

Motivating the generation y in the workplace



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Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory also known as the Two Factor Theory of Motivation states that employee motivation is achieved with challenging but enjoyable work where their efforts are recognised and rewarded. Two factors that influence employee motivation is intrinsic (motivation) following a natural desire to grow psychologically and extrinsic (hygiene) whereby job dissatisfaction stems from the desire to avoid unpleasant experiences.

Herzberg identified motivational factors as achievement, recognition, advancement, the work itself, the possibility of personal growth and responsibility. On the other hand, hygiene factors are necessary to maintain a relative level of satisfaction and include technical supervision, salary, job security, personal life, work conditions and interpersonal relations with workmates.

This paper therefore reviews the characteristics of Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y in the Malaysian workplace. As many organisations are facing difficulties in retaining the latest workforce addition, this paper studies the effectiveness of using Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene

Theory as a motivation tool for Generation Y. Observing the success of Malaysian organisations, research is supported by material from academic journals, books, newspapers, magazines and websites.

Literature Review

A generation can be defined as an “ identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location and significant life events at critical development stages” (Cennamo & Garden, 2008). A generation draws special attention to a shared or collective field of emotions, attitudes, preferences and dispositions and a set of embodied practices like leisure activities that each generation uses to create their own traditions or culture (Arsenault, 2004).

The three generations who complement each other in the Malaysian workplace are the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. A survey conducted by Kelly Services (2009) revealed that 50% of Malaysians say the generation differences make the workplace more productive, 33% said it interfered with productivity and 9% found no differences. However, because the latter generation is well informed, are experiencing globalisation and have a relatively easier life, Generation Y is proving to be a challenging group particularly when it comes to motivation as they are driving change at the workplace.

Baby Boomers

Most Baby Boomers form the senior management teams and hold all or some of the legitimate power in an organisation. However, most of the people in this generation are retiring. According to Forrester Research, Baby Boomers exit from the workforce will contribute to labour shortage of about

10 million qualified workers by end-2010 and will affect middle and senior managers and leaders in all industries (Unknown, 2010). Baby Boomers were born between 1947 and 1966 following the robustness of the post-war economy and high level of immigration (Appelbaum et al, 2004).

Today's leaders are products of their formative years and the values that they went through during their professional adolescence. They are highly experienced, work-oriented and stable in employment unlike their younger counterparts who favour interdependence, consensus decision-making and collaboration at the workplace (Sirias et al, 2007). Baby Boomers are resistant to change and into company loyalty and lifetime employment and will work to earn respect from others (Elsdon & Lyer, 1999). They are also competitive as they had to fight for their achievements.

Generation X

As Baby Boomers leave the Malaysian workforce, Generation X ("Xers") employees are taking over and getting promoted from their middle management level. Born between 1967 to 1976, Xers are the self-reliant children of Baby Boomers who grew up during a period of relative economic prosperity witnessing a dramatic political and social change which made them want a strong need for independence and autonomy in the workplace (Yrle et al, 2005).

Xers are described as individualistic, entrepreneurial, independent problem-solvers, adaptive to change and value-added providers (Sirias et al, 2007). Xers do not trust institutions and personal relationships as they witnessed their parents' failures and hardship during their growing up years.

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Generation Y

Having graduated and joining the workforce from 2000, Generation Y (“Nexters”) are also known as the Echo Boomers, Millennium Generation, Generation Next and Generation Why (Macky et al, 2008). They are the individuals born between the years 1977 and 1994 who have been heralded as the next big generation, an enormously powerful group that has the sheer numbers to transform every life stage it enters (Paul, 2001).

Nexters will develop community norms based on rules, standards and personal responsibility and will carve out fresh concepts of public cyberspace and use the information to empower groups rather than individuals (Howe & Strauss, 2007). In other words, Nexters are inquisitive, entitled, brimming with self-esteem and come with global perspective that is sure to transform the workplace and the world. They believe in collective action and have a will to change things (Zemke et al, 2000).

