

Study of motivation theories importance to managers

Profession, Manager



Job performance of any employee is linked to Motivation, Ability and Environment. Ability of the employee is judged at the time of recruitment while environmental factors are the basic necessities required to work, which are taken care by most organizations. The crucial of the three aspects is “Motivation”. Managers and researchers have long been trying to find out why some employees work harder than others. 8 out of 10 times, the answer is Motivation! What exactly is “Motivation”? Motivation can be defined as a tool used by managers to encourage the employees in an organisation to do more productive work in their respective work areas. The managerial effort to support employee’s motivation represents one of the most challenging parts of a manager’s job (Bryce, 2000; Lawler & Thye, 1999).

This paper studies the different theories of motivation. It discusses why the study of these theories is important to managers and how it affects employees with a wide variety of intellect, social and economic background needs (personal and professional).

Motivational Theories

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs:

Maslow’s theory of motivation suggests that there are five classes of needs and that they are hierarchically organised. Physiological needs are at the bottom of the pyramid followed by safety / security need, need to belong and to be loved, esteem needs and self – actualization.

R. A. Goodman in his research, which was carried out to analyse whether or not Maslow’s theory is a useful tool for managers found out that a job which

offers no real hazards, reasonable security, good level of interaction opportunities serve to break down the hierarchical relationships posed by Maslow. In many situations, the middle three levels are not pre-dominant.

If a manager is successful in ensuring the above three factors for his employee needs, then he can motivate them to a great extent. The Human Resource department of a company can play an important role in supporting the manager to motivate the employees on these three factors.

In my previous organisation, I had manager from Australia and India at different career stage. There was no much difference in their styles when it came to ensuring the above three factors for our motivation. Be it nurturing of strong Safety culture, communication – both formal and informal (open door policy, where in an employee can walk into a manager's cabin for discussion anytime). Our company policy ensured job security at all times. This indirectly helped the managers to motivate their employees on that front.

Alderfer ERG Theory

Clayton Alderfer in order to synchronise Maslow's need hierarchy theory of motivation with empirical research, proposed a new theory called ERG theory. He classified the needs proposed by Maslow in a broader category namely: Existence, Relatedness and Growth needs. He states that at any point of time, more than one need could be operational and that the needs do not follow any hierarchy. He even added the aspect of frustration – regression to his theory. International Journal of Human Resource

Management (June 1, 2002) states that, One of the main strengths of the Alderfer theory is the job-specific nature of its focus. In the theory specific reference is made to pay fringe benefits, relatedness needs from co-workers and superiors and growth need satisfaction at work.

As a manager identifying these needs is important. Also, a manager should be aware that he cannot just concentrate on any one need of an employee at a time but he needs to cater to different needs as stated by the ERG theory at the same time. Thus, a manager should understand his employees well. Management by walk-around, social events and personal interviews can be helpful in this respect. An employee is best motivated when he knows that his manager “cares”.

Expectancy Theory

In the Journal of Marketing Research (August 1, 1974) Richard Oliver states that Expectancy theory of employee motivation is by and large attributed to Vroom [46]. But its chronological roots are found in the works of Lewin [29] and Tolman [45]. It is essentially a process theory. Expectancy theory assumes a fact that the motivational force experienced by an individual to select a particular behaviour from a larger set is some function of the perceived likelihood and that behaviour will result in the attainment of various outcomes weighted by the desirability (valence) of these outcomes to the person.

Vroom's theory hypothesized Motivation be a function of the multiplicative interaction of the valence of individual performance goal (V_j) and the

subjective expectancy that the individual's efforts will result in the attainment of that performance goal (E_j). Thus, $M = f(V_j, E_j)$. Valence (as per psychological definition) means the psychological positive or negative value that an individual attaches to an event, object or situation.

What should a manager learn from this theory? The valence factor for an employee is positive when he has desirable outcomes (like pay, recognition etc.) or when he is able to block the undesirable outcomes. The policies of the managers should aim to keep this factor positive at all the time. Even if a few people in the team attach a negative value to valence, it is not desirable as it is bound to influence many others in the organisation or team.

Assigning correct job to individuals, defining their job description and providing training necessary for achieving set goals are a few ways in which a manager can ensure positive value of valence. Monetary rewards or recognition for one's performance can be helpful at times. Accurate measurement of performance, feedback and guidance will give employees enough confidence to realise their performance goals.

Locke's Theory of Goal Setting

Locke (1968) has proposed a theory of "Task Motivation" analysing the effects of incentives such as knowledge of results (KR) and participation in goal setting on task performance. His basic argument is that task performance is not caused directly by the presence of incentives such as KR and participative goal setting, per se. Rather it is determined by one's cognitive interpretation and evaluation of the incentive and the goal aspirations that evolve from this cognitive process. In simple words, Locke

hypothesizes that, KR and participation lead to a mental evaluation and cognition of the task situation resulting in goal aspirations and these goal aspirations determine task performance.

The various features of this theory and the approach manager should follow are

The goals set for the employee should be clear and specific, particular and challenging but realistic.

A manager should gauge the ability of his employees before setting out goals for them. Setting goals which are impossible to achieve can harm employee's confidence and thus motivation. Unambiguous and measurable goals accompanied by deadline for completion surely helps to avoid confusion.

Employee should participate in goal setting. It generates greater participation from employee side.

A manager should discuss in length with the employees before setting their goals or objective, which should be in line with organisation objectives.

Appropriate and timely feedback directly contributes to higher and better performance.

As a manager, providing appropriate and timely feedback is absolutely necessary. In this way, the manager can make clarifications and regulate

goal difficulties of the employees. It will help the employees to gain reputation which will eventually lead to higher and better performance.

During my employment with Leighton Contractors, responsibility of a \$45 million package was entrusted to me. The package was in the critical path of the entire project. The goals were set up-front. The deadline was clearly defined. This helped me plan various stages of this mini project carefully with no confusion whatsoever. During the course of this project, my manager had series of discussions with me. He provided feedback on the work status on a weekly basis and advised me during critical / difficult situations. I really felt motivated seeing the confidence of my manager in me. This gave me a lot of positive energy to work more enthusiastically towards achieving the set goals.

Corporate Social Responsibility – A new approach towards Motivation

Philip Mirvis (2012) in his article Employee engagement and CSR states that CSR activities of the company or in few other cases, CSR activities specifically designed for individual employees is helping managers to motivate their staff. The employees when associated with CSR activities can produce social and business value through their volunteer service and through their jobs, relationships, products and services. This is a fairly new concept. Managers and organisations should weigh all the options before investing in any such activities.

Conclusion

Employees are important and crucial to any organization. Wiley, Brooks, Lundby (2006) emphasis on this fact that employees not only create value as individual contributors or team members; they also serve as keen observers of the effectiveness of their workgroups and the customer service environment. Thus, managers aim to keep their employees motivated all the time in a number of ways. The styles and strategies adopted by managers are vastly different. But they all are connected to one or more motivation theories discusses above. No book, journal or article will tell how to do, when to do and what to do to motivate employees. Different motivation theories can just act as guidelines. Manager's experience and skills in people management are the most important tools for this purpose.