

How To Motivate Good Performance Among Government Employees

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Abstract: The performance of any government is dependent upon its employees, especially the low and middle ranking ones, just like the performance of any other organization is dependent on its workers. Therefore, it is required that the government employees be motivated in order to achieve higher levels of performance. However, motivating government employees is not without constraints. Usually these barriers or constraints are different from the ones faced by profit making private organizations. Money is widely used by profit making organizations as a motivator whereas it is usually not available to motivate government employees. Similarly punishment including firing from the service is common in the private profit making concerns, whereas civil servants or the government employees are usually protected by the civil service rules. A look at the motivation theories, methods used by non profit organizations and methods adopted to motivate low paid monotonous work employees gives some clues as to how to motivate government employees.

Key words: Motivate good, government employees, civil servants

INTRODUCTION

The government is the biggest employer in the country. Its success ultimately depends upon how well or how badly its employees perform on their jobs.^[1] Leaders of the state-ministers and high ranking government officials give plans and visions for the future to the nation. They then rely on the effort of the employees of the state in bringing those plans to reality. Without their motivation, commitment and hard work all planning and goal setting will go to waste. Therefore where care is taken in sound planning, care should also be given as to how to motivate the workers who are actually going to bring those plans to fruition.

This paper looks at the concept of motivation in light of the motivation theories and programs and how best they can be utilized in motivating government employees to gain higher performance out of them. This paper is limited to the motivational aspects of low and middle ranking government employees e.g. clerks, assistants, accountants, foremen, technicians, paramedical staff, drivers, peons etc. These are the people who actually carry out the plans and it is up to them i.e. their performance whether higher productivity is reached or not. Therefore, it is essential to discover what the motivators are for them in order to achieve success. Similarly. What is the best way to motivate workers? What is the impact of paying workers or offering other incentives? How much supervision and training are needed?^[2]

There are limitations in motivating government employees as compared to employees in private organizations. The private sector has always had a variety

of positive and negative incentives to motivate individuals or teams of workers. The positive ones include bonus pay, stock options, gifts and promotions. Negative ones are based on the threat of dismissal^[3]. For a government it is usually not possible to utilize either of these methods. Financial rewards are out of the question because most governments use a rigid grade-based system for determining pay across the entire public sector^[4]. Neither is it possible to remove a non-performer from the service. And in most countries the law also makes it very difficult to fire a civil servant [government employee] for poor performance^[5].

With such handicaps it nevertheless becomes a challenge for governments to charge its human resources into achieving the desired performance levels. Telling them what needs to be done is one thing but actually making them perform is another. Various researchers have shed light on what really motivates a worker. Some have focused on just the tangibles whereas others have discovered the importance of intrinsic causes as the determinants of motivation. A look at the definition of motivation and what causes motivation in light of motivation theories gives an insight into the possibilities of motivating a worker.

What is motivation and what motivates a worker?:

Motivation is a process that starts with a physiological or psychological deficiency or need that activates a behavior or a drive that is aimed at a goal or incentive. Thus, the key to understanding the process of motivation lies in the meaning of, and relationships among, needs, drives, and incentives^[6].

Considerable research has been done to discover what key factors play a role in motivating workers and the best way to motivate workers. Several motivation theories have been developed to explore the issue of employee motivation. A set of theories called the Content Theories focus on the needs that people experience and how these needs drive and initiate behavior. A summary of the Content Theories of Motivation is given below:

According to Maslow's needs hierarchy theory, the lowest needs are initially most important, but higher needs become more important as the lower ones are satisfied. Alderfer's ERG theory is a content motivation theory that groups human needs into a hierarchy of three broad categories: existence, relatedness and growth. It also suggests that those who are unable to satisfy a higher need become frustrated and regress back to the next lower need level. Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory states that people are only motivated by characteristics of the work itself, whereas "hygiene" factors only reduce dissatisfaction. However, evidence suggests that hygienes can motivate to some extent. McClelland's learned needs theory argues that people have secondary needs or drives that are learned rather than instinctive, including need for achievement, need for power and need for affiliation^[7].

