Work Motivation Efficiency in the Workplace

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Abstract: Employee motivation is very important for a successful organization, so any company should focus on motivating human resources if they want to stay competitive on the market and to avoid issues, such as employee retention problems that will adversely affect the business. Thus, effective motivational techniques should be implemented in any company that wants to be successful. Following the implementation of motivation methods adapted to the organization's environment and its type of employees, the satisfaction of workers will increase, and they will feel more motivated to perform at the highest standards. Studies have shown that motivating factors, such as success at work, recognition, diversification of responsibilities and career advancement, play an important role in motivating employees at work. It is important to strike a fragile balance between the level of challenges that the job brings and the resources made available to the employee. Packages that combine financial and non-monetary motivation, with coaching and mentoring activities, investing in employee development, as well as the flexibility of the work schedule, are major components of stimulating work motivation.

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1. Introduction

Motivation includes all characteristics of the human being, the best and worst. Motivation can be analysed from any angle. However, many times the human understanding and interpretation is not taken into account during the analysis. For example, if we were to watch a group of young adults of the same age doing the same task, without a doubt we would notice that some of them are faster, more good looking, or simply better at work than others.

People tend to categorise others. Referring to the example above, young employees could be divided into different categories. One could be considered fast, another could be the one who talks a lot and no doubt there will be one who is considered lazy. Placing employees in categories can facilitate the managers' work related to understanding how to motivate the employees to be better at their job.

Motivation is an important topic to study in postmodern times as the postmodern society is prone towards fatality, a lack of optimism and motivation. Jameson (1992) observed "a new kind of superficiality" and a lack of depth in postmodern individuals, as he postulated in his book "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism".

On the same note, the postmodern society is faced with many controversies. On the one hand postmodernism is promoting team work at the workplace, but on the other hand society encourages people towards individualism in order to reach their personal goals. Thus, individuals become more interested in satisfying their personal needs than in concentrating on the collective motivation and good.

Motivation in the workplace can also be correlated to the idea of quality of life and work/ life balance and to the individual's own definition of a quality life in the postmodern society. It is more and more emphasized in the postmodern world that the individual has to have a clear work motivation that is not conflicting to their work/ life balance.

It is particularly difficult to find the right balance between all these aspects so that individuals reach the necessary level of motivation which will make them perform at their best.

2. Work motivation

In 2009, Daniel Pink, stated in his book „Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us”, that extrinsic rewards have a complicated nature and argued that for the receiver it becomes like a drug addict who

needs more and more in order to feel satisfied (Pink, 2009). Also, receiving a reward for doing a task can signify that the task is unwanted.

An important aspect to note is related to the interior motivation of an employee and that they often find that thought-provoking attractive tasks are rewarding in themselves. Rewards lead to a concentrated and diminished attention and work well only if they increase the ability to do something personally valuable to the employee. Thus, the exterior motivation is better suited for motivating employees performing algorithmic activities, but it can have adverse effects in employees performing creative activities.

In the cases where employees anticipate that they will receive rewards, this can completely change their behaviour, due to the biological process of dopamine secretion, which makes them less rational and more inclined to take unnecessary risks. When having the immediate potential of rewards, people no longer take into account external and durable solutions. Consisting with the previously mentioned short-term based drug-addict behaviour, research has uncovered that employees will often choose the easiest path when chasing rewards and they might choose to have an immediate victory.

Figure 1 below shows the potential unintended consequences of anticipating rewards, according to Daniel Pink.

Figure 1 . Potential unintended consequences of anticipating rewards
Source: representation of Daniel Pink's vision (Pink, 2009)

Pink (2009) argues that only routine activities should be rewarded to encourage motivation and to recognise that some tasks are monotonous, but

also the fact that employees should be allowed to perform these activities as they see fit. Motivation is often increased by providing more diversity and knowledge-gaining activities in the workplace.

Another important aspect for rewards to work is that they should not be given in advance, before the task is completed, and also, that the employee should not be able to expect that a particular reward is coming. This can be done by varying the frequency of rewards and oscillating between tangible and intangible rewards. It is a proven fact that in many cases material rewards are less valuable than meaningful and specific feedback, received by the employee, regarding work performance and ways to enhance it.

3. Employee motivation strategies

The motivation approaches that an organisation implements may become effective or not, based on the methods. However, the different motivational theories of researchers in the field can influence leaders towards aspects of organisational behaviour that may need mitigating.

