

EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

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Abstract

A substantial body of theory and empirical evidence exists to attest to the fact that motivation and productivity are concepts which have been subjects of immense interest among researchers and managers. The objective of this paper is to conduct a literature review and analysis on theories and empirical evidence on the relationship between employee motivation and organizational productivity with a view to drawing important lessons for managerial practice. To achieve this, the paper conducted a review of some of the key theories and empirical studies on motivation and its impact on employee productivity drawing experiences from diverse organizational settings in Nigeria and several other countries. The study revealed that there are different factors to consider in motivating employees: some monetary or financial such as pay and others are non-financial like recognition and challenging jobs. Important implications are presented for managerial practice.

Keywords: Motivation, productivity, theories, non-financial rewards, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Motivation and productivity are concepts which have been subjects of immense interest among researchers and practitioners. Both concepts have been defined in a variety of ways by several scholars. If we have to review the definitions, the paper will be unnecessarily long and boring. Therefore, we have adopted the approach of describing what we mean by these two terms and proceeding to discuss the issues with the understanding that the descriptions will serve the purpose of definitions.

By motivation here we mean the way and manner in which an individual or group of individuals are inspired to behave in a desired manner with a view to receiving some positive rewards or to satisfy certain human needs. To be motivated is to do something which is different; to be inspired to go beyond the call of duty. That is to do more than you have to do not because you are told to but because you want to. The concept of productivity is one of the most fashionable and frequently used in the domain of management today. It is described as the optimal utilization of resources in the production of goods and rendering of services that meets predetermined objectives.

Research in the relationship between motivation and productivity is justified on at least two grounds. The first justification is the rapidly changing workplace environment and its meaning to the young generation of employees in high paying jobs in the oil and gas and other high technology related organizations who do not accept the traditional approach to employee motivation. Who, according to Singh, et al. (2012), do not accept the 'status quo', and have moved from obedience to questioning; and who assess work in terms of its significance in human life and human nature. Secondly, this study is also timely in the Nigerian economy with the current recession characterized by low employee morale, low sales volumes, challenges to industrial harmony, etc. It is argued that motivation is the key to economic recovery in the country (Aremu, 2017). A review of theories and empirical evidence on the central issues at stake on how to boost motivation therefore becomes timely. The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. The immediate section after this introduction briefly reviews some theories and empirical studies on motivation. The third section presents our views on motivation of workers for enhancing their productivity based on the literature analysis. Section four concludes the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of Motivation

It is adequately documented in the literature that several thinkers from Adam Smith to Abraham Maslow and others have studied human behaviour from different perspectives – economic, psychological, behavioural, etc., to understand what motivate people to do the things they do. In the process, they developed several theories of motivation. This section presents a brief review of some of the theories and empirical evidences on the relationship between motivation and productivity. Broadly speaking the theories of motivation can be classified in to content theories and process theories. The former deals with what motivates and are concerned with identifying people's needs and their relative strengths, and the goals they pursue in order to satisfy these needs. The main content theories include Maslow's hierarchy needs; Herzberg's two factor

theory and McClelland's achievement motivation theory. Process theories on the other hand, place emphasis on the actual process of motivation. These theories are concerned with the relationships among the dynamic variables which make up motivation and with how behaviour is initiated, directed and sustained. Examples are expectancy –based models, equity theory goal theory and attribution theory (Uzonna, 2013).

The most popular theory of motivation in the classical literature is perhaps that of a United States psychologist, Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Maslow (1943) discussed five levels of employee needs: physiological, safety and security, social, esteem or ego and self- actualization. According to this theory, people have many needs which motivate them to work, that those needs are arranged in a hierarchical manner in such a way that lower level needs (physiological and safety) had to be satisfied before the next higher level social need would motivate employees to work hard and increase productivity.

