

EMPLOYEES MOTIVATION THEORIES DEVELOPED AT AN INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

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International specialized literature speaks about motivational strategies, about methods of increasing the employees' satisfaction at work and of obtaining the best results by increasing work motivation. But what does motivation really represent? Which are the most modern motivational theories? How do HR specialists choose to evaluate work satisfaction and the motivation degree of the employees? The purpose of the article is to make radiography of the main traditional motivational theories, but also the modern approaches related to motivation, sometimes contrary to the traditional opinions and evaluation techniques of employees' satisfaction at work applied in the EU.

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Foreword

Certainly, motivation is one of the main factors that determine the work performance of employees. But what does motivation really represent? We may say that a person, man or woman, is motivated when he or she wants to do something. The reason does not represent the same thing as the stimulus. While a person could be enthusiastic about a stimulus, her main reason for achieving something could be the fear of failure, the desire to distinguish herself from the others, the wish of acquiring knowledge, etc. The motivation of a person covers all the reasons for which he chooses to act in a certain manner (Adair, 2006).

Professor Frederick Herzberg dichotomized, suggesting that the factors which make people experience satisfaction in their work situations are not the opposite of the factors inducing work dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction is determined by deficiencies in the work environment and the context of the job; work satisfaction depends of the content of the work and the career opportunities, the accomplishments, the recognition and the personal growth.

International motivation theories

The most influent theory in the specialized literature is the theory of **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**. Maslow published in 1954 a volume of articles and papers made during 13 years of research, under the name "Motivation and personality". "A theory of motivation" appears in chapter 5 and classifies people needs in 5 well-known categories: physiological needs, needs of security and safety, social needs (sense of belonging), needs of self-esteem and the needs of self-actualization.

Through this theory, Maslow mentioned that, when an inferior rank need is satisfied (for example, assuring food, clothing, the need of breathing, etc), the next level need becomes dominant, and the attention of the person is dedicated to the accomplishment of this higher rank need. The need of self-actualization can never be satisfied; Maslow mentions in this sense that "man is a perpetually wanting animal" and only an unsatisfied need can motivate the behaviour, the dominant need being the primary factor for behaviour motivation. During the evolution of needs towards the top of the hierarchy of needs, there is also a psychological evolution, but it doesn't happen necessarily as a direct progression. The inferior rank needs continue to exist, even if temporarily in a latency state as motivation factors, and people constantly come back to previously satisfied needs.

Maslow's theory has had a great influence over the organizations, but it was also very criticized, especially for its rigidity, because people are different and have different priorities. Even Maslow mentioned that it is hard to accept that people's needs advance progressively and constantly towards the top of the pyramid, in a very orderly manner.

Another motivation theory is **Frederick Herzberg's Two Factors Theory**. He made an investigation about the sources of professional satisfaction and dissatisfaction for accountants and engineers. Hertzberg ascertained that their statements about the good periods were mostly related to content elements of the professional activity, especially professional acknowledgement, achievements, promotions, responsibilities and the nature of work itself.

The frustrations of the interviewees were frequently related to the context of their work: the company policy, the management, the surveillance system, the salary, the work conditions.

Hertzberg considers that motivation and the increase of work performance can be only obtained through the action of the motivational factors, which directly reflect the content of the executed work by the employee on his position. The contextual factors represent only the conditions necessary for the execution of work processes.

This theory was often criticized, especially because it does not make any evaluation of the relation between satisfaction and performance. Many critics also suggested that Hertzberg drew deductive conclusions, with general incidence, unjustified by the utilization of significant interviewees.

Douglas McGregor developed one of the best known motivational theories, **Theory X and Theory Y**. In the process of work, McGregor separate employees in two categories. Employees that align to the X theory are predisposed to negligence, by avoiding work as much as possible, by lacking ambition and avoiding responsibilities. Considered a medium level person, the X employee is indifferent to the needs of the company that he belongs to, and has certain inertia towards change, by resisting it. In consequence, at the workplace, the X employee must be forced, threatened with punishments, permanently controlled and penalized in order to be determined to make the efforts necessary to attain the company objectives. According to the Y theory, the employees consider it normal to make physical and intellectual efforts at work, by voluntarily taking upon themselves different assignments and responsibilities and by being motivated by the associated rewards. The Y employee must not be forced by different means to obtain performance, because he is motivated by the content of his work. McGregor's view can, of course, be considered simplistic, because external and internal factors can often decisively influence his work performance.