Let's take the example of **Hertzberg's Two-Factor Theory**, which stipulates that in order to have happy and productive employees, organisations should concentrate on two factors: motivation and hygiene. According to Hertzberg any organisation that wants to have motivated employees must take certain steps: providing appreciation and support; provision of concrete and meaningful feedback; clear path for career growth. These are the motivation factors. But, as mentioned above, this theory also entails Hygiene factors, as follows: the employer should provide the best possible working conditions and fair wages that reflect the work performed by the employee.

Another instrumental motivation theory is **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**. This theory is more suitable for business transformation in situations where managers have difficulties in understanding the abstract notion of self-actualization and have a tendency to direct motivation efforts towards the needs from the basis of the pyramid.

One very good example of how to use Maslow's pyramid to motivate employees is the case of Chip Conley, founder of the Joie de Vivre hotel chain and head of Hospitality at Airbnb. As mentioned by Kermit Pattison in his 2010 article in Fast Company magazine ("Chip Conley", 2010), Chip Conley had an issue – he was unable to recognise the efforts of those working close to him. Being aware of his challenge, he consciously decided to create structures that would inoculate a recognition organisational

culture. Conley is the author of several books, out of which we note *Peak: How Great Companies Get Their Mojo from Maslow* published in 2007, explaining his implementation of Maslow's theory of needs.

Chip Conley explains how he found motivation in Maslow's research: *"Maslow looked at psychology not from the model of deficiency, which is what most psychologists look at, but from a best practices model: What if we study people who are fulfilled and what he called self-actualized? I liked that as a business guy so I started using Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid for a model of how we connect to the higher needs of our employees, our customers and our investors"* ("Chip Conley", 2010). Conley created offsite retreats with his employees and they did different types of exercises. For example, he asked groups of housekeepers to choose team names that would better describe them and their duties, reflecting the character and scope of their job. They came up with names like „Serenity Sisters”, „The Clutter Busters” or „The Peace of Mind Police” (Nelson & Campbell, 2013, p. 609).

According to Conley, *"There was a sense that people were doing more than just cleaning a room. They were creating a space for a traveller who was far away from home to feel safe and protected"* ("Chip Conley", 2010). This way, Conley managed to make his employees feel respected and motivated them to perform, by showing them the value of their jobs.

Other studies focus on the importance of requesting and providing regular meaningful feedback and recognition. Examples of research on this are **Hawthorne effect** and **The Attribution theory** of Weiner (1972). Praising achievements and providing concrete and effective feedback in areas in which the employee can develop will support the employees' understanding that their failures are not the result of inborn lack of skills.

Recognising the employee's efforts or using the right steps, even in cases in which the desired results were not achieved, should empower the employee to evolve and re-analyse road-blocks as learning opportunities. This will also have an impact on the company's psychological environment, harbouring security and encouraging employees to take control over their own success by adopting specific sets of strategies and setting attainable goals.

X, Y and Z Theories stress on the importance of instilling autonomy, competence and a sense of belonging of the employees for companies that want to consolidate their position and evolve in a thriving organization. In order to instil autonomy, competence and the sense of belonging, the leader need to give the employees the right to make decisions, to encourage broad information and knowledge exchange, promote political correctness and courtesy and to provide coherent performance feedback. An

environment of work autonomy makes employees more responsible, it fuels vitality and growth and employees are more likely to thrive. The psychological need for competence can be fuelled by the constant and concrete feed-back, aimed towards employee growth. When being shown appreciation for their efforts, employees tend to appreciate more their job and to give their best perform better. One specific type of feedback is known for creating most learning opportunities: two-way, open, frequent and guided feedback.

For employees to know where they stand regarding their skills, competencies and work performance, they need periodic and specific feedback. This will create a sense of competence and, as an effect, it will lead to professional growth. Regarding the most effective type of employee recognition, it seems that immediate, specific and clear public praise and showing focus on the effort and behaviour and not attributes manage to create the best results. People feel empowered to reach their full capacity when they receive positive feedback.

Research shows that using recognition creates lower levels of stress, which in its turn, improves employees' health. When talking about recognition, we are not referring only to receiving praise from a manager, but also recognition received from a colleague could have a positive impact on employee's experience or rewarding the team around that person.

There are other work motivation methods that deserve to be mentioned, like those that concentrate on **significance** and the ones that emphasize the importance of harbouring **a positive work environment**. Having a meaningful work is increasingly considered to be a cornerstone of motivation. In some cases, burnout is not caused by too much workload, but instead by too little significance in the work performed. In most cases, employees have jobs that make a difference in the world they live in, but they never have the chance to see first-hand or to meet those impacted by what work. Adam Grant's research emphasizes the power of long-term objectives that benefit others and demonstrates they are a great solution to motivate those that are unlikely to advance professionally by creating significance to broaden perspectives (Grant, 2013).

