

EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

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The job of a manager in the workplace is to get things done through employees. To do this the manager should be able to motivate employees. But that's easier said than done! Motivation practice and theory are difficult subjects, touching on several disciplines.

In spite of enormous research, basic as well as applied, the subject of motivation is not clearly understood and more often than not poorly practiced. To understand motivation one must understand human nature itself. And there lies the problem!

Human nature can be very simple, yet very complex too. An understanding and appreciation of this is a prerequisite to effective employee motivation in the workplace and therefore effective management and leadership.

These articles on motivation theory and practice concentrate on various theories regarding human nature in general and motivation in particular. Included are articles on the practical aspects of motivation in the workplace and the research that has been undertaken in this field, notably by Douglas McGregor (theory y), Frederick Herzberg (two factor motivation hygiene theory,) Abraham Maslow (theory z, hierarchy of needs), Elton Mayo (Hawthorne Experiments) Chris Argyris Rensis Likert and David McClelland (achievement motivation.)

Quite apart from the benefit and moral value of an altruistic approach to treating colleagues as human beings and respecting human dignity in all its forms, research and observations show that well motivated employees are more productive and creative. The inverse also holds true.

Motivation is the key to performance improvement.

There is an old saying you can take a horse to the water but you cannot force it to drink; it will drink only if it's thirsty - so with people. They will do what they want to do or otherwise motivated to do. Whether it is to excel on the workshop floor or in the 'ivory tower' they must be motivated or driven to it, either by themselves or through external stimulus.

Are they born with the self-motivation or drive? Yes and no. If no, they can be motivated, for motivation is a skill which can and must be learnt. This is essential for any business to survive and succeed.

Performance is considered to be a function of ability and motivation, thus:

$$\text{Job performance} = f(\text{ability})(\text{motivation})$$

Ability in turn depends on education, experience and training and its improvement is a slow and long process. On the other hand motivation can

be improved quickly. There are many options and an uninitiated manager may not even know where to start. As a guideline, there are broadly seven strategies for motivation.

- Positive reinforcement / high expectations
- Effective discipline and punishment
- Treating people fairly
- Satisfying employees needs
- Setting work related goals
- Restructuring jobs
- Base rewards on job performance

These are the basic strategies, though the mix in the final 'recipe' will vary from workplace situation to situation. Essentially, there is a gap between an individuals actual state and some desired state and the manager tries to reduce this gap.

Motivation is, in effect, a means to reduce and manipulate this gap. It is inducing others in a specific way towards goals specifically stated by the motivator. Naturally, these goals as also the motivation system must conform to the corporate policy of the organization. The motivational system must be tailored to the situation and to the organization.

In one of the most elaborate studies on employee motivation, involving 31,000 men and 13,000 women, the Minneapolis Gas Company sought to determine what their potential employees desire most from a job. This study was carried out during a 20 year period from 1945 to 1965 and was quite revealing. The ratings for the various factors differed only slightly between men and women, but both groups considered security as the highest rated factor. The next three factors were;

- advancement
- type of work
- company - proud to work for

Surprisingly, factors such as pay, benefits and working conditions were given a low rating by both groups. So after all, and contrary to common belief, money is not the prime motivator. (Though this should not be regarded as a signal to reward employees poorly or unfairly.)

Managers are often confronted with high employee attrition. For most managers the easiest solution when a valuable employee resigns his job is to offer more benefits in terms of money and perquisites. But rarely does it work. Exit interviews often point out low moral due to infrequent appreciation and recognition of the contribution of the employee leading to de-motivation and disenchantment with the job.

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