Analysis

A major global study shows that 61% of CEOs have enormous difficulty in attracting and retaining Nexters as they have a compulsive habit of changing jobs frequently and an expectation that employers need to impress them (O’Connor, 2009). Deloitte’s Lim Phui Cheng (2010) suggests 10 top ways to discourage Nexters from working in an organisation by banning social media websites, disallowing flexibility of working outside the office, not reminding them about the importance of work, giving mundane tasks, evaluation based on the numbers spent at the workplace, no praising for extra effort put in,

lack of transparency, shattering the work-life balance and providing an authoritarian stance.

However, an organisation that follows the recipe will face disaster just like some of the famous hawkers who have refused to change their ways and seek better technology and methods of selling their food. The Baby Boomers' children, especially those in Malacca, are snubbing traditional family hawker businesses as the beauty of food preparation is tarnished. In a random survey conducted by the team, the Nexters see bigger cities such as Kuala Lumpur and Penang having more modern infrastructure and working opportunities compared to Malacca. They view hawking as hard work, dirty, tedious, boring, not as profitable as a white-collared job and outdated in this era of globalisation. Nexters are also “embarrassed” to tell their peers that they work in a coffee shop.

This results in authentic food dishes being sold by foreigners, not tasting as good as when made by the original hawkers or extinct when no one wants to make the family recipes a business. Thus, as the workforce becomes older, new blood is needed when it comes to succession planning. If Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory was used, the negative perceptions associated with hawking could have been reduced. In fact, with better educated Nexters, the hawker food could be sold in a more comfortable atmosphere, marketed using Web 2.0 technologies, produced in bigger amounts using automation or increasing resources and distributed nationwide or globally with newer supply chains.

Although 96% of Malaysian respondents are members of social networking sites such as Facebook, Nexters value privacy and have a strong resistance to sharing personal information with employers (O'Connor, 2009) and will not necessarily add their employers as their “ friends”. However, by growing up with technology, they may not be able to discern the boundaries between personal and professional life. At the same time, not all Nexters are technologically inclined as they may be victims of the digital divide, encountered poverty and not had similar opportunities as their well-off peers or may be from a group preferring traditional methods of communication.

Public relations firm TQPR Malaysia receives Nexters interns during the higher learning institutions' semester breaks. Informal spot checks found nearly all the interns constantly updating their Facebook profiles and chatting with their peers on Instant Messaging instead of doing the tasks assigned to them such as following up on media attendance for special events that would indirectly mould them into future public relations practitioners. Some of the interns were reluctant to read the newspapers, preferring to go online to read news or independent blogs that appear to have free, honest, personal expressions and may address important but very sensitive issues such as politics.

However, as the management team were Baby Boomers and the support staff were Xers, they did not have a clear understanding of technology, policies limiting the usage of social networking sites were not available. Had there been a company policy defining the proper usage of such sites and included motivational factors, productivity and conflicts of interests could

have been avoided to the extent that the Nexters would have put in some effort and maybe even joined the company after graduation.

Recommendations

Challenges in attracting and retaining best talents affect the working environment's competitiveness in Malaysia. Taking the characteristics of Nexters and the situational analysis into consideration, should Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory have been applied in the workplace, perhaps the Nexters would have been more motivated to work and could have positively contributed to the enterprise's or organisation's productivity.

Hygiene Factors

Organisations who want to hire Nexters must ensure that the hygiene factors such as company policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations and working conditions are in place and live up to Nexters' standards.

For instance, the company policy should be fair for every employee. When recruiting Nexters, organisations can advertise how their mentoring programme produces successful employees in the organisation. This competency can be used as a motivating tool to attract Nexters.

Organisations should enhance their work environment with clearer lines of authority and team work. It is important to encourage Nexters to learn more about the organisation's goals, vision, mission, culture and strategies through training and induction programmes. A set of rules and policies should be in place with an appointed mentor who will guide young newcomers who lack direction and experience at the workplace.

