

ENERGY AND CAPABILITY

INFLUENCING THE FACTORS
THAT DRIVE PRODUCTIVITY,
ENGAGEMENT, AND FULFILLMENT

BY FRED JEWELL

INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS OF INDIVIDUALS that make up organizations require two things to produce output.

- 1) **ENERGY** – This is the emotional energy that we get from motivating leaders, inspiring environments, supportive relationships, engaging work, and our own internal frame of mind.
- 2) **CAPABILITY** – Capability is made up of factors that structure and enable us to perform well, like clear goals, smooth processes, useful tools, relevant skills, efficient organization structures, and environments suited to the task.

Over the years, our research and the research of others have identified several concepts, tools, and techniques that can raise the energy and capability of individuals and organizations. We call these things “enhancers.” We have also identified forces that drain energy and capability away from the system; we made up a word for those – “depleters.”

The performance of an organization is, of course, made up of the sum of the performance of each of the individuals in the organization. Therefore, if we can minimize the effects of common energy and capability depleters and maximize the effects of common energy and capability enhancers on those individuals, we can improve the productivity, engagement, and fulfillment of the individuals in the system. In turn, we will improve the overall performance of the system.

ENHANCERS AND DEPLETERS COME FROM FOUR PRIMARY SOURCES

First, *each individual* brings their own energy and capability to a system. How they think, how they see the world, how they interact with others and their environment, what they know – all these things have an effect on their own performance and the performance of the system.

The second source, *social influencers*, is made up of the interactions among individuals. These can have dramatic effects on the output of a system, both positive and negative. Relationships, peer pressure,

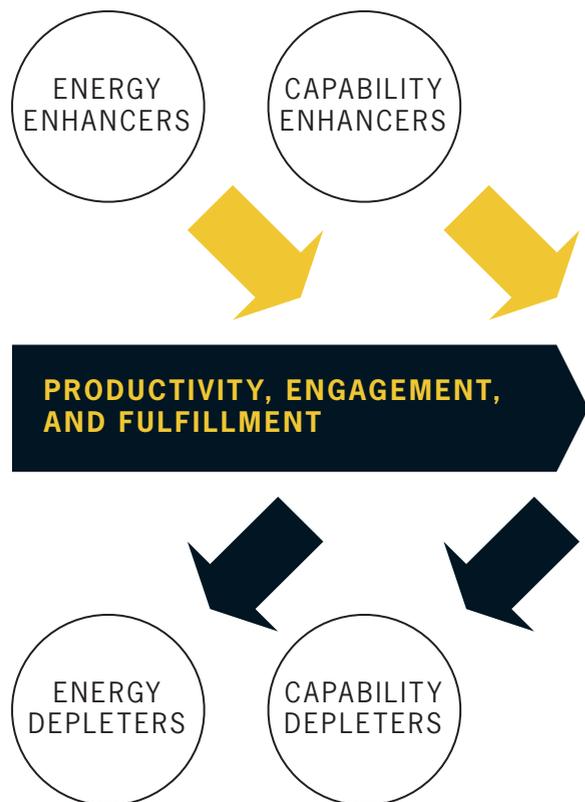


Figure 1 – Energy and capability enhancers and depleters

empathy, and group problem solving are all examples of the ways that our interactions with others affect the energy and capability of a system.

The third source, *organizational influencers*, is put in place by leadership within organizations or teams to help motivate and guide individuals toward a particular outcome or culture. Examples of organizational influencers are processes, organizational structures, communications, and training.

The fourth source, *environmental influencers*, is tied to the physical space in which people operate. Examples of environmental influencers include noise, lighting, temperature, space suited to the task, and architecture.

When we ask our clients what they think of when they think of change management, the most common responses have to do with training, communications, and sponsorship. While these things, all organizational capability enhancers in our model, are usually very impactful in a change effort, they are not sufficient alone to drive quick and lasting adoption of change.

Leaders who think more broadly about change will find themselves with more available tools to achieve



Figure 2 – Energy and capability enhancers and depleters framework



a successful outcome. In particular, the energy enhancers and depleters shown in this model (see Figure 2) are some of the biggest untapped levers at the disposal of change leaders. As energy enhancers are added to and energy depleters are worked out of a system, energy has a way of building on itself, leading to a cycle of improvement where both energy and capability are continuously increased.

Let's look at an example. For this instance, let's examine how a combination of the "clear identity" and "positive framing of messaging to purpose and identity" influencers in the model can be effective.

In this situation, an outsourced telecommunications IT organization was required by their customers to be certified in an industry-standard capability model. Leadership struggled to get buy-in from the programmers in their development organizations on the new process discipline that the model required.

To drive the change, leadership considered the possibility of establishing a new identity for the programmers that would align to the change they were after. Rather than referring to them as programmers and developers, leadership began to refer to them as "software engineers," which was, in fact, what they were. At the same time, the communications team that was part of the overall transformation effort began to change the messaging to appeal to this new professional identity. The messaging subtly pointed out that engineering is a discipline that requires process and precision. Achieving the certification would give these new software engineers the opportunity to put that on their resumes, enhancing their careers and making themselves more marketable in the technology community.

Almost overnight, the active resistance towards the process changes being put in place disappeared.

The workforce got involved in the changes, rallied around the new processes, and went on to meet the certification commitments. The more efficient processes led to greater productivity and higher quality output for the customer. More importantly to most of the software engineers, the certification helped them move one step closer to mastery in their field. And with the new processes, the organization settled into a more predictable and manageable pace, which allowed for more creativity, which drove more involvement, and so on and so on.

The magnitude of the effect of each of these enhancers and depleters will vary by implementation and by organization. It's worth analyzing each of these factors within your organization during the change design phase of an implementation. The process can yield surprising insights, leading to actions that can have huge effects on individuals, their teams, their organizations, and even to our society as a whole.

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