Motivation, Employees, and Communication in the Start-Up Phase

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Abstract

A challenging task for a start-up is the development of employees. Finding people who are interested in unpredictable overtime and bad pay sounds bad in any job description. Economically, there is no reason to refuse a job with a secure, successful company. There is also no economically understandable reason to give up a permanent position unless there is a better paid one. And there is no economic reason to change the last years of one's professional life into the uncertainty of self-employment, at least not voluntarily. Nevertheless, there are thousands of examples that refute exactly that. For a reason that cannot be measured in figures.

1   Motivation: The Engine of Our Founder Scene

It is impressive to see which subculture of the established economy has formed in Startup Hubs, Co-Working Spaces and the one or other free workrooms. A spark ignited the inner fire of inspiration and self-realization. With some entrepreneurs, the fire then also passes to co-founders and employees, but that does not succeed without a plan or talent. The vision must exist from the beginning, form or be created, otherwise the blazing fire falls on wet wood and goes out. How to get employees to peak performance, even though they have to work more in a badly paid job, have to carry more responsibility, possibly have to look for a new job in a few months. Financial incentives?

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For founders and co-founders planning an exit, the question is not whether there are financial incentives, but these are originally difficult to transport to employees. The rain of money, which is supposed to come up during the sale, is the dream of the exit-driven founder, but the employee in the team of 25 who is responsible for the acquisition of new customers on the phone or by mail bot, has not yet had this vision (Deutsche Startups 2013).

Work–Life Balance drops flat at probable workload? In theory, it is a nice thing, but it cannot be sustained in the development of work processes, because they are not yet foreseeable in terms of time expenditure. Nowadays all add-ons like Playstation, Kicker, or Superfood have become an indispensable standard and make no difference. Thus, visions, missions, and a good team have more weight than ever what makes the working day an experience (European Commission 2019).

2   Creating a Basis for the Team

My model for business is the Beatles: They were four guys that kept each other's negative tendencies in check; they balanced each other. And the total was greater than the sum of the parts. (Steve Jobs) (Curtin 2019)

The beginnings of team building are the most challenging times in the team building phase. You need leaders, leading figures, and self-runners who absorb visions and missions like an elixir of life and carry the spirit into the team. It needs guidelines, written and felt, experienced and imagined. The first team members are crucial to maintaining these guidelines, while external pressure from investors and potential customers increases. The very beginning is the meaningful design of written corporate goals. Top down they let themselves interpret and stimulate these from the beginning, like a philosophy, which promotes creativity with procedures to the goal reaching which was before indefinite. Even if this has potential for misinterpretation, it is a clearly solution-oriented approach rather than making any decision dependent on a key person, such as a founder or co-founder, who ultimately makes opportunistic decisions by flooding tasks.

2.1   Create Room for Feedback

In addition to all fixed and established processes of meetings, group meetings and staff appraisals, team moods can best be achieved outside the working environment. If the team leaves its familiar environment into "free terrain", the role of all team members must also be reassigned. A new starting line is created for limited time for all. Be it a bar, a restaurant, a visit or a hike, whatever it is, it is a useful special situation. If the meetings are unplanned and voluntary, it is an award for the team spirit, but of course not only for start-ups. What makes the difference here is the discussion about setting up the various necessary business areas—only then can talents be identified who have fully understood and consumed the business model.

Feedback then becomes talent scouting and opens up new opportunities. Compared to established companies with fixed structures, there is a blatant difference here that distinguishes itself from the standard in agility and resource planning (Rericha 2006).

2.2   Agile Planning

Using a temporary work instruction as agile management for teams not only makes sense in project management, but also in the management of teams whose workflows have not yet been defined. Mistakes must be made known, causes and effects discussed and changed into modified workflows. Thus the department grows out of itself and finds the way to a stronger, better self. The biggest obstacle is the disclosure of mistakes, because even in our Western culture, the admission of poor performance is seen as a scar on the career ladder. This is countered by short-term planning, because the achievement of goals is more tangible and there is only the flight forward. If something has not worked, we discuss and adapt without letting bad feelings arise in the participants. They see themselves more as part of a process than as a source of error. This does not mean a release from responsibility, but a liability for the misappropriation of mistakes (Projektmanagement 2015).

In fact it motivates additionally, because the feeling to help shape something has a positive effect on people. People, on the other hand, who have sold themselves very well, quickly show their true core, because focusing solely on their career does not help them to error message or process optimization (Arndt 2004). Creative employees, on the other hand, drive processes forward.