Another set of theories called the Process Theories describe and analyze how behavior is energized, directed, sustained and stopped. Following is the summary of Process Theories:

Process theories explain how motivation works through its process. According to Vroom's expectancy-valence theory, the intensity of a person's motivation depends on the value the person places on the outcome of a behavior multiplied by the perceived probability that the behavior will actually lead to the outcome. People are most motivated to seek results they value highly and think they can achieve. Reinforcement theory, pioneered by B.F. Skinner, says that people behave as they do because of the kind of consequences they experience as a result of their behavior. The supervisor can therefore influence behavior by administering the consequences (in the form of reinforcement or punishment^[8]).

Thus, the key to understanding the process of motivation lies in the meaning of and relationships among, needs, drives and incentives...Needs set up drives aimed at incentives^[9]. The question is whether these theories hold any ground in practicality or they are good only for to be made part of motivational text? The answer is a qualified yes. People who are motivated exert a greater effort to perform than those who are not motivated^[10]. 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^[11]. The motivation theories acknowledge the direct link between a worker's performance and motivation. Furthermore, these theories offer some guidelines for designing effective motivation programs^[12]. Although there are various ways in which motivation is defined and there are various theories which try to explain motivation but our purpose in discovering those theories was to get explanations of why some people exert more effort on their jobs than other^[13]. Then utilize these findings in order to maximize worker effort for realization of government goals.

Motivation theories in practice: Reinforcement Theory has proven that rewarding a work well done will serve as a motivator in enhancing that behavior. Utilization of some type of recognition programs as simple as a pat on the back, a plaque or a certificate are well taken by workers. A few years back, 1,500 employees were surveyed in a variety of work settings to find out what they considered to be the most powerful workplace motivator. Their response? Recognition, recognition and more recognition!^[14] Trophies, plaques and congratulating an employee are examples of recognition methods. The strength of recognition as a motivator is also evident from the example of Laura Schendell [who] makes only \$7.50 an hour working at her fast-food job in Pensacola, Florida and the job isn't very challenging or interesting. Yet Laura talks enthusiastically about her job, her boss and the company that employs her^[15]. In giving the reasons for her motivation Laura says What I like is the fact that Guy [her supervisor] appreciates the effort I make. He complements me regularly in front of the other people on my shift and I've been chosen Employee of the Month twice in the past six months. Did you see my picture on that plaque on the wall?^[16] Such is the strength of Employee Recognition programs that a low wage employee doing monotonous work feels good about himself or herself and the work he or she is doing. Laura Schendell's situation is not much different from low ranking government workers, who are on low wages.

The value of employee recognition is something which was also proved by Hawthorne studies conducted during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Hawthorne studies concluded that individuals ...may improve their performance simply because of the added attention they receive..., rather than because any specific factors being tested in the study^[17]. The strength of employee recognition and attention as evidenced from Hawthorne studies formed the basis for Human Relations movement in management. The human relations movement was carried forward by management theorists like Abraham

Maslow who put forward the Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory - probably the best known among managers today^[18] due to its intuitive appeal. Although Maslow did acknowledge the esteem needs of a worker which he put forward as a higher order need, he also recognized the importance of physiological needs (food, water, shelter etc.) which according to him are the most basic needs and without their fulfillment a worker will not be motivated to strive for higher level needs like self-actualization e.g. a work well done for personal satisfaction. So, it would be naïve to say that recognition and appreciation will placate the need for food, water and shelter. Most government jobs do ensure that the basic physiological and security needs of a worker are met. Precisely the higher order needs like esteem are the ones which remain unfulfilled and motivation theories have pointed out that these needs can be overcome through non-monetary means like recognition. In fact these higher order needs require intangible and intrinsic factors to motivate a worker. Therefore, there is no disadvantage in utilizing non-monetary means of motivation and desired results can be achieved without using money as a reward. Reinforcement theory confirms this hypothesis. Consistent with reinforcement theory, rewarding a behavior with recognition immediately following that behavior is likely to encourage its repetition^[19]. The reinforcement can be a non-monetary reward. Recognition can take any form...including personally congratulating an employee in private for a good job; sending handwritten note or e-mail message acknowledging something positive the employee has done...trophies and plaques^[20].

