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Ramona-Cristina BĂLĂNESCU

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Is the Improvement of the Employee Motivation Process truly an Organisational Objective?!

Ramona-Cristina BĂLĂNESCU^{1*}

Abstract

The organisational goals and objectives can only be accomplished through the joint efforts of its members. One of the must-haves that make some organisations be more productive than others consists of the quality and quantity of the efforts their employees put in, efforts which are related to motivation. In order for the people to work well, they must be strongly involved in their activities, and willing to reach certain goals, ranging from the simplest ones (such as, the wish to make money, to get back home quickly or to have more spare time), to the more complex ones, which also serve the organisation (to do important things, to find new and effective methods, to do what they like). The topic approached in this paper focuses on the description of different aspects of the motivational process in privately-owned company, for the analysis of which, an interdisciplinary approach method shall be used, combining management consultancy and organisational psychology. The data collection methods were: questionnaires and individual and group interviews. Furthermore, the described research aims at identifying both the causes leading to the drop in the employee motivation within the given organisation, and at making recommendations for improving the motivation process.

Keywords: *motivation; organization; satisfaction; performance; remuneration.*

1. Introduction

Motivation is considered to be a highly important factor of the organisation success, which is why the way it influences the activity within an organisation and performance achievement cannot be ignored. As Ramlall [7] argues, there is extensive evidence that organizations regardless of size, technological advances, market focus and other factors are facing

¹ University Politehnica of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail prc73ro@yahoo.com.

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Corresponding Author: Ramona Cristina BALANESCU

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retention challenges (p. 52). The concept of motivation refers to internal factors, which boost action, and to external factors, which can stimulate action. The three aspects motivation acts upon are: direction (choice), intensity (effort), and duration (persistence). Motivation can affect not only the qualification/skill and individual ability development, but also how or when such skills and abilities can be used.

From the work psychology perspective, motivation is defined as the sum of the internal and external energies initiating, directing, and supporting an effort oriented towards an organisational objective, which shall simultaneously also satisfy the individual needs. Three key elements stand out from this definition: effort, organisational objectives and needs [8].

Furthermore, motivation must also be analysed as a *process of need satisfaction*. The need is an internal state of necessity, which renders certain purposes more appealing. So long as it remains unsatisfied, it creates an internal pressure which stimulates the individual, leading to a behaviour aimed at satisfying the need and reducing the pressure. In order for an individual to be motivated at the workplace, he/she must have the certainty that by doing a certain activity, it will also satisfy his/her own needs.

A series of motivational factors determines an individual's work motivation: intrinsic (individual) and extrinsic (organisational). In the general motivation pattern, we notice how the combination of these factors will lead to an individual motivated behaviour (or not) in order to achieve the expected performance.

In the vision of Nicolescu and Verboncu [5], from the perspective of the managerial conception they are based on, we find two major meanings of the motivation:

The motivation in the restricted sense of the word, based on a classical vision on the organisation and management, which only envisages the company salaried employees or personnel, and which is still dominant both in the world managerial theory, and practice.

The motivation in the restricted sense of the word consists of correlating the needs, aspirations, and interests of the personnel within the organisation with the achievement of the objectives and the performance of the tasks, competences and responsibilities allocated within the organisation.

The motivation in the broad sense of the word, outlined during the past few years, based on a modern vision on the organisation and management. Its basic feature consists of the focus on the stakeholders, namely, on such persons, categories of personnel and bodies having a major interest in the company development and performances. The main stakeholders that are usually taken into account are: owners, clients,

managers, salaried employees, trade union, suppliers, bank, central and/or local administration, local community, etc.

The motivation in the broad sense of the word resides in the overall decisions and actions whereby the organisation stakeholders are determined to contribute to the creation of superior overall functionalities and performances directly and indirectly, based on the correlation between their interests in approaching and achieving the objectives of the organisation and of its subsystems.

