

Amabile and Kramer's Progress Theory

Using Small Wins to Enhance Motivation

There are many ways that you can motivate and inspire your team.

For instance, you can provide a positive, exciting workplace, with plenty of opportunities to build strong relationships. You can use incentives, such as bonuses or other rewards, to keep your team focused. And you can provide great support, and publicly recognize people's hard work.

However, recent research has shown that the way that people complete their work can also have a significant effect on motivation, and that's what we're looking at in this article.



Recognize progress, and boost motivation.
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In it, we'll see how consistent progress in the form of "small wins" can boost people's motivation and performance, and we'll explore strategies that you can use to help your own team achieve small wins as part of their work.

About the Theory

Professor Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer wrote in detail about how progress can boost performance in their 2011 book, "[The Progress Principle](#)."

In their research, they asked 238 people (from 26 project teams in seven major organizations) to keep an anonymous diary, so that they could track their experiences on a daily basis. They received more than 12,000 separate diary entries, which they used to analyze people's "inner work lives" - their perceptions, emotions, and motivation levels - and to explore how this affected their performance.

They found that when people consistently take steps forward - even small steps - on meaningful projects, they are more creative, productive, and engaged, and they have better relationships. This, in turn, has a positive influence on their work performance.

In short, achieving and recognizing regular "small wins" helps people have rich, engaged, and productive work lives. As any experienced manager knows, happy, engaged, and productive team members can achieve far more than unhappy team members.

Applying the Theory

So, how can you apply this theory with your team?

Amabile and Kramer identified six things that you can do to give people the best chance of experiencing and recognizing meaningful progress.

These are:

1. Set Clear Goals and Objectives

When people have unclear or changing goals, they don't know what to focus on. This means that they're likely to be less engaged with the work they're doing, and they're unlikely to see the small tasks that they do as "wins."

So, make sure that you set [SMART](#) (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals for everyone on your team; and change them only when you have to. Your people need to understand what's expected of them, so that they know when they've achieved these goals.

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he biggest indicator of a rich inner work life. This rich inner work life, in turn, enables people to be more productive, more engaged, and more creative in the work that they do.

Amabile and Kramer came up with six mechanisms that managers can use to help their team achieve small wins:

1. Set clear goals and objectives.
2. Allow autonomy.
3. Provide resources.
4. Allow ample time.
5. Provide support and expertise.
6. Help people learn from "failure."

As well as using these mechanisms, you should also encourage your people to recognize and celebrate their own successes, however small.