A study was conducted in Vietnam in order to discover the impact of non-monetary methods in motivating government employees. In order to identify strategies to assist the Ministry of Health to motivate staff..., the Hanoi School of Public Health and the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) conducted a study^[21]. The Herzberg's theory for motivation also called the two-factor theory was used as basis for the study design.

The two-factor theory distinguishes between motivating factors (or 'satisfiers') that are intrinsic to the job and the primary causes of job satisfaction and dissatisfiers (which Herzberg also calls 'hygiene factors') that are extrinsic to the job and the primary causes of job dissatisfaction, or unhappiness on the job. Job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are not opposites. Motivating factors include: achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, and growth or advancement and lead to job satisfaction. Their absence leads to lack of job satisfaction. Dissatisfiers include: company policy and administration, supervision,

interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status and security and determine the level of job dissatisfaction. Herzberg found that many of the dissatisfiers had a small effect on job satisfaction e.g. supervision; likewise some motivating factors reduced job dissatisfaction to some extent e.g. achievement^[22].

The results of the study confirmed that workers appear to be motivated by recognition and respect from their managers and colleagues and from the community^[23].

Role of the nature of job in employee motivation: An evaluation of the nature of government jobs will help identify the motivation techniques most suited for civil servants. Government jobs at best are monotonous. The only change that may occur is either a change of the supervisor or an increase in the work load. These pose a challenge as to what must be done to get higher performance out of a worker while retaining his or her high motivation levels. Digging deep through the motivation theories one might first find the needs of these workers and then devise strategies to enhance their behavior towards gaining higher performance and organizational success. The needs of the government workers are not different from the needs of workers in other profit and non profit organizations. They have the physiological and esteem needs like workers elsewhere. The difference may be in the impact government employees can have in the lives of the public. Regardless of which theory is followed, interesting work and employee pay appear to be important links to higher motivation^[24]. A job design addressing the issue of boredom and a compensation system addressing the needs of the workers could be expected to result in higher levels of motivation. Options such as job enlargement, job enrichment, promotions, internal and external stipends, monetary, and non-monetary compensation should be considered^[25]. Providing these factors can be challenging considering the bureaucratic hurdles in bringing about change and lack of funds available to carry out audacious compensation plans. However, government has been careful in revising the salaries of its employees which are now at par if not more than in most private jobs in Pakistan. To make the job more interesting, a creative job design from the options given above could serve as a motivator. One way of doing this is by aligning organizational goals with a worker's personal goals!

Management by objectives (MBO) as a motivator: No discussion of employee involvement can be complete without mentioning MBO or Management by Objectives, a widely respected and practiced management technique. The basic idea of Management by Objectives or MBO is

participatively setting goals and joint decision making by workers and management. Put forth by Peter Drucker, a foremost management guru who recently passed away (November 2005) has its basis in the Goal-Setting Theory. This theory has proved that aligning organizational goals with an employee's personal goals act as a strong motivator. Unfortunately at the government level MBO might be difficult to apply because the goals are not set by the employees of the government but by the parliamentarians or cabinet minister. For MBO to work there should be joint decision making and goal setting. However in government, MBO can be applied at a lower level e.g. at the level of an office which is responsible for its own targets. There the managers or supervisors can jointly make decisions with the employees as how best to achieve the targets of their office, and how much they can achieve in a particular time thus setting their own internal objectives or milestones.

The strength of employee participation as a motivator cannot be ignored, and if MBO is unable to be applied, simpler ways of making workers feel that their input is important to the management should be practice. In this regard evidence shows that even letting employees give their suggestions can contribute to employee motivation. One of the most well-known and widely used recognition devices [resulting in motivation] is the use of suggestion systems. Employees offer suggestions for improving processes or cutting costs and are recognized with cash awards^[26]. These cash awards are nominal and their purpose is only symbolic. Besides cash rewards employees also perceive intrinsic rewards in the form of recognition by suggesting ways for improvement.

