



IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION AS A MANAGEMENT SKILL

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INTRODUCTION

Statt (2000) defines motivation as “a general term for any part of the hypothetical psychological process which involves the experiencing of needs and drives and the behaviour that leads to the goal which satisfies them.” In essence, the motivational theories provide explanations as to why people behave the way they do. This paper explores the importance of motivation as a management skill. In so doing, it delves on the major motivation theories and subsequently identifies which of those theories have been proven effective within the context of management. The structure of this paper is as follows: first, it identifies and explains the following motivation theories: need theories; expectancy theory; equity theory; and goal setting theory. The need theories include the following: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Alderfer’s ERG Theory, Herzberg’s Dual Structure Theory and David McClelland’s Need Theory. Next, it evaluates the effectiveness of the abovementioned motivation theories in the development of management skills.

MOTIVATION THEORIES

In 1953 Viteles insisted that in the absence of a good theoretical foundation, applied research follows a path of trial and error; and becomes misdirected and inefficient. Indeed, there has been a significant body of literature that delved on the theories of motivation. These diverse motivation theories helped identify and determine the myriad of factors that drive people to behave in particular ways. There are numerous motivation theories with more than one way of grouping or classifying them. However, the most common one is to classify them according to four general types, namely: need theory; expectancy theory; equity theory; and goal setting theory. These are considered as the formal motivation theories. Additionally, there are also some informal motivation theories that are classified under the following general classes: (1) Theory X; and (2) Theory Y.

A. Need Theories

Need theories buttress the assumption that people have “psychological needs arising out of, though going far beyond, basic biological drives like hunger, thirst, sex or the avoidance of pain” Motivation in this case, is referred to the content of satisfying such needs; and the need theories are referred to as the ‘content theories’. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Alderfer’s ERG Theory, Herzberg’s Dual Structure Theory and David McClelland’s Need Theory all belong to this group of theories.

1. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory

According to Maslow, there are five key categories of needs that are arranged in a hierarchy. Needs belonging to the lower levels must be satisfied first, “before the higher level needs become important.” Physiological needs (e.g. food, water, air) occupy the lowest level in the hierarchy. This is followed by the safety needs such as security, freedom from danger, good health, etc. Next, are the social needs which are exemplified by love, affection and group acceptance? Next are the esteem needs which are achieved through “recognition and respect from colleagues and by voiced approval from others.” At the topmost level are self-actualisation needs which are associated with skills and potentialities; and “relate to finding self- fulfilment opportunities on which to build a career.”

2. Alderfer’s ERG Theory

Alderfer’s ERG theory is similar to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory. However, instead of five key categories of needs, the ERG theory only has three major needs categories, namely: (a) existence needs, which are the same as the physiological needs in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory; (b) relatedness needs, which are associated with successfully relating to others; and (c) growth needs, which are associated with self-development and growth. These three needs categories are also arranged in a hierarchical manner.

3. Herzberg’s Dual Structure Theory

This theory posits that “motivation factors affect one dimension, ranging from satisfaction to no satisfaction.” This theory groups needs into two general categories, namely: hygiene needs and motivator needs. Moreover, this theory assumes that people’s attitudes toward aspects of their jobs that are regarded as motivators, influenced job satisfaction and not motivation. These are referred to as hygiene factors, which include the following: interpersonal relations, company policies, working conditions, supervision, and salary and benefits. On the other hand, the motivators include the following: “achievement, independence, recognition, and responsibility, challenge and so on”. This theory is particularly applied in a technique used for structuring employee tasks called ‘job enrichment’. Herzberg’s Dual Structure theory suggests that managers adopt a two-stage process, wherein the first stage requires the elimination of factors that cause dissatisfaction in order to enhance motivation in the workplace; and the second stage necessitates increasing opportunities for “achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement and growth.”

4. David McClelland’s Need Theory

The Acquired Needs Theory posits that certain types of needs are acquired during a particular individual’s lifetime. Hence, people are not automatically born with such needs, but acquire them through their various life

experiences. These needs are grouped into the following categories: (a) achievement needs; (2) affiliation needs; and (3) power needs. McClelland explains that people with a strong need for achievement are more likely to enjoy entrepreneurial and innovative activities; while those who have a high need for affiliation are commonly successful integrators; and those that have strong power needs often attain top levels in the organisational hierarchy.

B. Expectancy Theory

The Expectancy Theory presupposes that motivation is largely dependent on an individual's mental expectation about their ability to perform tasks and subsequently receive desired rewards. In contrast to the needs theories discussed above, the expectancy theory does not focus on understanding the various types of needs, but rather, on the specific thinking process that individuals utilise in order to achieve their rewards. This theory places a particular focus on the relationships among the following factors: (1) the individual's efforts; (2) the possibility of high performance; and (3) the desirability of outcomes arising from the high performance. Thus, in essence, the expectancy theory posits that motivation is largely dependent on how much a particular individual wants something and how likely that individual thinks that he is to get it. Moreover, this theory suggests that managers need to recognise that: (a) employees work for many reasons; (b) such reasons may change over time; and (3) "it is necessary to show employees how they can attain the outcomes they desire."