Along with those three content theories, there are also different process theories. If in the content theories the accent is on the specific factors that motivate the employees regarding certain necessities and aspirations, in the process theories the accent is laid on the processes, on the psychological forces that have an effect on motivation. They start from the premise that motivation begins with the wish of doing something, generating expectations. The process or cognitive theories are more useful to the managers than the content theories because they offer more realistic principles regarding the motivation techniques. The best known process theories are: the expectancy theory, the goal setting theory and the equity theory.

The expectancy theory, also named the VIE theory was initially elaborated by **Vroom** (1964) and then developed by **Porter and Lawler** (1968). This theory establishes a connection between the employees' motivation and the certitude of their expectancies. The motivation is possible only when there is a clear relation between the work performance and its results and the results are means to satisfy a certain need.

The goal setting theory, developed by **Lotham and Locke** (1979) states that the level of motivation and performance is higher when the individual has specific objectives established and when these objectives, even with a high level of difficulty, are accepted and are offered a performance feedback. The human resources specialists have an important role to play in establishing organisational objectives. The employees must participate in the process of goal setting in order to obtain their approval when setting higher and higher targets and the human resources people can help them to understand the consequences of these targets over their entire activity. Feedback is also vital to maintain employees motivation, especially when targeting even higher objectives.

The equity theory speaks about the people perceptions regarding the way they are treated in comparison with others. Actually, the theory states that the people are higher motivated when they are fairly treated and less motivated when there is no equity between employees. This theory only explains one of the features of the motivational process, but an important one at an ethic and moral level.

The theory of group personality and group needs is a recently debated theory. In the last years the team work and the project based work developed rapidly across worldwide organisations. Their advantages are definitely known and were proved in the business practice. Though, we must ask ourselves which are the actions that motivates the entire team and not only some of the individuals in the team.

Adair (2006) brings some new issues in the theory of group personality and group need. He developed the idea that working groups resemble individuals in that although they are always unique, developing its own group personality, yet they share, as do individuals, certain common needs. There were identified three areas of needs present in such groups. Two of these are the properties of the group as a whole, namely: the need to accomplish the common tasks and the need to be maintained as a cohesive social unity, called by Adair "the team maintenance need". The third area of needs is constituted by the sum of the individual needs of group members: physical needs, social needs, intellectual and spiritual needs, which can be accomplished or not by participating to group activities.

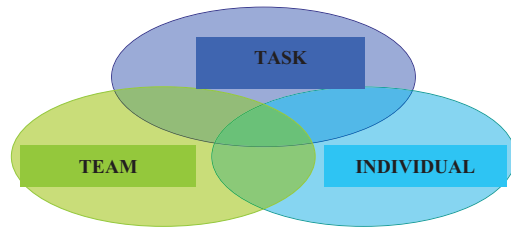


Figure 1. Interaction of needs (Adair, 2006)

As we can observe in the upper figure, that the three types of needs interact and influence one another inside the group. For example, if a group fails to achieve a specific goal, this will intensify the disintegrative tendencies present in the group and produce a diminished satisfaction for its individual members. Though, if there is a lack of harmonious relationships in the group this will affect performance on the job and also individual needs. On the other side, the achievements of the team build a sense of group identity and close the psychological gaps between team members, automatically rising their morale. An individual whose needs are recognised and who feels that he or she can make a significant and worthwhile contribution both to the task and the group will tend to perform in both these areas.

Adair (2006) developed a **new theory of motivation** also named **The Fifty – Fifty Rule**. Its fundament is the intersection of the three circles. Adair took into consideration the Pareto Principle and suggested that a similar principle is at work in the field of motivation. Its theory does not claim to identify the exactly fifty – fifty proportions in the equation. It only says that a substantial part of motivation lies within a person while a substantial part lies outside and beyond its control.