Employees in most organizations would like to feel that their ideas can make a difference in their workplace. For many people, in fact, there are few things more motivating than seeing and assisting with the successful implementation of an idea they suggested^[27].

Controlling VS. motivating: Theory X assumes that workers inherently dislike work and they will cut corners whenever possible and coercion rather than motivation will get higher performance from the workers. Many organizations especially in the third world are running on this management philosophy. Therefore, many private organizations resort punishment as a means to control worker's behavior. However, this method is usually not available to control government employees as they are protected by legislature and service rules. Harvard University Professor Robert D. Behn has highlighted the non-availability of this option with the following lament: How can you motivate anyone in the public sector? Everyone is protected by civil service rules. We can't fire

anyone....How can they expect us to get anything done?^[28] Arthur C. Brooks an Associate Professor of Public Administration at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, USA has refuted this argument by focusing on the very essence of motivation which according to him is more than just controlling the workforce. He states that:

But motivation goes beyond simple control of the workforce. It also involves inspiration to achieve public purpose with vigor. Understanding this involves attention to the personal benefit calculation of public-sector employees. Given the relatively low salaries in many government jobs, a significant portion of the compensation is certainly non financial, as many authors in public management have noted. The core issue can be explained as follows. An employee in any sector earns compensation in money wages, fringe benefits, and non-pecuniary compensation (such as job satisfaction, public-spiritedness, experience, career enhancement and a host of other possible intangible benefits). If a potential employee chooses to work for government in spite of higher-paying alternatives in the private sector, it must logically be that non-money benefits are higher in government work for this employee. The lesson here is that under constrained financial resources--where wages are effectively fixed at a low level--the handle on worker motivation can be found in these non-financial benefits^[29].

The prestige and respect one receives from the society for being a government employee is part of the non-financial benefits in addition to job security and rich experience that could open doors for lucrative positions in the future in the private sector, international organizations like U.N. or overseas.

Lessons from the non-profit organizations: There are similarities between working for non-profit organizations and government. Government in fact is a non-profit organization. So, the motivation techniques used by non-profit organizations could be applied to motivate government employees.

Motivating forces for volunteers track fairly closely with those found among satisfied government employees: a sense of public service, skills acquisition and a workplace environment that features more security and less stress than in the private sector (to name just three that researchers commonly find).^[30]

This is just another proof that motivation through non-monetary means is possible. There are aspects of government jobs which are often overlooked but can serve as powerful motivators. Job security for instance is hard to find in the private sector but is the mainstay of

any government job. Therefore, it can be safely stated that it is possible to motivate a public sector worker and without using money as a motivator. The need is to understand the concept of motivation thoroughly and then apply it creatively.

CONCLUSIONS

As the world around us is changing so is the nature of work. New technologies have opened up new possibilities and imposed new challenges. Performance is at the heart of any governmental and non-governmental organization. Success depends on how hard the worker's work towards organizational goals. Workers need to be motivated to work towards those objectives. In this day and age, any company that wants to get ahead is going to have to have motivated workers^[31]. Hoping for big successes without properly motivating the workforce is like hoping bicycle makers to start making jet engines. The contribution of government employees in the success of a government achieving its goals is crucial. Realization of this fact necessitates investment in the Human Resources. This doesn't mean hiring few well qualified workers at key posts. Rather it is the whole government machinery which needs to be motivated to build a country, to take it from where it is at the moment to bigger heights. No one else is more responsible for it than the government workers. They are the ones to make or break a nation. Focus therefore should be put on government workers especially the middle and low ranking ones when launching any government initiative because it is they who will make it a realization or not. This means motivating the workers into achieving the set out goals and objectives. Without motivating government employees no government initiative will bear fruit.

We have seen throughout this paper that money is not the only motivator and there are other ways of motivating employees that do not necessarily require money. The task nevertheless of discovering what really motivates a worker is daunting but the paper has shown that there are examples where this has been done and with better results than if money had been used. The need is to realize the importance of motivation in getting a higher performance out of workers, then coming up with affordable ways of motivating employees.

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