The concept of work motivation changed over time, along with the development of various management and organisation approaches. Starting from them, Lefter, Deaconu, Marinas and Puia [4] consider that the motivation system must be customised, since people have different personalities and expectations; what motivates something may be of no interest to someone else. Thus, the following motivational typology emerges: a) economic and professional motivations (“homo economicus”); b) social motivations (“homo socialus”); c) self-achievement motivations (the “achiever”); d) complex motivations (“homo psychologicus”); e) mobilisation and involvement motivations (“homo participatus”).

a) The economic and professional motivations include: the remuneration received by the salaried persons, the waging manners, the performance of a competence-appropriate job, the salaried person’s physical and intellectual qualities (the adaptation of the person to the position), the provision of optimal working conditions (the adaptation of the position to the person).

b) The social motivation simply that the person, in performing his/her activity within the organisation, belongs to certain groups, the same way that, in the private life, he/she belongs to a family. Within the group, certain relations are developed between the salaried employees, in close connection to their work, to the existing regulations, and to the superior/subordinate relations. The groups must be led by people having knowledge about people and group dynamics.

c) The self-achievement motivations: the salaried persons’ physical and intellectual efforts are justified in the work process; the persons can personally direct and control the activity in order to achieve the objectives they are responsible for; the responsibility for achieving the objectives exists in relation to the rewards associated to it in this respect; the most important rewards, the need for self-achievement, and self-satisfaction can be obtained directly, only through an objective achievement-oriented effort (management by objectives); the average individual will be capable, under certain given conditions, to accept and even assume a series of responsibilities.

d) The complex motivations – “Homopsychologicus” – make up a complex organism which develops, goes through certain psychological and physiological evolutionary stages, and has connections with the personal environment.

e) The mobilisation and involvement motivations are especially noticed in the case of salaried persons within high-performance companies. Each salaried person has the feeling of playing an essential role in the achievement of company objectives and having a place within the respective organisation and the client services.

Nohria, Groysberg and Lee [6] identify four drives that underlie motivation: (1) the drive to acquire; (2) the drive to bond; (3) the drive to comprehend; (4) the drive to defend.

The first drive is explained as the need to acquire physical goods and experiences to boost one’s subjective well-being. The drive to bond is related to the need of creating connections among fellows and to extend them to larger collectives such as organizations. In the workplace, the drive to comprehend accounts for the desire to make a meaningful contribution, as the authors argue. A human subject is motivated by a job where there are possibilities to learn, to grow, to acquire a better self. And finally, the drive to defend is related to the need to protect ourselves and our properties and goods. In the organisational context, this drive explains the resistance to change, for example. The transition from a job to another is explained by this type of drive. In the view of the cited authors, the companies have a number of levers to use in order to fulfil the aforementioned emotional drives. Table 1 explains the correspondence between the drivers and the corresponding lever as Nohria, Groysberg and Lee [6] mentioned them. Moreover, the table entails the latent structure of motivation that has been measured in the context of this research.

Table 1. Emotional Drivers and corresponding levers

Driver	Lever	Latent dimension
The drive to acquire	Reward System	Earnings and rewards
The drive to bond	Culture	social and physical environment;
The drive to comprehend	Job Design	working time quality; work intensity and diversity
The drive to defend	Performance-Management and Resource-Allocation Processes	career prospects

In the above table is mentioned the concept of subjective well-being. In this light, it is needed to operationalize and discuss this particular concept. Dodge, Daly, Huyton and Sanders [1] suggest that well-being could be understood as a set-point between subject's resources and challenges and requirements of the environment. The authors rely their conceptual framework on three majors: the set-point, the equilibrium between resources and challenges and the exchanges between the two domains. In essence, well-being is achieved when the subjects have the psychological, physical and social resources they need to best respond to a corresponding environmental challenge (we also refer here to the subject's internal environment). When challenges are more than resources, there is a state of tension that unbalances the set-point.

Thus, following the analysis of the aforementioned theoretical landmarks, in our opinion, the need to motivate the human resources, and to find the best methods for stimulating the employees is both an old, and a current problem in terms of management, because of the need to reach higher productivity and of the competitiveness in the market place. An efficient motivational process is effective both for recruiting human resources, and for maintaining them. The personnel motivation is not only limited to the financial aspects, but it also implies putting together an entire motivational system with advantages both at the individual level, and at the working group and organisation level.

