Book Review

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This book successfully unravels the intricate and complex construct of human motivation which is the experience of desire or aversion. Motivation has simultaneously an objective and a subjective side and this book deeply scrutinizes each of these. One of the torch-bearers and pioneers of cognitive psychology, Dan Ariely is a best-selling authors and his other works have also managed to establish a conspicuous position in the fields of business and management. This book encompasses all the important elements of human motivation and the processes with which it impacts an individual in the pursuit of his daily goals. Eternity, social connections, meaning, and the right creation are some of the elements of motivation which the author has discussed in this book. With meticulous detail and care, the author has shed light on every element, convincing the reader about the powerful abilities of motivation as a subjective and objective emotion.

Firstly, the author has deconstructed the concept of ‘meaning’ acting as pre-cursor behind most of our actions. The effects of connections and meaning take a leap beyond the conventional wisdom, thus motivating us beyond our social circle. Even if a small ‘why’ surfaces up behind any one action of an individual, the completion of that particular action becomes easier and fathomable. The initial chapters have provided the best depiction for proving this. The attitude of janitors in the hospitals is central for understanding this element behind motivation. A major group of those janitors may find their job requirements to be inferior from their status and a lot of times, they have been seen complaining about the arduous and torturous nature of their job. On the other hand, some janitors do not think on these lines, rather they find their service as a contribution towards the well-being of the mankind. The latter group of janitors found a meaning in their job which pushes them further and is a manifestation of motivation. Attempting to psychologically reframe the current actions and viewing them in a holistic image helps to find meaning. On the contrary, destroying someone’s motivation is extremely easy. Displaying ignorance towards other people’s efforts or rejecting their hard work can easily bring a decline in the level of motivation that people have.

Humans are largely egocentric by nature. The level of effort than an individual puts into a task is directly corresponding the increasing sense of identity being cast into that process. Resultantly, more joy is gain when the aims or objectives of a particular task are accomplished. Similarly, if any organization proffers valuable opportunities and chances for connections and meanings to its employees, there is an increasing likelihood that its employees will strive harder and put in more efforts to accomplish the collective goals of the organization.

This book does a pretty impressive job in its documentation of unique and interesting aspects of human motivation. In a short book, the author has managed to break down the idea of this poignant abstraction and led many people, specifically managers in various organizations to closely reflect on the dynamics of human productivity and the motivating factors behind it. An individual’s intrinsic need of recognition and validation are also analyzed in this book and the verdict about this need is affirmative. The author establishes that if this need is not satisfied, it can have adverse effects on the productivity and progress of an individual. This can also be proven by many studies where by organizational and employee feedback offers various chances of improvement and provides subsequent opportunities.

There are four main chapters of this book, revolving around different stories in an attempt to shed light on various aspects of motivation. All the stories and their results are based on actual research which increases the credibility of this book. Although the main theme of this book is basic in nature and many people are mostly aware of the drivers that motivate them to do what they do in a routine life, yet the deployment of various interesting stories in this book engages the attention of the readers and provides a lot of insight. This book is an investigation into the true nature of motivation. Additionally it also indicates towards our partial and /or complete blindness and ignorance to the way it works, and looks for solutions in the pursuit of bridging this gap. Effective incorporation of studies that range from Intel to a kindergarten classroom the author, Dan Ariely digs deeper and deeper to find the root causes of human motivation. The dynamics of motivation influencing every single action of an individual are also analyzed in the book. The author has not only stated the processes but he has also reinstated various blueprints that how individuals and groups use this knowledge to approach and evaluate important choices in our own lives. In his meticulously detailed overview of motivation, Ariely propagates that it is time to recognize the payoff that is confirmed when we stop thinking in terms of trade-offs.

In one of the chapters of the book, Dan Ariely stipulates that more than fifty percent of employees in various organizations are disengaged (Ariely, 2016). Besides this, he notes that more than seventeen percent of the employees are actively disengaged from the overall goals of their organization. There are many reasons for the disengagement of employees in an organization, for instance, lack of recognition, excessive workload, poor leadership, poor management, and lack of training. One thing can be noted while reflecting upon these reasons which is that all these reasons can be traced back to a sheer lack of motivation. The question arises that how can employers reverse this perturbing trend of increasing disengagement among employees. An associated query with this question searches realistic solutions so that employers can fully ensure that their employees are motivated to give their best performance. The employers chiefly want that instead of going with the flow, their employees should be actively engaged and associated with the collective goals of the organization. Traditionally, these questions can be answered with one simple word: money. Financial incentives are key to increasing the workplace performance of many individuals as has been established many studies. If any individual is asked about the top reason behind his productivity, the answer will undoubtedly signify the financial incentives. The author of this book, Ariely agrees and affirms the central role played by money and purchasing power, yet he signifies that money is only one of a multitude of factors that trigger human motivation. Various achievements, increased levels of happiness, meaningful purpose, a sense of progress, relationships with your colleagues, concerns about your legacy, pride, even the number of young children at home will all play a part in one’s motivation. The main focus of this book are the ways and techniques which boost up the motivation levels of individual employees in a workplace. Moreover the author also delineates that it is very easy to kill the level of motivation in an individual.

The best attribute of this book is that the contents are not repetitive or long to read and one can easily finish it in one sitting. Ariely gracefully condenses the seminal thoughts of his TED talk in this book and provides the readers a different view on the dynamics behind motivation. According to the author, money is a poor motivator and in some instances, it has alo proved to be demotivating. In controlled laboratory experiments, Ariely proves his exegesis at the concluding, slightly under-developed chapters of this book.

Most often, the books of social psychology and behavioral economics deploy a proximate perspective and so has been the case of the in-depth analysis of this book. Various things instilling different feelings in humans, our likings and disliking, and the way our motivation work are the main thematic areas entailed in this book. Consequently, the holistic picture is missed by the author as he draws some misleading implications about the topic. It is an obvious matter of fact that people are chiefly passionate about those prospects and horizons that are highly valued by the society. Similarly it is also a fact that people are demotivated when their efforts and hard work go unnoticed. These implications should only pose as a shock or surprise if we start to believe in a pre-defined assumption that the correlation between level of motivation and the corresponding passion is perfectly optimized. People devoting almost half of their lives in playing chess or spending a significant portion of their lives in laboratories marveling on the innovative powers of science are also some examples behind which motivation is playing the key role. The inspiration behind collecting the largest number of postal stamps or reading the most number of books in a given year are also triggered by motivation. These are some of the thought provoking precedents of human experiences, especially when they are seen from an evolutionary frame of reference. The focus of the author in this book is particularly on the productivity of employees in an organization and the level of motivation behind it, therefore he has not been able to draw a broader picture about motivation.

Summing up, it can be said that the book is a concise and short read with highly informative and interesting observations. Upon reflection, the readers be able to think about motivation in a counterintuitive manner.

# References

Ariely, D. (2016). *Payoff: The Hidden Logic That Shapes Our Motivations.* TED Books.