

Behavioral Science for improving community health worker performance

What motivates community health worker performance?

Key project details

Title of the project:

Motivating community health workers through social recognition and exploring psychosocial welfare.

Organisation(s):

Living Goods and Medic Mobile

Initiative:

The Virtual Design Lab (vLab)

Researchers/Staff Involved:

Franciscah Nzanga, Tabitha Mberi, Stephen Odindo, Isaac Mwangi [Living Goods], Beatrice Wasunna [Medic], Dhwani Yagnaraman [Busara]

Summary Author:

The Community Health Innovation Network

Behavioural Themes:

Uptake, timing, incentives

Workstream:

Social Recognition

Location:

Busia, Thika

Sample Size:

10





Summary

Brief overview:

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are the cornerstone of regional health ecosystems. Their dedication is vital to the well-being of the communities they work in. Motivation is a crucial factor in determining their performance and psychological wellbeing. In an attempt to discover the best way to bolster their motivation and foster healthy competition, the top performers were given digital badges they could display on Whatsapp. The entire group was then surveyed to better understand their current state of mind and how social recognition can kindle motivation. vLab designed and prototyped these badges with the target audience to make them exciting and relevant.

Result:

CHWs who received the badges felt recognized and appreciated for the work they had done, citing passion, commitment, and extra effort as reasons for their recognition.

CHWs who did not receive badges were not as affected by THOSE WHO had received badges as they were by the fact that they themselves DID NOT receive the badges. Some mentioned that they did not know the criteria for evaluation, while a few cited personal commitments and a lack of feedback as the reason for their performance. Many CHWs declined to share their thoughts on not receiving the badge. All of these CHWs would have liked to receive this badge and some felt bad that they were not recognized for their work.

Discussions about psychological welfare showed that CHWs' motivation levels were strongly linked to their performance at work. Doing good work made them more motivated and vice versa.



Context

The CHW system is an interesting balance of presiding over an assigned domain and region while interacting and training with others who perform the same function as you. While this environment encourages knowledge sharing and cooperation, it might also be a source of rivalry and competition.

On the other hand, the role of the CHW is all the more essential now as a number of remote populations may not feel safe or be able to access traditional healthcare services. It is safe to assume that CHWs are more stretched during this time and could do with some encouragement and motivation. This, coupled with the dynamics of the CHWs community, provoked the questions of:

1

Can the community dynamic play a role in improving motivation and performance?

2

How do CHWs feel about their daily duties in light of the pandemic?

The Innovation Network designed prototypes of different ways to motivate health workers and got feedback from the target audience. The chosen design of the digital badge was not only expected to motivate those who received and displayed it on WhatsApp but also encourage others to strive for similar appreciation, eventually leading to better performance and improved healthcare services.

Borrowing from the Top Performers Board, the badges intended to establish a virtual way to celebrate top performers given the COVID-19 pandemic.



Intervention Design

The digital badges targeted two main components of a community health worker's role:

1) Motivation; and **2) Performance.**

The intervention of the badges aimed to improve both aspects through the mechanism of recognition within the community health worker network, which remained strong despite the COVID-imposed distancing measures.

A text message was sent out to 10 CHWs, alerting them about the opportunity to receive a badge if they did good work during the week. The badges were then given to the top three performers in Busia and Thika, while the remaining 7 CHWs did not receive anything. The badges, which included an embedded image of the CHW, could be displayed on their Whatsapp profile and shared through messages. All ten CHWs were then surveyed about their understanding of the role, their motivations and performance, and the effect receiving or not receiving the badge had on them.

The badges were tested at a small scale to understand exactly how CHWs would react to them. While a quantitative survey would have captured the average effects of a motivational tool such as badges, conducting a qualitative study unearthed the thought process and feelings behind responses to the occasionally abstract and challenging topics of motivation, approval, and a sense of accomplishment.





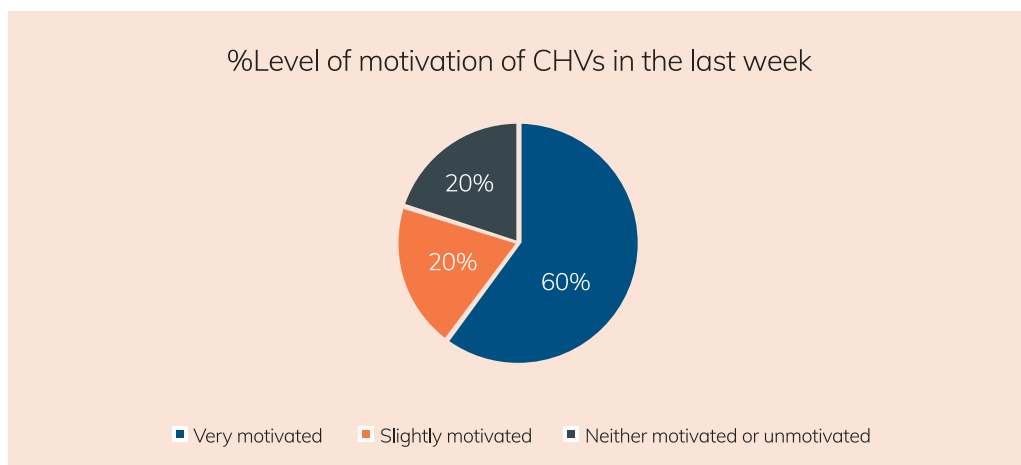
Intervention: Results

The badges validated the strong work ethic of CHWs who received them and raised their self-perception. CHWs felt recognized and energized to do more. All the members of this group shared this achievement with their family members, who might be an interesting conduit for motivation in future sprints.

“It is a great motivation to put more effort in serving the community through Living Goods.”

The badges demotivated some CHWs who did not receive them, with a few CHWs expressing disappointment: “I felt bad about it because I have always done my best to deliver” or situations that may have hampered their chances, such as one CHW who cited: “I have not been doing well in my duties since January when my mother-in-law became ill and I had to take care of her hence no much time for follow-ups.” One CHW also shared that she thought everyone would be receiving the badges from Living Goods as a thank you for their work. A number of CHWs were not sure why they didn't get the badge.

This suggests that such incentives are likely to positively reinforce good performance but might not motivate better performance or a drive to achieve them in their absence. The badges themselves served as tools to self-signal the type of person CHWs believed themselves to be: hardworking and committed, whereas, in the case of non-badge receivers, it contradicted their sense of identity as a CHW and disrupted their sense of self-efficacy.





A majority of the CHWs were very motivated and felt so because they were able to meet their targets, create a good relationship with community members, have confidence in their work and frequently follow up with their clients. For the CHWs who were slightly motivated, one mentioned only being able to do assessments, but not treat. Another CHW mentioned having a good rapport with the community, who are satisfied with Living Goods services. For the CHWs who were neither motivated nor unmotivated, one of them felt like they could do better.

Discussion and Exploration

This study illustrated the usefulness of testing interventions before scaling them. We thought that the badges would motivate everyone, either through positive reinforcement or social proofing. However, it seems like sharing badges with everyone might have yielded similar outcomes as we had intended, which was to motivate everyone and improve their performance. Taking a step back, giving everyone the badges would have done much more than motivate CHWs: it might have further cemented the respect and trust between CHWs and Living Good, which was a popular theme throughout the interviews.

The interviews were also a good way of checking in on people's understanding of their role and their motivation levels, which is always helpful to know during this tumultuous period. By balancing psychological wellness and the effects of an incentive, the study was able to build a rapport of care and concern with the respondents, while furthering an understanding of their thought processes and levers around performance.