2. Problem Statement

The motivation is a key-driver of employees' performance and well-being. „Getting people to do their best work, even in trying circumstances, is one of managers' most enduring and slippery challenges”, argue Nohria, Groysberg and Lee [6]. Assuming this, the research study aimed at investigating the latent dimensions of the motivation as stated in Introduction. The study is based on a hybrid research strategy blending quantitative and qualitative methods. This methodological approach conducted to the elaboration of a case study regarding the motivation to work of the employees of a particular organization.

3. Research Objectives

The research study aimed at investigating the latent dimensions of the motivation, namely (1) working time quality; (2) career prospects; (3) work intensity and diversity; (4) social and physical environment; (5)

earnings and rewards; (6) subjective well-being. Based on the research results, recommendations to improving the motivational drivers and levers are proposed and discussed.

Thus, the research aimed to:

- O1: investigate the motivational drivers according to the model proposed in the first section;
- O2: establish the employees' level of motivation;
- O3: identify the possible causes for the employee yield decrease;
- O4: identify the motivational levers to address the motivational drivers.

4. Research Methods

The present paper describes a case study research study. This design was preferred in order to address a complex problem such as employee motivation. The above stated objectives require an in-depth investigation rather than an extensive one. Thus, a number of qualitative and quantitative methods were blended to pursue the research objectives. Moreover, through case study methods, the researcher „is able to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioral conditions through the actor's perspective”, according to Zainal [9].

The Research Sample

The sampling method followed a theoretical and realistic approach based on the criterion of relevance. According to the convenience criterion, the organization was selected. Its profile indicates a private company, acting in the IT&C sector, with 50 employees. The company management was informed regarding the author's intention to conduct the research. The invitation to the study was distributed via the internal messaging system. 32 persons were purposefully sampled, as suggests Emmel [2]: $Mage = 28.9, SD = 1.2$. Due to the nature of the company activity, the gender distribution is unbalanced. Thus, 12 female and 20 male subjects participated in the research. All of the subjects completed a self-administered questionnaire. According to the availability criterion, 10 subjects were invited to participate in a focus group. In addition, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with managers and team leaders (6 interviews). The author fully acknowledges that the investigated sample may not be representative for all the companies in the IT&C sector but it allows to conduct an in-depth investigation of the motivational flow in an organizational environment.

Research Instruments

The selection of the method approaches for analysing the motivational process in the studied company was focused on the need to collect information that would be as varied as possible, originating in all the organisation layers. Thus, the used research methods were: the questionnaire-based research method, the interview-based research method, and the used tools were the following: questionnaire, individual interview, group interview.

The questionnaire includes 29 items addressing latent constructs of motivation. The research tool was developed after conducting an in-depth analysis of the scientific literature on motivation theories, job satisfaction and performance, working time quality, value and recognition of work results. The questionnaire encompasses various dimensions regarding motivational factors at work: (1) working time quality; (2) career prospects; (3) work intensity and diversity; (4) social and physical environment; (5) earnings and rewards; (6) subjective well-being. The items regarding working time quality; career prospects; work intensity and diversity; and social and physical environment were designed according to the European Working Conditions Survey and European Company Survey (Eurofund, 2013; 2015). The operationalization of the subjective well-being was based on the conceptual framework of the set-point theory (see Dodge, Daly, Huyton și Sanders, 2012) [1].

The internal consistency score of the questionnaire can be appreciated as a good one: $\alpha = .72$. All the inter-item correlations were statistically significant ($p < .05$). The author acknowledges that the Cronbachalfa coefficient is sample sensitive. In other words, it depends on the volume of the sample. The content validity of the present questionnaire is achieved since the items were derived based on an extensive bibliographical research.

The interviews, both the individual ones, with the managerial staff, and the group one with the non-managerial personnel, are semi-structured, thus having only an interview guide, while giving the interviewees the possibility to express other varied opinions, as well.

Research Procedure

For analysing the existing situation (the raised problem concerning the employees' insufficient motivation), the following investigation stages were taken:

- preliminary talks with the contact person in the company management;
- general and specific data collection;
- preparation of the preliminary questionnaire;
- questionnaire submission to the upper-management superior for obtaining the approval for applying it and pretesting;
- questionnaire application in all the company;
- interview with the managers/team leaders (semi-structured interview starting from the statistics of the questionnaire results);
- group interview (10 persons in non-managerial positions);
- analysis conclusions.