The second theory of motivation is the two factor theory or motivator and hygiene theory developed by Frederick Herzberg (Herzberg, 1966). Motivators or intrinsic factors such as drive for achievement and advancement, being treated in a caring and considerate manner and receiving positive recognition are inherent in the job itself and which the individual enjoys as a result of successfully completing the task, produce job satisfaction and motivate employees to work harder. Hygiene or extrinsic factors, such as salary, benefits and job security are external to the task and often determined at the organizational level can lead to dissatisfaction and lack of motivation if not present in positive degrees. Uzonna (2013) argues that one important element of Herzberg's theory is that knowing employee needs can help us motivate today's young, ambitious and knowledge and technology-based workers. Given the fact that these workers already command high paying jobs, we can infer that money or cash rewards alone does not provide enough of an incentive as a motivator for performance. This implies that to motivate workers, organizations need to look beyond monetary rewards.

Victor Vroom developed the expectancy theory based on the belief that employee effort will lead to performance and performance will lead to rewards. Rewards may be either positive or negative. The more positive the reward the more likely the employee will be highly motivated. Conversely, the more negative the reward the less likely the employee will be motivated to work harder (Vroom, 1964, as cited in Malik, et al, 2011: 39). This theory was further developed by Porter and Lawler (1968).

Another theory is the equity theory of motivation developed in the early 1960's by J. Stacey Adams, a psychologist. The theory proposes that a person's motivation is based on what he or she considers being fair when compared to others (Redmond & Housell, 2015). It recognizes that motivation can be affected through an individual's perception of fair treatment in

social exchanges. When compared to other people, individuals want to be compensated fairly for their contributions to the organization. A person's beliefs regarding what is fair and what is not can affect his motivation, attitudes and behaviours which will in turn affect subsequent performance. When applied to the workplace, equity theory focuses on an employee's work-compensation relationship or "exchange relationship" as well as that employee's attempt to minimize any sense of unfairness that might result. According to the theory, underpayment inequity induces anger and distress while overpayment induces guilt. (Redmond & Housell, 2015).

Lastly, B.F. Skinner's reinforcement theory states that those employee behaviours that lead to positive outcomes will be repeated and behaviours that lead to negative outcomes will not be repeated (Skinner, 1953, as cited in Malik, et. al., 2011:39). A reinforcer can therefore be seen as a reward or incentive to behave in a certain way. Reinforcers may be tangible like food or money and they can be intangible like approval or praise. The implication is that organizations should reinforce employee behaviours that lead to positive outcomes and discourage those behaviours that lead to negative outcomes. This can be achieved through staff training and development, among other strategies.

Empirical Studies on Motivation

Almost all the theories discussed above have been tested empirically. One of the early empirical studies on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory tried to test whether the list of needs derived from American culture by Maslow is applicable to other cultures. The study found that managers had these needs and that they were important. However, although these needs may be universally accepted the importance attached to the satisfaction of different needs varies from culture to culture (Haire, et. al., 1963).

A survey conducted by Velnampy (2007) to test Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory reveals that consciously or unconsciously lower level employees in both public and private sector organizations of Sri Lanka attach more importance to lower level needs and higher level employees emphasize higher level needs.

In another study, Sajuyigbe, et al. (2013) collected data from 100 employees of selected manufacturing companies in Ibadan, Nigeria and concluded that pay, performance bonus, recognition and praise were significantly related to organizational performance, supporting Herzberg's motivation hygiene theory.

Apart from cash or monetary rewards, motivation theories and empirical studies also attest to the role of non-cash rewards in motivation especially in technology-based, high paying jobs. Brown and Armstrong (1999) reported that the non-financial schemes in their survey were

particularly popular among knowledge and technology based sectors as well as sales and service companies. Another study by Beran (2005) confirmed that majority of companies have in place one form of non-financial rewards or the other especially employee recognition and that the policy enhanced productivity. In another study, Rose (1998) discovered that the respondent companies that prefer non-financial rewards are those that rely on high level of customer contact.

Studies using data collected in the United Kingdom also attests to the role of non-financial incentives in motivating employees to high productivity. In a 2009 McKinsey Quarterly survey of 1,047 executives, managers and employees from a range of sectors in the United Kingdom (Vrancic, 2015), the respondents view three non-financial motivators: praise from immediate managers, leadership attention (for example, one-on-one conversations) and a chance to lead projects or task forces as no less or even more effective motivators than the three highest-rated financial incentives: cash bonuses, increased base pay, and stock or stock options. In addition, it was also found that the survey's top three nonfinancial motivators play critical roles in making employees feel that their companies value them, take their well-being seriously and strive to create opportunities for career growth. According to these researchers, these themes recur constantly in most studies on ways to motivate and engage employees (Vrancic, 2015).