One of the big mistakes that inexperienced leaders make is assuming that the same motivators will work on everyone. Other leaders might misjudge the situation and use demotivating factors in the workplace, by punishing employees for their mistakes or criticising them frequently. Unfortunately for them, this type of negative behaviour rarely brings the desired results. If we were to take one important thing from all this, it's the

fact that motivation is individual and using only one type of strategy to motivate employees will most likely not work.

4. Motivation and performance at work

There are several interventions that can be used in the workplace to improve important aftereffects of work, such as enhanced work motivation and commitment, improved work performance and diminished levels of work-related stress.

4.1 Financial Motivation

The monetary reward is the factor that allows the population to ensure the standard of living to which it aspires. At the same time, the value of the salary can tell the employee how valuable he is considered in that organization. It should also be noted that people consider the value of salary as a unit of measurement of career success. (Jex, 2002).

Using high salary levels can prove to be an effective method of attracting a highly skilled workforce. Chişu (2002) points out that this process can be very risky for the company, so if these new employees do not live up to the expectations that accompany the salary level, the organisation will not have the expected profit from that employee. In Capital magazine from 18th of March 2008 ("The Secrets", 2018), a counter-model is presented, which represents the salary situation in the Romanian public administration where employees receive a very high net income at the end of the month (due to bonus, bonus and bonus systems), but they are too little related to the level of performance. For some management positions, these financial incentives can triple the basic salary. This model is completely deficient as employees are not stimulated to perform in their duties.

In the private system, however, most of the time, performance is what generates the level of remuneration. Thus, employees with high achievements and performances prefer this pay system based on results. However, there are also situations in which employees attach an important value to harmony and solidarity and want an equal pay system. (Deckop and Cirka, 2000).

We must not lose sight of the fact that focusing on (extrinsic) financial rewards can lower the level of intrinsic motivation of a category of people.

- **Remuneration systems aimed at motivating employees:**

Financial incentive plans are systems for correlating the salary level with performance in the case of directly productive jobs. According to Johns (1998), this type of plan was based on the employee's payment for each piece of product he completed. Even more common is the hourly payment, in which each employee receives a sum of money per hour, to which is added a percentage related to the production made during that time.

However, there are some problems. First of all, in such a salary system, the employee is stimulated to increase the number of products he makes without taking into account the quality of the finished products. This aspect can be counteracted by implementing management systems and quality control. Johns (1998) draws attention to another potential negative aspect could be the impact on the work environment, creating a highly competitive atmosphere or, on the contrary, an agreement could be spread at the level of employees about what would be the sufficient effort made per day, this arising from people's fears that a very high level of productivity could lead to staff reductions to reduce production costs.

Financial incentive plans have a high chance of failure if workers do not have a similar level of productivity or if the individual contribution to productivity is not concretely measurable.

- **Remuneration systems based on the performance of intellectual work**

A disadvantage of intellectual work is that it provides fewer objective performance indicators to correlate with the salary level. In many cases, the performance of the subordinate is left to the personal appreciation of the direct manager. Thus, managers are those who, based on the annual personnel evaluation, theoretically objective, but with strong subjective accents, will recommend the type of correlation with the salary level.

A major disadvantage of this system is the impossibility of making a realistic and objective comparison and separation. That is why, in organizations that do not have a clear and precise process for evaluating the performance and merits of employees, some managers end up no longer making precise distinctions between the level in which employees perform. The risk of this situation lies in the fact that there will be an effect of equalizing the salary level, paying too much to those with poor performance or too little to those with high performance. (Deckop and Cirka, 2000).

- **Remuneration systems based on qualifications.**

These imply that the level of an employee's income must be directly proportional to the number of tasks he can perform, regardless of the work performed. Two pre-conditions are needed for the effectiveness of this remuneration system (Johns, 1998):

a) Clear identification of the skills and abilities necessary for success and allocation of a scale for the level of payment;

b) Implementation of well-developed evaluation and professional training procedures for employees.

This system has both pros and cons. The advantage is increased flexibility, the company being able to operate with a small number of employees. Employees will have a clearer perspective on the activity, more easily overcoming the obstacles that may arise. The main disadvantage is the increase of salary costs with extremely well trained staff, but also the increase of costs related to the training and education of employees.

- **Remuneration to motivate teamwork** can be done by offering a share of the profit or by the possibility of gaining the right to become a shareholder of the company.

