

The motive-talent mystery

UNCOVER HIDDEN BLIND SPOTS AND ALIGN MOTIVE WITH TALENT.

WERNER BARKHUIZEN

(m) Managers and leaders quite often face the challenge of not being able to retain top talent in the organisation. Individual employee retention may be increased significantly if a meaningful match exists between their underlying motive, the organisational culture and the specific job competencies.

Significant differences between motive (what you want, need or enjoy) and talent (the behaviours you are effective at) are referred to as motive-talent splits. The ultimate goal of any manager or leader is to establish alignment between motive and talent thus creating flow - a state of optimal functioning and effectiveness. The performance of an individual can be significantly enhanced by ensuring an accurate match between motive, organisational culture and required job competencies.

When an individual has low motive and talent in a certain area and displays little interest, motivation or indeed talent to perform effectively, the individual is likely to be resigned to not demonstrate talent in these areas. Concomitantly, the individual is not likely to feel an internal sense

of drive to develop or perform effectively, thus exhibiting a low level of flow.

In contrast, when the job and organisational culture provide opportunity, the individual experiences 'flow', and takes real pleasure in their work knowing they are good at it. Consequently, they derive real satisfaction in performing their jobs well.

Individuals often recognise that they have little underlying motivation or predisposition, while also knowing that they have talent. Understandably, this can result in mixed feelings and lack of interest. For example, a project manager with an 'organising' competency says, "I can organise well, I worry about things at work and work out what needs to be done in what order. I try to treat it as an intellectual activity to maintain my interest. But it is a struggle and very occasionally I lapse and end up being reactive. In my personal life, I am happy to let other people do the organising."

The management consultant said the following about his 'engaging' competency: "I don't feel any great need to connect immediately with people, but people always say what a strong positive impression I make. To be honest there are times when I feel that people seem to act immediately like I was their best friend when I hardly know them. " Clearly in both instances, talent is higher than motive and the individual acknowledges the disposition dissonance.

When motive is higher than talent, the individual aspires to do more, and there is a need to be better and more effective in this specific area of competency. A policy analyst

commented: "People listen to me, but they never seem to adopt any of my suggestions. I try hard at getting people to see that I am right - I just never seem to get anywhere. It is important that people listen to what I've got to say, I've got some really good takes on things and I research what does and does not work in other organisations. It just doesn't seem to get me anywhere." This individual seeks development and wishes to improve performance in this specific area of competency.

Managers can improve retention through culture matching and identifying "best fit" environments based on a comprehensive understanding of individual employees' preferred culture. By surveying the prevailing organisational culture, mismatches can be spotted thereby optimising retention of top talent. Additionally, organisations can expand and target their executive coaching requirements by comparing what executives say they enjoy with what they say they are good at (motive-talent splits) and rapidly uncovering conflicts blocking growth.

It is the responsibility of managers and leaders to better understand motive and talent of their individual employees. They must be able to accurately predict, not only the performance of an individual, but also, crucial to sustained performance, those specific areas where an individual will be most motivated to succeed.

The capacity to measure motive and talent is clearly a powerful tool and has vital implications for attracting and retaining talent in the workplace while also linking talent and motive directly to competencies and job performance. [\(HRJ\)](#)