From many perspectives this theory is contrary to the general theories developed by Maslow and Herzberg. They put into light only the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of an individual. The Fifty – Fifty rule enlarges the motivation understanding and suggests that 50 per cent of our motivation lies without us. Of course, this does not mean that it is pointless to study the very much known theories. The two researchers contribution lies in the fact that they map out the internal needs and motivations of an individual, many times accomplished through work. Maslow's sketchmap is more general and more original. Herzberg continued and applied Maslow's theory into practice. He dichotomized the human needs into satisfiers and dissatisfiers, or motivational and hygiene factors. The Fifty – Fifty rule covers both perspectives: the internal perspective of an individual and its inner motivational factors and also the external perspective, when the employee motivation is influenced by others and the instant circumstances. "When someone is motivating you, he or she is consciously or unconsciously seeking to change the strength and the direction of your motive energy"(Adair, 2006).

The European Employee Index

The European Employee Index was developed by some human resources specialists in the northern European countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway). The research and the developing of the model were based on annual questionnaires conducted in more than 20 countries which offered the best international benchmark. Accordingly to this model, the employees' motivation, their job satisfaction and sense of loyalty are the result of a large number of factors directly related to the employees' perception of job and work environment. In the European Employee Index, these factors were gathered into seven dimensions, levers that the company and the individual manager can pull in order to improve motivation.

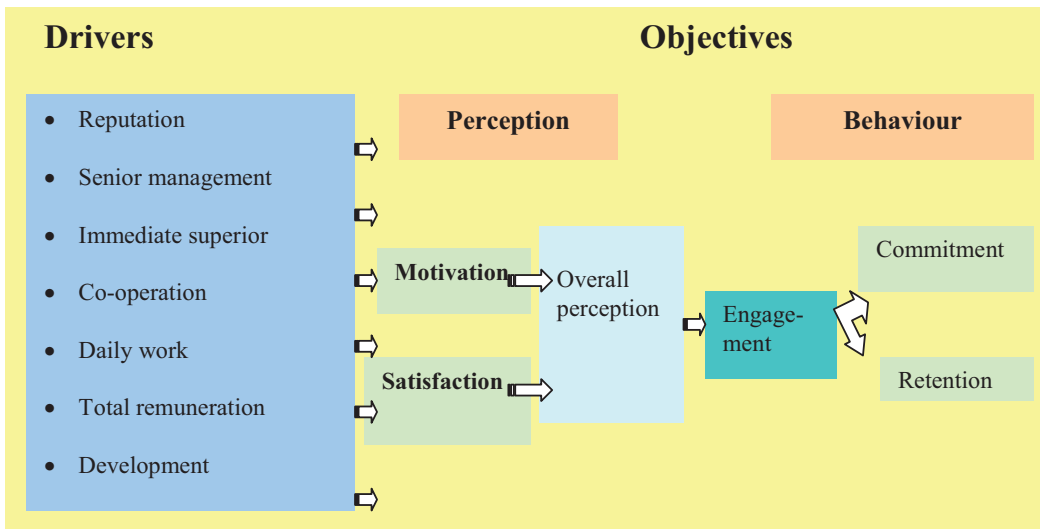


Figure 2. The European Employee Index Model¹²⁵

Reputation is the employees' perception of the general knowledge of the organisation and how this is perceived externally, both as a workplace, as a player in society and in relation to the products that the organisation delivers.

Senior management is the perception of the general direction of the organisation and the people in charge.

Immediate superior is the quality of the management and support offered by formal immediate superiors as perceived by the individual employee in the daily work and which is reflected in an assessment of the qualifications of these superiors.

Cooperation is the quality of the interaction between people in the organisation – in relation to the performance of a specific task, the general sense of community and atmosphere as well as the social interaction with colleagues both in and outside the workplace.

Daily work is the employees' general perception of the specific content of their daily activities in the workplace and the working conditions related to the performance of these activities.

Total remuneration is the employees' perception of all the elements involved in the compensation that they receive for performing their job.

Development is the employees' perception of the individual acquisition of competences (both professional and personal) which takes place in connection with the employment in the company. Competences can be acquired in connection with formal education, courses, on-the-job training, everyday challenges and feedback from managers.

The last study conducted in 2008 shows no change in the top two countries that have the highest motivation and satisfaction: Denmark and India, two very different countries. For every country, a different driver was found to be the most important, definitely influenced by the cultural features. For instance, senior management is especially important for employees in Ireland, the United States and Japan. Immediate superior is important in United Kingdom and Japan, while co-operation means a lot for the employees in Netherlands. In the Czech Republic and Russia remuneration plays the most important role. The study also brings into light the fact that, no matter the country, the development of human resources and the daily activity are very important factors for increasing employees' satisfaction.

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