C. Equity Theory

The Equity Theory presupposes that people are motivated to achieve and "preserve equitable treatment for themselves." In this case, equity is construed to mean the "distribution of rewards in direct proportion to the contribution of each employee to the organization." Hence, this theory focuses on "the exchange relationships among individuals and groups and the motivating effects of a perceived imbalance in the exchange." This theory could be further exemplified in the following manner: first, an input-to-outcome ratio is developed by the individual concerned. Inputs in this case, pertain to the contributions of the individual to the organization such as time, effort, skills, education, experience, etc. Outcomes, on the other hand, pertain to the rewards that are obtained from the organisation such as "pay, benefits, recognition, and promotions." Next, the individual compares the input-to-outcome ratio with what he perceives as the input-to-outcome ratio for some other individual, who could be a co-worker, or a friend working for another organization, or even an average person in his organization. If the two ratios being compared are approximately similar, the individual concerned may feel that the organization is treating him equally or fairly. On the other hand, if his input-to-outcome ratio is higher than that of the 'comparison other', he may feel under-rewarded and is, thus, motivated to make changes. Such changes may include decreasing his own inputs; try to increase his total outcome by demanding for an increase in pay; leave the organization; or carryout a new comparison with a different individual. Since pay is a most relevant outcome within the context of the equity theory, it suggests that managers avoid problems arising from inequity by ensuring that rewards are distributed equitably – that is, on the basis of employee performance; and that "everyone clearly understands the basis of his or her own pay."

D. Goal Setting Theory

The Goal Setting Theory posits that “behaviour is a result of conscious goals and intentions.” Thus, this theory was underpinned “on the premise that human action is purposeful, in that it is directed by conscious goals.” It has been observed that employees are more likely to be motivated to attain goals that are established by both their managers and themselves. This theory suggests that the manager must develop a thorough understanding of the goal setting processes of employees and the manner by which they attain such goals. Thus, in applying this theory, a manager can formulate and implement a reward system that “fit employee needs, clarify expectations, maintain equity and provide reinforcement.” Moreover, this theory essentially provides an understanding of the goal that a particular employee intends to achieve and the subsequent rewards that the employee could get if the goal is attained. The Goal Setting theory is characterised by two attributes, namely: goal difficulty and goal specificity. Goal difficulty is the degree or extent by which the goal becomes challenging and requires effort. On the other hand, in terms of goal specificity, “goal content can be vague (“work on this”) or specific.” It is recommended that a goal be specific, moderately difficult and one that the employees is motivated to achieve.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MOTIVATION THEORIES

There is a dearth in available studies that explore the effectiveness of motivation theories in the context of management in general, and in the development of management skills in particular. However, there are a few studies that explored such topics. One such research undertaking was the study conducted by Kini and Hobson in 2002 which evaluated the relationship between motivational theories and successful total quality initiatives. In particular, the researchers tested the effectiveness of the following motivational theories in the success of total quality initiatives: (a) Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory; (2) Alderfer’s ERG Theory; (3) McClelland’s Theory of Needs; (4) Expectancy Theory; (5) Goal Setting Theory; and (6) Equity Theory . In this study, the researchers constructed and distributed a survey instrument which was designed so that “the participants can enter a score between 0 to 10 to indicate the extent to which each of the item in the question was utilized in participant’s organization’s approach to total quality” and performed a regression analysis on the collected data. The results indicated that Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory; Alderfer’s ERG theory; McClelland’s Theory of Needs and Equity Theory were ineffective in promoting “organizational commitment to employee morale, cross training and performance recognition.” In contrast, however, the results of the study suggested that “a combination of major elements in goal setting and expectancy theories were most likely to produce success in the implementation of total quality initiatives.” Hence, this study found that the goal setting and expectancy theories were indeed effective in developing management skills in terms of developing an effective system to monitor TQI progress; of facilitating clear communication of performance expectations; and empowerment of work teams. In contrast, however, in a study conducted by Tesone in 2005, it was found the Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory had significant implications “for managers in organisations from the standpoint of recruitment, selection, employee retention, and performance improvement.” The results of the study indicated that younger workers prioritise socialization needs, “only to be replaced by more self-actualizing and self-esteem needs with age.” Managers may employ this understanding of “human intrinsic needs to develop effective strategies in the areas of employee recruitment, selection, and retention, as well as performance management.”

CONCLUSIONS

The motivation theories discussed in this paper, namely: need theories; expectancy theory; equity theory; and goal setting theory; indeed have management implications, and thus, are deemed important as a management skill. For example, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory can be used by managers in developing training programs that target the specific needs of the employees, for such training programs to be effective and subsequently produce positive outcomes. In the same vein, understanding of Herzberg's Dual Structure Theory can help managers eliminate the factors that cause dissatisfaction in order to enhance motivation in the workplace; and subsequently increase opportunities for employee achievement. Similarly, an understanding of The Goal Setting Theory can enable a manager in formulating and implementing appropriate reward systems that meet employee needs, offer reinforcement and maintain equity. The Equity Theory, on the other hand, can help managers prevent problems emanating from inequity by ensuring that rewards are equitably distributed.

Indeed, the motivation theories explained in this paper has important management implications. However, there is a dearth in empirical studies that confirm the effectiveness of such motivation theories in management in general; as well as their importance a management skill. Thus, theoretically, motivation theories are important as a management skill. However, there is a need for further research in this area if we are to confirm such claims empirically.

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