

The Elemental measure of intrinsic motivation: A guide for line managers

What is intrinsic motivation?

Motivating people at work most commonly involves offering rewards to get them to work harder, for example bonuses for good performance. However, extrinsic factors like these are only effective in the short-term, so most research on motivation focuses on intrinsic factors.

The Elemental questionnaire is a measure of intrinsic motivation which means what comes from within the individual or what you are driven to do. For example, it profiles the classic distinction between people who are motivated by a technical specialist role, building up their expertise in one particular area and advising others, and those who are motivated to be managers, organizing and implementing across a broad range of activities. It also reveals important differences in the way people like to operate, for example whether they're more concerned with getting things done or getting them right.

So in simple terms, the two halves of the questionnaire are about what you want to do and how you want to do it. This generates a detailed report on what makes that person tick which is used to find out what will give them 'the buzz' in work situations.

How is Elemental used and what are the benefits?

Research on employee engagement shows that it is closely associated with intrinsic motivation, and increasing levels of engagement can have significant long-term impact on job performance.

The most important driver of engagement for all employee groups is the 'meaningfulness' of the job, and this depends primarily on how well the job fits with the individual's motivation profile. Elemental is therefore used as a basis for two-way discussion between managers and their staff on how best to match what they want from the job with what the organization requires. The aim of the exercise is to ensure that employees feel as close as realistically possible to their ideal role and their line managers are equipped to make best use of them.

How does it work in practice?

The line manager's part in the process is to facilitate the two-way discussion on what the comments in the report represent in the context of the job.

The easiest way to do this is to ask the individual to highlight key phrases that strike a chord with them. For example, if they highlight the phrase "She will want to have clear targets and guidelines so that she knows what is required", this should lead to a discussion of how much structure there is in the job at present and what can be done to add more.

The good news is that respondents are generally very willing and able to explain their interpretation of the profile. However, for those who are more reserved, a useful device is to ask them about their options and ideals for the future, specifically, to describe three options they would consider and what their ideal role would be.

The last section of the report is the Job Matching page, and this warrants particular attention in the two-way discussion. In the job matching chart, you will want to agree on which job criteria are essential or desirable for success, and then discuss how the individual's profile matches up.

Overall, it's important to bear in mind that there's no such thing as a bad result in this kind of assessment. Be sure to read the explanatory notes for each section so that there can be no misunderstanding, and take a look at the User Report Guide in the Questionnaire section of the website for a more detailed account of how it all works.

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