Profit sharing implies that employees will receive an annual bonus from the organization's profit, either in cash or as deposits in private pension insurance funds. The best argument for using this remuneration system is its easy use only if the company registers a certain profit, so the struggle to obtain the established profit becomes common for both company owners and employees. The counter argument refers to situations where employees do not have a direct impact on profit. There are a multitude of other factors involved, but also the fact that when applying this system, companies must show their annual balance sheet to employees.

As mentioned, employees' participation in profit occurs only when a certain previously established level of profit is reached. As a precondition, the company's leadership must set measurable goals, managers should stimulate the active involvement of subordinates, and they should have a high level of trust in management (Chișu, 2002). The pro arguments would be to stimulate team performance, employees' perception that they are fighting for a common good, getting more involved than usual and understanding the dynamics of the company's activity. The arguments against it refer to the fact that some employees could focus on productivity, to the detriment of quality, which will be reflected in the market, but also to the fact that if the company does not establish a smart profit-sharing policy,

it could find yourself in the situation where you have to pay bonuses even when the profit does not reach a good level.

4.2 Motivating interventions

Research shows that psychological interventions can bring several benefits, such as: improved performance, commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviours (Avey et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2007). The Components of psychological capital are illustrated in Figure 2

Figure 2. Components of Psychological Capital

Source: representation based on Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017)

- **Job modelling interventions**

Research has demonstrated that job modelling interventions in which employees are allowed to design and control their tasks, can lead to an optimal match between work requirements and personal strengths, which can generate a higher level of performance and more involvement in the job. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Van Wingerden et al., 2016).

The concept of job modelling is rooted in the theory of job-resource demands and suggests that employee motivation, commitment and performance can be influenced by practices such as:

- Utilisation of feedback and coaching;
- Offering development opportunities in the workplace;
- Challenging requirements in the workplace, such as reducing workload and creating new projects (Tims et al., 2012).

Job modelling is a proactive process, initiated by the worker in order to change their job elements to improve the fit between their job

requirements and personal needs, skills and strengths (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

Traditional approaches to job modelling, such as Taylor's, are based on the principle of job simplification and standardisation.

The most important theory regarding motivation based on job modelling is the one postulated by Hackman and Oldham (1976). They identify the motivational potential of a job through five critical characteristics (see Figure 3):

Figure 3. Factors influencing the motivational potential of the job

Source: Graphic representation after Hackman and Oldham (1976)

Hackman and Oldham (1976) consider that the factors that influence the relationships between job characteristics and employee motivation are the following:

- the abilities and skills of the person;
- the person's desire for development,
- context satisfactions.

Taking all these factors into account, job modelling strategies can be applied to increase the employee's personal motivation. Work enrichment strategies depend on the type of task to be performed, the technological level and the organizational environment.

- **Interventions of using goals as a motivating factor**

Peter Drucker introduced the notion of Management by Objective (MBO) in 1954 in *The Practice of Management*, which was also called

objective management or results-based management. Management by Objective is a process by which the objectives of an organization are created by both managers and its employees. In this way, employees better understand what is expected of them, and managers will have clear evaluation criteria. Therefore, the objectives of the organization will become personal goals for each of them.

The MBO system requires the managers of each department to be present at the creation of the annual strategy and to establish together with the management the company's objectives for that year. Then the objectives of the people in the department are presented and the directions on which to go to achieve them and the evaluation criteria are established together with them. In this way everyone will know what to do and how their work will be appreciated at the end of the year.

In theory, Management by Objective seems like a process that guarantees the success of any organization, but the lack of attention to detail or things that are not fully understood / explained quickly leads to its collapse. It is a system whose success consists in the periodic verification and constant adaptation of all the factors involved.

Zorlençan et al. (1998) points out that one of the challenges associated with goal management is that the degree of difficulty of the goals is not always comparable for employees in similar jobs. But the argument for using this management style comes from the very idea that difficult and concrete objectives lead to higher performance than the easy and vague one. The formulation of objectives influences the achievement of performance through four mechanisms (Mitchell & Daniels, 2003):

- focusing attention and actions on achieving the goal;
- a degree of intense effort;
- greater persistence on the activity, even in conditions of failure
- creating strategies that help employees achieve goals.

But certain conditions must be met for the MOB system to be truly motivating. The first condition is that the goals are SMART:

S - Specific - concretely related to the activities carried out.

M - Measurable - the objectives must be able to be materialized in actions and quantitatively quantifiable results for a better achievement of the result indicator.

A - which can be achieved - employees will be motivated by challenging goals, but which can still be achieved.

