Explain one theory of motivation and evaluate its practical usefulness for a team.

Although motivation doesn’t have a universal definition that would be applicable to every facet of our society, it can be looked at as ‘the factors that push or pull us to behave in certain ways’ (Arnold, 2005). It has also been suggested, by Steers and Porter, that motivation is essentially made up of three components; direction, energy and persistence (Steers and Porter, 1979).

A process theory of motivation simply focuses on what it is that motivates human behaviour within an organisation. The theory that I have chosen to evaluate is the Goal-setting theory (Locke and Latham, 1990). I will initially introduce this theory, establish its practical usefulness for individuals in comparison to teams and finally I will include a personal example of ineffective goal-setting.

The goal-setting theory looks at how setting aims can motivate, both, individuals and teams. It can be segmented into 5 categories; clarity, challenge, task complexity, commitment and feedback. Clarity recognises that a goal must be specific for the employee to be motivated, the reason for this is that if a goal is too generic, such as ‘do your best’, the individual will not know how to go about achieving it. Challenge considers the difficulty of a goal, this element should ensure that an allocated goal is not an easy one to achieve as that can be demotivating, however, a goal that is too challenging can have the same de-motivating impact as the individual may not have the skills necessary for achieving that goal. The commitment to a goal is closely intertwined with the challenge of a goal since people need commitment to achieve a difficult goal which requires persistence. Task complexity represents describes how dividing complex goals into sub-tasks can enhance motivation as overly complex goals can mitigate the individual’s understanding of that goal, compromising their motivation. Lastly, feedback is also necessary for goal-setting for people to determine whether they are on track to achieving their goal or whether their energy needs to be re-directed (Locke & Latham, 2002). All of these components contribute to effective goal-setting, but Locke and Latham also identified that monetary incentives could be used to enhance performance by triggering extrinsic motivation – as long as the financial reward is deemed significant and the goal is attainable (Locke & Latham, 1990).

Practical usefulness summarises whether the theory is in fact usefully applicable to real life situations, whether it be goal-setting for teams or for individuals. Whether goals are ‘practically useful’ is dependent on perspective. While the manager will focus on the productivity of employees, team are likely to look at their own satisfaction and whether the goal has been achieved in the first place. Essentially, each of these stakeholders will look out for their own interest over the interest of others. It is due to goals being subject to perspectives to such a wide extent that these conflicts occur.