Appointed supervisors should have strong leadership skills and emotional intelligence particularly as Nexters need a lot of supervision in their first jobs. In their first few months of joining an organisation, most Nexters will lack experience, especially in handling difficult people issues, miscommunications do occur and need to be addressed quickly. If they are in a service industry like public relations, they should not deal with the clients directly without the presence or advice from a senior person. Furthermore, management trainee programmes offered by banks and logistic companies with many departments are ideal for Nexters to test the waters as many do not know what they want to do after graduating. Nexters are looking to contribute, demonstrate value and enhance their working skills using methods they are familiar with. By being rotated in different departments for a period of time, Nexters will become indispensable and their acquired capabilities in a particular work area will allow them to shine in the corporate world. This generation wants clear direction and management support but seek flexibility and autonomy in task achievement and possess the real advantage of being very technologically literate and highly educated (McGuire et al, 2007).

No one likes to be taken for a ride. Thus, the salary should be according to the market rate otherwise a Nexters will job hop to a competitor's organisation and take their skills as well as the company's trade secrets with them. With instant access to the Internet and a wider network of friends, Nexters can easily check the salary scale of a job or particular industry. At the same time, Nexters do not want to become a slave to work and spend

their whole life bound to their desks. They could opt for a lower-paying job as long as they have the opportunity to learn and have meaning in their work.

Unlike Baby Boomers and Xers, Nexters prefer to work in teams as interpersonal relations are crucial to them. As Nexters are encouraged to express themselves freely, transparency, good dialogue and some clarity about the future engender trust and reduce anxiety. Furthermore, teams produce better ideas, progress and are the foundation of strong companies. Thus, organisations should encourage team building exercises, knowledge sharing sessions and team development programmes. Pricewaterhouse-Coopers Malaysia hosts a Parents' Day for over-anxious parents of its young Nexters recruits to see the human side of the organisation (Tan, 2009).

Lastly, the organisation's working conditions should allow Nexters employees to have some personal space. Younger employees are increasingly mobile, exhibit less organisational commitment but are entrepreneurial and technologically literate (McGuire et al, 2007). Important characteristics of Nexters need to be considered when developing workplace policies including Y-not as they are challenging the status quo and are committed to making things better, Y-fi as they hold the expert power of information communication technology, always connected with their peers and multitasking; and Y-go as they are comfortable with virtual meetings, games and even relationships (Henretta, 2010). Thus, Procter & Gamble employees are allowed to work remotely once a week, enjoy flexible hours and are supported in their engagement with corporate social responsibility programmes (Henretta, 2010).

Motivation Factors

Motivation entices individuals to work harder and increase their productivity and efficiency in an innovative way. Herzberg's motivation factors or satisfiers include work itself, achievement, recognition and advancement.

Work itself is a motivating factor especially when employees realise the importance of their performance in an organisation and obtain job satisfaction. Most people remain with an organisation due to quality and satisfaction derived from a rewarding and balanced workplace. Rewards and engagement of employees are very much motivated by some fundamental essentials offered by corporations and can be direct (pay), indirect (benefits) and intangible (non-financial). Herzberg suggests job enrichment be provided to employees to allow them to demonstrate their initiative, creativity and improve productivity. Forward-looking organisations, realising the potential of diversity, have developed and employed strategic diversity plans that take advantage of this diversity to become more competitive in the global economy (Arsenault, 2004). By knowing Nexters well and utilising their strengths, employers can create a workplace where people are not afraid to share their weaknesses. GreenPacket stimulates creativity amongst its new Nexters recruits by using one of the three "get out of jail" cards to avoid a telling-off when a mistake is made (Tan, 2009). However, the same mistake cannot be repeated.