5. Findings

Following the analysis of the data obtained (through the questionnaire, individual interviews, and group interview), the following was found:

We are dealing with a young company which started its operations 2 years ago; the motivational process is not very clearly outlined from the management perspective.

The Company Personnel consists predominantly of young people, students or fresh graduates, for many of them this being their first job, 19 of the respondents (approx. 60% of the employees) have been working in this Company for more than one year, which is correlated to the high results obtained at the item concerning the importance of the workplace security.

The financial motivation is lacking: 67% consider that the salary is low compared to the performed activity, and 13% consider it to be very low, while the managers consider that the salary is good given the context (working hours, level of responsibilities, and the fact that for many of the employees, this is their first job).

Three months before, a *monthly bonus* system was introduced, with percentages varying between 10 and 25% of the basic wage (the bonus being regarded as a company strong point by 4 of the 6 team leaders/managers), but this does not reflect in the yield. The lack of material incentives is reproached, such as: luncheon vouchers, festive bonuses, annual salary increase - 2 of the 6 team leaders/managers and the general opinion at the non-managerial group interview.

There are communication gaps (between the teams, between the operational personnel and the management);

63% of the employees consider they do not efficiently communicate with their direct superior; 5 out of 6 employees holding a team leader/manager position consider that the management and the operational personnel face communications gaps. In one of the 2 operational teams in the company, failures exist in terms of the relationship between the team leader and the team members (they complain about the lack of communication, an overly-authoritarian style, and the lack of flexibility).

57% of the employees believe they have no possibilities of professional development at the current workplace.

There are no group motivation actions (team building, other common extra-professional activities) - 2 out of the 6 team leaders/managers and the general opinion of the non-managerial group interview.

The research results show that 21 of the respondents are stimulated by the working relations with their co-workers and that, at team level, everything is all right.

The problems arise in terms of the vertical communication (the superiors listen to their opinions, but disregard them, and the communication style is inefficient), in-between the teams and in-between departments; 50% of the salaried employees consider the offered feedback to be insufficient or, even, non-existent.

The employees do not feel valued or appropriately evaluated; only 5 of the respondents consider they are objectively assessed.

Moreover, 16 of the employees (over 50%) consider that only through good performance can they keep their workplace, which leads to the idea that some of the main motivations for the ones remaining with the organisation are the security and physiological ones. This conclusion is strengthened by the high scores under: 1. The importance of having advancement possibilities, of the professional development and growth opportunities and of contribution and merit acknowledgement, which means that growth and development needs, but they are not satisfied, and 2. The intention/thought of leaving the organisation (over 50% of the employees).

The environment-related elements (logistics) are considered as being above-average.

Although 23 respondents see this approach as being useful, there is no faith in the company management's taking measures concerning the raised problems, most of the interviewees thinking that this process would

lead to no result, would not lead to improvements in the organisational environment or to motivation increase (40 % of the questioned persons; only 10% think that the Company will take measures).

6. Discussion

The objectives (at company level, team level and individual level) are known by the employees, but the main causes of demotivation, namely, of the decrease in the employee yield, are:

- non-satisfaction of the needs for belonging, that the organisation can solve by organising social and group activities, which can lead to favouring the employee interaction, professional friendships, organising meetings at the organisation-level;

- non-satisfaction of the needs for appreciation and respect, which, in the organisational environment might translate in performance-based salary increases, appraising, mentioning names in various organisational contexts, providing individual desks/offices, granting titles, awards, other forms of recognition;

- non-satisfaction of the needs for self-update, namely, offering opportunities to reach high-performance, encouraging creativity, responsibility, promotion, autonomy.

Concerning the last research objective, identifying motivation strategies and motivational process improvement strategies, we propose the following recommendations for improving the motivational process, at Company level:

1. To present the Company vision regarding the salary and benefits package, the professional development and promotion opportunities to all the employees.

After noticing that we are dealing with a start-up company, and that most of the employees are still students or fresh graduates, at their first place of work, the need arises to inform the current employees, but also the new employees, as well as possible regarding the salary and benefit package, their professional development opportunities, as well as the possibilities and means of promotion within the Company.