Another study conducted by Ng, et. al. (2010) as cited in Singh, et. al. (2012) sought to study the expectations and priorities of young employees. They found that this category of workers rated opportunities for career advancement as the most desirable work related attribute followed by good people to relate to and opportunities for good training and development. According to these researchers, surprisingly, pay, benefits and job security were ranked in the middle behind career advancement.

In Pakistan, Tausif (2012, as cited in Haider, et al., 2015:348) conducted a survey among public school teachers and found that non-financial rewards were essential in developing employees' job satisfaction and motivation. Similarly, Barton (2006, as cited in Haider, et al., 2015: 348) found that employee recognition is the most important factor among non-financial rewards in enhancing job satisfaction. Bull (2005, as cited in Haider, et al., 2015: 348) conducted a study and concluded that challenging jobs enhanced employee job satisfaction.

Finally, several universities and technology related institutions in the United States like Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), University of Washington and University of California have designed, implemented and maintained employee recognition programmes to encourage hard work and productivity in the workplace.

In an empirical study to test equity theory, Griffeth and Gaertner (2001) developed and tested a model using data collected from 192 hospital employees using structural equation modeling which placed satisfaction and intention to quit as mediators of employee turnover. The researchers utilized many dimensions of perceived unfairness which includes: pay rules (the fairness of one's pay relative to one's coworkers and the fairness of granting pay increases and promotions); pay administration (or the perceptions of the fairness of the supervisor in administering the rules for pay increases and promotions); pay level, work pace (or the fairness of the supervisor in maintaining a fair pace of work activity and rule administration. The results showed that pay rules, pay administration and work pace or supervisor satisfaction were strongly related to quit intentions.

Other studies aimed at testing equity theory include Summers and Hendrix (1991, as cited in Griffeth & Gaertner, 2001: 11019) who found a significant relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit and Iverson and Roy (1994, as cited in Griffeth & Gaertner, 2001: 1019) who investigated the perception of various pay and benefits in relation to co-workers and found a strong correlation between pay equity and job satisfaction.

Staff training and development is another indispensable motivator in the workplace. In a study conducted by Aibievi (2014) collected data from 100 non-academic staff of University of Benin, Nigeria to test the impact of training and development on employee motivation. The study found a significant positive relationship between training and motivation; that trained staff were found to be more dedicated to duty compared to those who did not receive training and also that training could lead to increased productivity.

From the above brief discussion of the theory and empirical evidences, it is now time for us to bring out our views on how to motivate workers to increase their productivity.

Based on the preceding discussion on theories and empirical evidence, we are compelled to arrive at the following synthesis of the literature. First and foremost, there is the need to motivate workers in order to increase their productivity and also that there are many financial and non-financial strategies of motivating workers. Secondly, it appears that there is no single general rule applicable to each and every circumstance. Differences exist amongst lower, middle and higher level employees in terms of their needs. For some, the literature suggests that monetary rewards and supervision are necessary strategies before they can perform.. Others work better in an atmosphere of fairness, equity, love and encouragement. Some must be compelled or even punished before they can work.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

From the preceding section, it becomes clear that each manager or supervisor needs to study his workers individually and generally in order to come up with adequate measures of motivation. This calls for a basket of measures to motivate workers. One single measure of motivation is not likely to work in the diverse circumstances in which we live.

Against this background, the paper provides a selected menu of how to motivate workers to work harder in order to raise productivity in the work place.

The first far reaching practical implication for management practice is the application of Maslow's theory by using employee expectations and lifestyles. It is established that significant difference exists between lower level needs and higher level needs of employees. According to Maslow, physiological needs for food, clothing and shelter are the most dominating in a person while an employee is just starting his career. At this stage if you want to motivate the person, pay him on time. This is because it is quite clear that at this stage the basic form of motivation is salary. An average Nigerian worker is motivated when he receives salary alerts especially if he is expecting some arrears. If that is guaranteed, Management can also consider additional monetary reward (e.g., productivity bonus) and this can motivate him to increase his productivity. Another man who has reasonably satisfied the first need but who is now afraid of losing his job (e.g., pre-mature retirement due to poor performance), can be motivated to put on more effort and increase productivity on account of that fear. But a person who has reasonably satisfied the second need now wants acceptance, to love and be loved; you can motivate him to work harder and increase productivity by providing him with a Staff Club as an easy avenue to make friends or facilitate membership of social and professional associations subsidized by the employer.