Herzberg notes that people want achievement and will do a good job to reach clear set goals and standards. Nexters will work hard to prove themselves, particularly in tougher economic times and the best way to

recruit or communicate with them is via an online social networking tool like Facebook or Friendster (O'Connor, 2009). If organisations are not able to reach employees or if workers are unable to access needed information, the Nexters is likely to be dissatisfied. Nexters are not exactly a united group and do not see Malaysia as the centre of their universe, opting to relocate for work and pursue better opportunities (Tan, 2010) which could cost the country to have a brain drain or lost of highly skilled talents. They see the world as a playground with airplanes as their buses. According to the United Nations Human Development Report 2009, Malaysia's rate of emigration at 3.1% was higher than that of Asia's at 1.7% from 2000 to 2002. About 350,000 Malaysians were working in Singapore while 214,300 Malaysians were working in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries with 47.6% having attained a tertiary education (Yap, 2009). On the other hand, this could be due to better wages, increased productivity and efficiency in those countries which allow skilled workers to become more competitive.

Recognition is a motivating factor as people want to be recognised for their efforts on the job either through formal or informal praises. Employees should be praised generously and given constructive feedback in order to ensure them that they are on the right track. Yet, Nexters can be naïve at times although they sound bold when they ask the boss personal questions a more senior person would never dare without thinking about the implications thoroughly. No matter how educated Nexters are, they need to shift their mindsets and attitudes accordingly by adjusting their expectations and not

expect employers to accommodate their every point of view. There needs to be a two-way communication at the workplace to resolve issues.

Finally, it is important to reward loyalty and effort with advancement to allow people to be promoted and further educated. Nexters prefer career advancement opportunities, good work-life balance and good relationships as incentives to remain in an organisation. Although their occupational titles may not change, an increase in corporate benefits and job responsibilities or challenges according to their capabilities would be appreciated. Introducing programmes that reward Nexters for their creativity and training would also allow them to excel at work as it builds their career growth opportunities. They will feel empowered and trusted at the same time. Under DiGi's personal and career development plan, D'Plan, employees rather than the management direct their own career paths allowing employees to determine what they want to be and what they need (Tan, 2009).

Limitations

As every employee is unique, motivation will differ for each person and a price cannot be put on the factors that drive an employee's performance. It is possible that Nexters are influenced by both the hygiene and motivation factors at an organisation. Nexters' needs could be affected by different demographics, political, social, economic, technology exposure and geographic situations. According to Montana and Petit (2008), an employee's motivation is also affected by age, personal circumstances, external environment and the current phase of life and career. During prosperous economy, the motivation factors may be taken for granted unlike during times of unemployment and recession.

From Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, the effects of motivation may not be immediate. New Nexters employees in the workforce will endure a learning curve at the beginning of their careers or new job responsibilities causing the organisation to experience a decrease in performance as workers get used to their new capacities.

In addition, the hygiene factors are an expensive investment as employers may pay Nexters more but not receive the expected improved performance. It can be argued that while Herzberg believed that additional performances would not come from higher salaries, not every Nexters will be satisfied with solely creating an effect on their work environment if given the opportunity as they expect to be paid fairly.

Conclusion

Organisations are dynamic as people have desires to improve their careers and enjoy a better life whenever possible. With huge demands and supply shortages, only those who can resolve the retention of Baby Boomers, Xers and especially, Nexters, will survive. Compared to the Baby Boomers and Xers, Nexters are a very demanding part of the workforce as they have the ambition drive of where they want to be and what they think they deserve to get in terms of salary and benefits.

However, as the current workforce ages, organisations must learn to manage and motivate Nexters who will be a future asset to them. It is inspiring to have organisations such as DiGi, GreenPacket, Pricewaterhouse-Coopers Malaysia and Procter & Gamble offering Nexters a broad range of experiences, corporate citizenship initiatives, development and learning

opportunities as well as good work-life balance. This will further equip them with soft skills and a culture of lifelong learning. By understanding, motivating and inspiring Nexters, organisations will be able to face the future confidently as they will be grooming their successors.

Job enrichment should be a continuous management effort for the whole organisation. Although it is important to motivate Nexters so that they are delighted and will stay longer in an organisation, employers need to ensure that the remaining Baby Boomers and Xers are not neglected or they will become dissatisfied and leave. This would create an unstable working environment as equity issues are not addressed.