2. To expand the bonus system to the entire company (depending on the performance, and on the financial possibilities); transparency in granting the bonus

Following the motivational process analysis, a general opinion arose concerning the low salary level. However, following the introduction of the

bonus system 3 months ago, this opinion is nuanced. The bonus system only applies to the operational teams. A recommendation was made to extend it to the entire company. Another element noticed following the interviews is the wish to have transparency in the bonus granting (the criteria are known, but it is known neither who got it, not the bonus category under which they were framed).

3. To introduce material incentives such as: luncheon vouchers, festive bonuses, annual salary increase (based on the performance and on the financial possibilities)

Another cause for discontentment concerns the lack of incentives such as: luncheon vouchers, festive bonuses, or an annual salary increase. The recommendation issued must be related to the financial possibilities of the Company and, obviously, to the employees' performance.

4. To elaborate professional development and promotion programmes for the persons considered to be valuable to the Company

Currently, there are no professional development and advancement opportunities within the Company. The elaboration and implementation of such programmes aimed at the employees considered valuable for the Company are required, this playing an important role in motivating, loyalty-enhancing, and retaining them.

5. To set regular meetings for openly voicing problems (not only operational issues)

Along with the strictly technical meetings, another proposition concerns the formal introduction of departmental meetings where the employees might openly express their issues, proposals for the improvement of various organisational aspects (communication, workload, process optimisation).

6. Leadership and communication trainings for the Team Leaders and Managers

A series of communication and leadership failures were raised following the questionnaire and interview application. 4 out of the 6 team leaders and managers did not previously hold a management position, nor do they have any theoretical managerial training. It is required that they attend a series of trainings, aimed at creating and developing managerial skills of leadership and communication.

7. To organise events aimed at building the team spirit, strengthening cohesion, and facilitating communication (team buildings, "open air" outings, movies, etc.)

Another outlined issue concerns the lack of events, group activities nonrelated to the workplace, aimed at creating a team spirit, strengthening cohesion, facilitating the communication between the members of various teams, and between the managers and the operational staff. The proposition refers to activities such as: team-buildings organised by the Company, but also other events involving lower costs for the organisation: “open-air” outings, group movie tickets, etc.

8. To communicate the study results to the employees

A first step towards improving the communication is that of giving a feedback to the employees regarding the results obtained from the questionnaire and interviews. It is important that they know that their “voice” was heard and that they are also informed regarding the opinion of their company colleagues, regarding the general opinion concerning the researched matters, etc.

9. To inform the employees concerning the changes envisaged to happen within the Company

If, following such a study, a series of changes are proposed, and they are to be considered by the top management, then, it would be advisable that the employees also be notified about the existence and nature of the upcoming changes, possibly, of their involvement in the successful change management, and the use of certain persons as Change Agents.

10. To proactively involve the employees in projects related to motivation, communication, and organisational culture

Along with the notification regarding the changes based on the previous recommendation, the employees need to be involved also in the matters that affect them directly. Listening to their propositions and requesting feedback concerning the motivational elements, face increases the correlation level between what the management is willing to offer, and what the employees expect from the management. The communication direction is not only top-down, but also bottom-up, and interdepartmental. These elements also contribute to the organisational culture specific to every individual Company.

By implementing and respecting these measures, the purpose of our research, namely, the improvement of the employee motivational process, in the researched organisation, will also be reached.

7. Conclusions

The employees' level of motivation may vary according to a number of aspects: inappropriate waging, compared to the employees' expectations, non-transparent and preferential granting of monthly bonuses, communication gaps, at all the levels, lack of professional development possibilities, nonexistence of group motivation actions, lack of employee valuation, subjective employee assessment, lack of trust on behalf of the employees that the managers would take improvement measures in what regards them. In some cases, the well-being state is hard to achieve due to the poor work time quality of work intensity. These could result in a motivational decrease affecting, in the end, the employees' performance. The role of the company management is that of identifying and mentioning to what extent reaching the organisation objectives would also ensure the satisfaction of the employees' own needs. Moreover, the knowledge of the employee motivational process and its improvement should truly be an important objective of successful organisation.

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