest possible level when barriers to performance are absent. This is consistent with the Theory Y assertion that employees will seek out and accept responsibility, exercise self-control and self-direction, and will work well given the right conditions.

### Implications for Practice

The author believes that strategic leaders should eschew the common approach of attempting to develop programs and policies to motivate the workforce, or at least any workforce similar to this population. Leaders cannot force motivation. There is no causal relationship. Leaders can mold an environment that allows workers to motivate themselves, but typical attempts to extrinsically motivate workers are counterproductive. The approach or philosophy of the leadership, as Sprenger (2007) suggested, should be to concentrate their time and resources on identifying and developing programs and policies that eliminate the negative aspects of workforce performance. There appears to be a greater return on investment for this approach.

### Implications for Leaders

The supervisor-subordinate relationship, as Buckingham and Coffman (1999) suggest, appears to be a critical—possibly the most critical—relationship in the workplace. A poor supervisor-subordinate relationship is the leading cause of employee attrition

(MSPB, 2010, p. 2). On the positive side, the “relationship with managers” ranked as the sixth most important; on the negative side, “bad managers” ranked second. While a few respondents were concerned with anonymity of answers, many more reportedly shared their responses with supervisors during annual appraisal feedback sessions. Supervisors should consider a similar discussion with all subordinates. The exchange of perceptions may improve the supervisor-subordinate relationship.

### Implications for Human Resources Organizations

If agencies insist upon individual performance evaluations—a position not supported by the author—agencies should consider implementing a 360-degree performance evaluation system instead of the traditional supervisor-only system. While a recent poll of federal workers by *Federal Times* (“How Should the Job Performance...,” 2010) indicates that only 19 percent of federal workers believe these evaluations to be effective (likely as a method to identify a “bad manager”), a large body of anecdotal evidence suggests that 360-degree feedback systems are effective in, at a minimum, bringing poor supervisory performance to the attention of senior management. The single viewpoint of a biased, inattentive, or English-challenged supervisor may, in some cases, paint a false picture of employee performance.

However, be aware that in industry, the general acceptance of 360-degree evaluations is diminishing. The common belief appears to be that these evaluations are useful, but very expensive; and the measured increases in performance and profitability cannot justify these costs. While federal agencies are cost-constrained, they are not constrained by the profit motive. Such 360-degree evaluations may be an appropriate cost of doing business, especially in organizations where the public perception of high performance is critical.

## Final Thoughts

The acquisition community is dominated by knowledge workers. These highly educated, high-skilled workers are self-managed and self-motivated. The traditional management approaches that appeared effective for the assembly-line workers of yesteryear are counterproductive when applied to the knowledge-based workforce. The monumental challenge for today’s leaders is to abandon the management practices of the last 50 years, which to some are counterintuitive and fraught with uncertainty, and to embrace a theory that is still emerging. Extrinsic-based attempts to “motivate the workforce,” despite conventional wisdom, are ineffective. Pay

for performance, bonuses, and even traditional performance evaluation systems, in the opinion of this author, are anachronisms.

When Thomas Paine said, “lead, follow, or get out of the way,” he did not have the acquisition community in mind, but his admonishment is appropriate for today’s leaders. The recipe for “doing more without more” is a simple one—one part solid, insightful leadership and two parts “getting out of the way.”

### Author Biography



**Dr. David E. Frick** is the senior advisor to the Defense Intelligence Agency’s acquisition executive. He has 35 years of federal service, 15 of which were in the acquisition community. A retired noncommissioned officer and first sergeant with over 21 years of active duty in the U.S. Army, Dr. Frick holds Level III Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act certification in program management, is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College, is a Project Management Professional, and holds a Doctorate of Business Administration from Girne American University.

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