A - Relevant - the objectives must be relevant for the employees in order for them to feel motivated to make the effort necessary to achieve them.

T - framed in Time - employees must have a clear picture of the time frame in which the goal must be achieved.

- **The flexible work schedule** is used by companies that aim to attract employees from various backgrounds and who want to increase the level of employee satisfaction, lowering the absenteeism rate and increasing staff retention.

Some companies offer employees the opportunity to work from home, provided they are available during working hours or when needed. Cole (1997/2000) points out that, allowing employees to work from home, benefits the company, lowering some categories of indirect costs, but also the fact that it allows the attraction of flexible and diverse workforce. The risks are related to the need for a very careful planning of the company's activity and employees and the need to digitise the activity to allow communication between employees and third parties.

It is noteworthy the increase in the use of the telework system (as it is called in Romanian legislation) globally in 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the drastic restrictions on the movement of people imposed in most countries have forced employers to agree to send their employees to work from home or to send them into technical unemployment.

Companies with a sufficient level of digitalization did not feel an impact on the quality of work performed by employees during this period. And for employees, the possibility of working from home was a motivating factor and gratitude to the company that takes care of its employees and does not expose them to health risks.

On the 11th of May 2020, Jack Kelly wrote in an article for Forbes magazine that working from home was a success during this period and that the trend is for it to become the new normal. He quotes JPMorgan co-chair Daniel Pinto as saying “*staff could work from home on a rotational permanent basis, in line with the bank's future vision of work*”. At the same time, corporate executives recognise the potential savings they would make by not having to accommodate all their employees in skyscrapers with high prices in busy cities. They admitted that corporations support to improve the environment by reducing the time spent by their employees in traffic or public transportation, thus providing their employees with a better quality and work-life balance. Working from home is also allowed for selfish reasons. Thus, if employees return to the office en masse and someone contacts the virus, corporations and directors risk being sued for large sums of money, considering that they have not provided a safe working environment.

Compressing the number of working days per week is a system in which employees work the normal number of hours per week, but in different daily proportions. This work system motivates employees who prefer to reduce costs and time lost by traveling to and from work (especially in crowded cities) or who want to spend certain days a week with family. The main argument against this style of work concerns employee exhaustion and the risk of Burnout syndrome.

The system of dividing the job into two part-time jobs can be attractive and advantageous for mothers and students. But the system raises major issues of work organization and performance evaluation of employees who share the job (Cole, 2000).

4.3 Career planning programs

A key element in attracting, motivating and retaining employees is having a clear career development program. Such programs include: a transparent and fair promotion system, mentoring and coaching programs, but also training opportunities to increase the level of employees' skills.

a. Employee promotion systems

The employee's perception on the company's promotion system plays an important role in increasing the employee's commitment to the company, in making efforts for superior performance, but also in the degree of employee retention that the company has.

Research has highlighted four criteria for promotion at the company level: exceptional performance, consistent performance, personal characteristics and luck or favouritism (Beehr and Taber, 1993).

Beehr et al. (2004) have identified the characteristics of promotion systems:

- are numerically limited due to the hierarchical structures.
- promotions can't occur as a continuous climb.
- when promotions happen from within and former colleagues end up being subordinated, a potential challenge is related to the recognition of the promotion as a merit-based one. If it is not considered as deserved, it will be a demotivating factor.

b. Mentoring and coaching programs

The main roles of the mentor and/or coach, as Johns (1998) argues, is to support the employees in their career and promotions, to provide visibility within the organization, counselling and feedback and to involve them in activities that will increase their professional skills.

At the same time, the mentor and / or the coach should inspire by their own example, offer psychological support through acceptance, confirmation and counselling.

5. Conclusions

Following the synthesis of the information, we can conclude that employee motivation is very important for a successful organization, so any company should focus on motivating human resources to remain competitive in the market and avoid some problems, such as be those related to employee attrition that will definitely affect the business. Thus, effective motivational techniques should be implemented in any company that wants to be successful. Following the implementation of motivation methods adapted to the organization's environment and its type of employees, the satisfaction of workers at work will increase, and they will feel more motivated to perform at the highest standards. Studies have shown that motivating factors, such as success at work, recognition, diversification of responsibilities and career advancement, play an important role in motivating employees at work. It is important to strike a fragile balance between the level of challenges that the job brings and the resources made available to the employee. Packages that combine financial and non-monetary motivation, with coaching and mentoring activities, investing in employee development, as well as the flexibility of the work schedule, are major components of stimulating work motivation.

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