A man who satisfied this need for love is now looking for esteem which is bred by accomplishments. The man can be motivated by giving him recognition. A man who has satisfied this need now needs self-actualization. He aspires to reach his highest potential. This man can be motivated by giving him assignments that praises his worth, opportunity for career growth such as promotion, etc.

The second strategy of motivating workers to increase their productivity is to inculcate the culture of appreciation, praise and recognition for the slightest improvement. This will spur them into further improvement. The motivator/hygiene theory provides an essential starting point on which to build a policy of motivating workers. The questions are: which behaviors should be recognized and how? There are several types of recognition schemes. According to Thompson and Milsome (2004, as cited in Silverman, 2004:7), there are those schemes that acknowledge inputs (ideas and efforts) and those that reflect output (such as service delivery or other forms of

successful contributions). In addition, there are schemes that emphasize pro-social behaviour (such as communication skills, teamwork, etc.) and those that concentrate on direct benefits to organizational performance (like improvement and customer satisfaction).

The Management of an organization can design, implement and maintain schemes like “Academic Staff of the Year”, “Administrative Staff of the Year”, and “Department of the Year”, etc. The assessment needs to be on a continuous basis (throughout the year) and not necessarily a one off ballot with clearly defined and communicated criteria for recognition like excellence in teaching, research, mentoring, community service, etc. or any other criteria which promotes the achievement of the mission and vision of the organization. It is also important to keep the scheme fresh and constantly updated. Similarly, since the value of recognition scheme is the attention it receives (Wiscombe, 2002, as cited in Uzonna, 2013:205); there should be a ceremonial coloration such as a public appreciation in a Departmental meeting or special award lunch or dinner. The winner can be presented with a trophy, a certificate and even a token cash award.

Closely associated with this is to give your workers a fine reputation to live up to. “You are from a family of hard workers” coming from a manager is enough to make the worker try to prove that he is indeed a handworker from a hardworking family. This will increase efficiency and productivity.

The third important implication from this study is that Management of organizations should exercise equity and fairness in administration of financial and non-financial motivation strategies because equity is at the centre of employee job satisfaction, motivation and increased productivity. In other words, the Management should use objective and justifiable criteria (education level, years of experience, special skills, etc.). There is also need for consistency even with those employees who may be perceived to try the patience of Management. Management should not ignore the concerns of employees about unfairness or inequities in pay, promotion, work schedules and other aspects of the human resource systems. Let Management needs to acknowledge and resolve what it can and explain what it cannot. There is therefore the need to re-educate and communicate to employee on fairness issues as circumstances demand.

Fourthly, Skinner's reinforcement theory of motivation appears useful for management in the area of employee training and development, job design, supervision, quality control, etc. In the area of supervision of workers, the process of informing employees how they perform is a form of reinforcement. The supervisor should provide feedback, approval and show personal interest in various ways to reinforce desired behaviours.

Staff training and development function is a serious motivation strategy. Participating in special educational/professional programs, conferences and other developmental activities help employees to achieve professional growth and development, acquire innovative technical and decision – making skills. This will enhance their ability to deconstruct tasks and challenges and how to feel less intimidated by their job roles and prepares them for challenges of training others with state of the art techniques, for industry attachment and collaboration as well career advancement. Therefore, demonstrating to staff how to cope in the workplace can lead directly to improved motivation. In this regard, Management should seek for more funding in annual budgets for staff training and development.

The fifth practical implication is to take a personal interest in the social life of your subordinates by supporting them in other aspects of their lives outside work. An example is to visit your workers when they are sick, attend their naming and wedding ceremonies, condole them when they are bereaved and give them gifts at important festivals such as Christmas and Sallah. In short when the Management tries to socialize, the workers will feel free. It is most likely that the workers will feel happy with the company and identify with it. In short Management should be genuinely interested in their workers and their problems. Management can also consider flexible working hours for employees to focus on their family or to pursue further studies. They will see the failure of the company as their own failure and they will work harder.