2.3   Fast Communication

Decisions that are proverbially postponed can be contrary to the first intention. An everyday means to put something literally "on the long bank." If it is a masterful tactic in politics, it can lead to the end of a business idea in the young economy. But how can this danger of delay be avoided?

Not only in private life, but also in project management, short messages and text messages in chat format have been established for years. It sometimes paralyses the process in the decision-making process, but brings all parties involved, insofar as they are in the chat, to the same, current state of knowledge. Strict rules increase the speed (Rach 2019). The most important thing is to make final decisions, because they should be discussed in the chat format. Looking back, everyone can read how the decision was made, without influencing a decision in the aftermath. Thus the understanding of decision-making contributes as a further building block to the common picture of a vision or mission.

2.4   Limitation of Freedom

> That's been one of my mantras—focus and simplicity. Simple can be harder than complex: you have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains. (Steve Jobs) (British Broadcasting Corporation 2011).

The challenge in transferring responsibility to employees is to avoid the loss of focus of the responsible person. In contrast to the founder who regularly gets feedback on his ideas, the responsible employee usually lacks the relevant environment. This does not mean that there is a lack of opinions in his environment, but the usefulness is doubtful.

Limitation by strict, disciplinary measures with creative, motivated personalities work deterring or even motivational destructive. The common mission supports the way of focusing and at the same time offers the possibility to be perceived not only as a superior but also as a counsellor! The way to support focusing and to be perceived as counselor, superior, is found in the common mission. The more the common mission is promoted, the less a limitation is necessary. If this no longer works through the common orientation, two questions arise. If the further mission is too undefined or communication no longer fits. Thus the focus turns back to the start, the team building.

3   Limits of Capabilities

As operation/working life progresses, skills are increasingly needed that were previously ignored. This is logical, because previously there were no concrete departments or defined positions to fill. Here there is the chance to further develop employees who have already attracted attention in indirect talent scouting through qualification and mission understanding and to equip them with additional tasks. One species decoupled from this are the creative minds.

It is more difficult to lead them and the more difficult it is for them to lead other people with exclusively creative talent. Creatively gifted team leaders with mission understanding and applied agile management skills are as rare as a four-leaf cloverleaf. So the goal is to set the creativity and the initiated self-realization within not noticeable limits.

Also the self-reflection in the management plays an important role and should be a firm component of the process, because the own abilities can reach limits like with each other coworker in the enterprise and that is the most serious brake which an enterprise can have.

4   Motivation Comes from Success

Whether a goal has been achieved can be measured in advance by determining it. A vision is too big to be measurable and a mission too long-term to have noticeable success, so the solution lies in the achievement of partial goals and that brings motivation. This brings the incentive to repeat the same experience at shorter intervals. Thus a cycle can be recognized from the sum of all things, which can be supplemented in its arrangement by further methods. The cycle is depicted in Fig. 1.
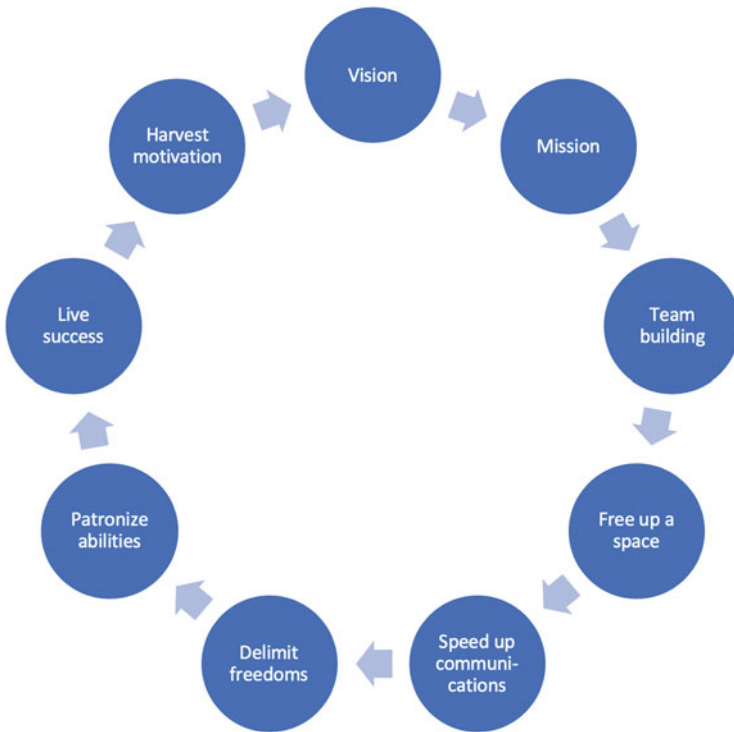

Fig. 1 From motivation to success. Source: author

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