

Anything is Possible with the Right Motivations: The Best Incentives for Collective Action

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ABSTRACT

In order to get people to take action, there must be a strong enough incentive for doing so. This paper walks through four methods to motivate cooperation, including making participation attractive and entertaining, ensuring that the source doing the persuasion is trustworthy, prioritizing clear communication, and making individuals feel that they are part of a greater cause. While these methods can be used to incentivise people to participate in a collective good, this paper acknowledges that these methods can also be used to incentivise people to act in or, at least, be complicit in movements led by fear and hatred.

GETTING RESULTS/DISCUSSION

The result that is aimed for in these incentives is cooperation. If done effectively, people will be incentivized to participate in certain causes and take action. The incentives that I discuss in this paper are not an exhaustive list, but rather are common methods that we have seen in recent and past events. If we take note of the ways people were persuaded into cooperating in certain actions, we can utilize these methods in future causes that require community involvement, as well as identify when these methods are being used to spread misinformation and hate.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

For a cause that may not produce immediate results, it is important that people are motivated and remain so to continue cooperating. While there are many ways to incentivize a group, there are some incentives that work better than others, especially if they have some kind of personal reward. This paper discusses a number of methods that can motivate people to cooperate, including making cooperation attractive, ensuring that the incentive is coming from a trustworthy source, prioritizing clear communication for the audience being persuaded, and making individuals feel that they are participating for a greater good.

The purpose of this paper is to learn from past and current events on how to best motivate collective action for present and future collective action issues. Being aware of what motivates people will help prevent results from being stalled as well as prevent motivation from declining over time.

PROPOSED SOLUTION/RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to incentivize people to participate in causes that require collective action, I proposed that the motivation must be attractive, the potential participants must be able to trust the source doing the persuading, the facts must be clearly communicated to avoid misunderstanding, and they must feel that they are a part of something bigger. An additional incentive that this paper discusses is if intimidation is an effective and moral incentive. I concluded that if the reasoning for intimidating someone is objectively going to improve collective wellbeing, such as sanctions for those who refuse to take certain vaccines, then it is a socially acceptable method of incentivizing (Northup, 2019, p. 17).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper is meant to give a collection of incentives that motivate collective action. Without incentives, the action needed for change will be prolonged or fizzle out over time. These motivations must be attractive to hook people in to want to cooperate, providing tangible or intangible rewards. People must also feel that they can trust the ones motivating them, ridding them of any worries of participating in a cause that has practices they do not support. They must also be presented with accurate information that is clearly communicated to them to ensure that the decisions they make are factual and built from a sturdy foundation. Lastly, they must feel that their individual contribution is an essential part of the cause as a whole. With this paper displaying both positive and negative events as examples for these incentives, the goal is to gather lessons from these events on how to best motivate collective action for present and future collective action issues.

METHODS TO INCENTIVIZE

Making the action attractive is an influential way to get people on board for cooperation. Making the action fun, such as a competition for who can reduce their energy use the most, or have some kind of tangible or intangible reward such as money or positive feelings incentivizes people to want to participate (Ostrom, 2012, p. 359).

It is imperative that the potential participants can trust the source doing the persuasion. Charities who have a history of shady morals or business practices, for example, tend to lose credibility, dismantling the trust from potential donors. Autism Speaks, a non-profit that claims to help autistic people and families of autistic people, for example, are notorious for spreading propaganda-level information about autism that only manages to increase stigma (Autistic Advocacy, n.d.).

Clearly communicating the facts for one's audience will also encourage action, as not doing so increases the likelihood of people attempting and failing to make sense of the information themselves, increasing the risk of misinformation being spread. Being aware of one's audience and their understanding of a topic is vital here, as Koontz (2019) describes as being an issue for experts tasked with communicating with the general public (p. 5).

Lastly, a sense of being part of a greater cause incentivizes people to participate for a greater good. A group with a common goal allows people to believe that what they are fighting for is valid and rational as there is a community of people to back them up. However, this can have fatal results in the cases of conspiracy theories and scapegoats, as these beliefs are often driven by fear and hatred. A notorious example is in the case of Nazi Germany, where the cult of the Third Reich validated the anti-semitic conspiracies of the German people and later used eugenics to rationalize the "Final Solution" that led to the deaths of millions of Jews and others deemed "degenerates" (Spiro, 2008, p. 356).

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