

# The New Science of Culture.

Performance,  
motivation and  
behavioural science  
in the workplace.


 morethannow



#ThinkSmall  
#TestLearnAdapt

An experiment on  
team motivation  
in partnership with  
Nationwide Building  
Society.

With thanks to the  
Centre for Self-  
Determination Theory  
and motivationWorks.



# The Power of How.

Introducing the science behind motivation and workplace performance.

Charity Wood from Nationwide Building Society at the MoreThanNow Lab

Too often, when we talk about purposeful work or employee engagement, we talk in inconsistent ways. The lack of a shared conception of what 'good work' looks like makes it difficult to measure or improve.

We don't need to start from scratch in our search. Self-determination theory (SDT) has been asking similar questions for decades from the field of academia, addressing the links between the dual concerns of performance and well-being.

It suggests that fostering a workplace where employees feel supported in their autonomy is not only an appropriate end in itself but will lead to more employee satisfaction and thriving, as well as collateral benefits for organisational effectiveness.

Exploring and experimenting with this framework offers a way to focus meaningfully on **how we work** as well as **what we do**.

Fundamental to self-determination theory is the idea that the impact of contextual factors like job design, pay and managerial styles are mediated by a set of three basic psychological needs: **Autonomy, Competence and Belonging**.

These needs are essential for psychological health and well-being and facilitate effective functioning in social settings. In effect, they underpin the belief that people need more than a paycheck to reach their potential at work.

If we care about that ideal, the concepts of autonomy, competence and belonging give us a robust platform for progress. They can also move us into the real world with two simple questions:

What, exactly, do these needs mean in your workplace? And how can you change them for the better? The quality of your answers will define your culture.

"People need to feel like they're using their skills to make a meaningful and valued contribution. They need to have a sense of belonging in the organisation while also feeling like they have autonomy and ownership in their work."

Richard M. Ryan, Ph.D  
Cofounder of Self-Determination Theory  
and motivationWorks

# TeamTalk

ThinkSmall and TestLearnAdapt in action at Nationwide Building Society



The idea behind TeamTalk was driven by the basic principle that teams should be given the accountability to solve their own challenges. TeamTalk was designed and refined in collaboration with 10 teams in user-testing phase, before we took it into an experimental phase with 50 teams and c. 400 employees.

#### Insight

We provided teams (between 5 and 13 people) a bespoke report on their three psychological needs. To offer quality insight, we partnered directly with motivationWorks, a company founded by the researchers behind SDT, Drs. Richard Ryan and Edward Deci. Their measurement & insight platform was the engine behind our work.

#### TeamTalk

After receiving their results, teams went through an experience to celebrate their strengths and seek opportunities to improve. All 3 exercises in the TeamTalk steered people toward small, practical ideas that were within their gift to change. The output of the session was simply to implement those ideas over 6 weeks.

#### Experiment

Culture interventions are often assessed through a 'pre-post' measure, if at all. By using a randomised controlled experiment to test our impact – the same method as a clinical trial – we could be confident that the difference between our treatment and control groups was caused by our TeamTalk.

"TeamTalk put freedom and accountability in local hands and the results are clear: Happier, higher motivated teams."

Faye Whitmarsh, Head of Culture  
Lee Raybould, Chief Data Officer  
Nationwide Building Society

## The TeamTalk Effect

When put under the spotlight of a randomised controlled trial (n=400), the TeamTalk showed significant effects on all three pillars of self-determined motivation.

### Autonomy

+5.55%

### Competence

+5.25%

### Belonging

+7.25%

These measures were taken in partnership with our insight partner, motivationWorks. The reported differences between treatment and control groups are statistically significant to  $p=0.05$ ,  $p<0.1$  and  $p<0.01$  respectively.



# The Future of Culture Change.

ThinkSmall. TestLearnAdapt.

The traditional approach to culture change:

**It's all about leadership and HR.** Culture data is reported at macro-level so organisations try to influence it at macro-level. The concept of 'culture' quickly becomes a leadership concern, rarely pitched as something within a team's control.

**It's purely visionary.** Without operational context and local ownership, words like 'innovation' and 'collaboration' become little more than platitudes. They're removed from everyday experiences and opportunities for improvement.

**It assumes homogeneity between teams:** Cultural strengths and weaknesses are treated as if they were consistent within divisions or regions. Organisations don't pay attention to the different needs between local teams.

The alternative of ThinkSmall and TestLearnAdapt:

Our approach to culture at Nationwide actively put control and flexibility in the hands of local teams. That's why the outputs were grounded in operational context and could be tailored to a radical diversity of strengths and needs.

We hope others will take inspiration from the 'ThinkSmall' nature of our intervention, but also the way we tested its impact. The precision of our experiment means that we can roll-out TeamTalk to the 18,000 people of Nationwide with confidence in the benefit it will offer them, their teammates, and the society and members they serve.

It's a great conclusion but it's only the start. We're applying behavioural science to many dimensions of corporate culture, from inclusion to risk and well-being to performance. **It marks a new era of workplace change - and there's so much to learn!**

"The power of behavioural science and experimentation is here to stay. Welcome to a new era of change in the workplace."

James Elfer  
Founder, MoreThanNow

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