The sixth practical technique of motivating workers is to throw challenges at them. Assignments provide opportunities for employees to develop skills expand knowledge and increase visibility within the organization. When considering such assignments, supervisors should consult with employees about the types of assignments they would value (Velnampy, 2007). If you have teams or shifts, you must be able to encourage healthy competition (in hard work) between them. Let each group want to excel the other and you will see how productivity will increase as each tries to do better than the other.

The seventh practical method is that Management or supervisors should never be bossy instead put a cheerful appearance. They should never scold their subordinates but try to correct them politely. Such politeness breeds respect, creates a feeling of humaneness in the worker and he finds himself co-operating instead of rebelling which culminate in doing things efficiently.

The eighth practical strategy of motivating workers to high productivity is to empower them; allow them to use their initiative as long as it does not conflict with the objectives of the company. Show them that they are competent; let them suggest ideas to you and together you will all run the organization each thinking it is his idea and each trying to make his ideas to succeed.

The ninth formula make employees feel happy about doing what Management suggests to them to do. This can be done by giving them responsibility that will boost their ego or an office that will make them feel important, or a change that will boots their morale. All these will make the workers to co-operate and to work much better.

The tenth and last strategy to motivate workers is to ensure that infighting and jealousies must not be allowed to thrive, Management must try to find the cause if necessary straight away dismiss the culprit. Infighting is one of the greatest causes of inefficiency and insubordination and should not be promoted.

These ten strategies we feel are very likely to motivate workers to work. There can be many more methods but these ten will bring no mean results in enhancing productivity leading to the corporate survival and growth of the business environment.

CONCLUSION

This literature review was carried out on the impact of motivation on productivity. In achieving this objective, the review and analysis contributes to the research in theory and practice in at least two ways. First and most notably, this study suggested ten strategies of motivating employees based on analysis of a catalog of theories and empirical evidence beginning with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and how to apply it at different levels of employees' career path by identifying their life styles and expectations and adopting appropriate strategies to motivate and satisfy them. Secondly, the paper also analyzed the implications of other theories such as equity theory and what Management can do to minimize the real or perceived inequities in the administration of financial and non-financial rewards.

The study has some limitations as well. First, some other theories of motivation are not included in the current review. For example, McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory, Goal Theory and Attribution Theory (Koontz & Weihrich, 1990, as cited in Uzonna, 2013: 202) as well as McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y. This raises the question whether including more theories may explain the motivation-productivity relationship better. The reason for choosing a few key theories is because of the need to keep the paper within a manageable size without losing sight of our objectives.

In sum, the important managerial implication of this study is that if organizations desire to keep productivity high, Management must be able to grasp the key theories and strategies of motivation in the management of their human resources. It is only by so doing that they can hope to understand their employees and their diverse economic, or physiological, social and psychological concerns and how to effectively bring about desired performance levels. Based on this review, we conclude that robust pay, promotion, recognition, conducive working

environment, equity and fairness and other aspects of human resource management systems are important for enhancing motivation, job satisfaction and higher productivity.

It is however important to point out scope for further studies as a way forward in advancing research in this area in order to address some of the limitations highlighted. Empirical research needs to be conducted to examine the role of non-financial strategies of motivation especially those that appeal to employees' higher level needs such as ego (esteem) and self-actualization. This can be achieved by collecting data and testing hypotheses especially in organizations with relatively robust pay and benefits such as the oil and gas industry in Nigeria and other technology-based organizations. This is important for research in this area for at least three reasons: First, it will help us understand the notion that money is not everything when it comes to motivating a certain category of employees and also that non cash rewards appeal to employees on a personal level (Uzonna, 2013; Olugbodi, 2017). Secondly, non-cash rewards are important practices in organizations across the globe with astounding results (Vrancic, 2015). The third reason is the current recession in the Nigerian economy which calls for cost reduction and as demonstrated in the paper, non-cash rewards are not only memorable but cheaper or cost effective as well. This will further our understanding of the role of non-financial rewards in motivating employees to higher productivity.

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