The Quest of Managers to Find the Magic Formula for Motivating Staff Members

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Abstract

The following motivational theories are reviewed in the context of furnishing managers with basic ideas for factors that may motivate staff members: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y, Herzberg’s Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers, McClelland’s Achieve Drive, Pink’s Autonomy/Master/Purpose Theory, and Haden’s Theory that motivation is a result of achievement, not a cause of it. No theory of motivation that will work all the time, with every staff member, under all conditions. We advocate that staff members each have unique motivators. The power and intensity of these motivators vary from time-to-time for a given staff member, depending on the situation. Managers should consistently seek to identify motivators for all staff members they supervise and assist them through the application of the motivators to be their best.

Keywords: motivating staff members, managers

Context

Motivation is a staff member’s intensity, direction, and persistence of effort to complete a task and goals (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Motivation is a daily issue for managers in the context of staff members to: (1) maximize their potential, (2) increase productivity for the organization, and (3) attain job satisfaction. We believe that each staff member has unique motivators. The power and intensity of motivators vary from time-to-time for a given staff member. Motivation is not a constant quantity in a staff member because it often “comes in spurts” as a motivational wave (Pink, 2018, p. 112). Managers must recognize when each staff member has an emotional wave and effectively use it to maximize her/his productivity.

Motivational theories such as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y, Herzberg’s Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers, McClelland’s Achieve Drive, Pink’s
Autonomy/Master/Purpose Theory, and Haden’s Theory of Motivation give managers general ideas regarding effective motivators for staff members. No theory of motivation that will work all the time, with every staff member, under all conditions. For managers, the quest for “the magic formula for motivation” will always be just that—an ongoing quest in the context of what motivates a particular staff member, at a given time, under a specific set of circumstances.

Managers need to consistently seek to identify motivators for each staff member they supervise. Generalizations from the traditional theories of motivation represent starting points. Next, managers must analyze “what makes staff members tick,” what are their motivators, and what managers can learn to motivate them better. Managers must not only identify the motivators for each staff member but learn under what conditions these motivators are most effective.

If the span of control—the number of staff members supervised—entails a relatively large number of staff members (e.g., 20 or more), individualization of motivators is exceptionally challenging for the manager. Hence, at times managers may have to use generalizations of motivators from existing theories more than they desire. Eventually, however, managers must accurately identify the best motivators for each staff member, as well as when and how to use these motivators.

**Theories of Motivation Reviewed**

The motivation theories reviewed are Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y, Herzberg’s Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers, McClelland’s Achieve Drive, Pink’s Autonomy/Master/Purpose Theory, and Haden’s Theory of Motivation. These motivation theories are reviewed to furnish managers with general information on possible motivators for staff members. However, the astute manager is always on a quest to identify the most effective motivators for each staff member and when and how to use these motivators to help all staff members to be their best.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

According to Maslow, a staff member’s needs are arranged in a hierarchy from the lower-level physiological needs to the higher-level needs of esteem and self-actualization (see Figure 1). The physiological needs are initially a high priority because until they are reasonably satisfied; social, esteem, and self-actualization needs will not motivate a staff member’s behavior. Satisfied needs are no longer a motivator (Maslow, 1998).

Movement within Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is fluid. For example, while a staff member is in a state of flow and realizing self-actualization on the task at hand, an announcement is made that the office building may be the target of a terrorist attack. All people are instructed to go to the predetermined “safe areas” immediately. This staff member likely went from self-actualization (top the Maslow’s hierarchy) to the perception of physiological needs (at the bottom of the hierarchy) in an instant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy (Top to Bottom)</th>
<th>Examples of How Needs Can Be Satisfied by the Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Self-Actualization Needs**  
(Realizing one’s potential growth using creative talents) | Challenging work allowing creativity, and opportunities for personal growth and advancement |
| **Esteem Needs**  
(Achievement, recognition, and status) | Title and responsibility of job, praise, and recognition for work well-done; promotions; competent management; pay as related to status; and prestigious facilities |
| **Social Needs**  
(Belonging, affiliation, acceptance) | Friendly associates; organized employee activities such as bowling or softball leagues, picnics, parties; and digitally based activities |
| **Safety Needs**  
(Protection against danger, freedom from fear, obtaining security) | Benefit programs such as insurance and retirement plans; job security; safe and healthy working conditions; and competent, consistent and fair leadership |
| **Physiological Needs**  
(Survival needs such as air, water, food, clothing, and shelter) | Pay benefits, working conditions (Maslow, 1970) |


**McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y**

McGregor’s (1960) landmark book, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, ushered in the 1960’s decade of human relations and civil rights. McGregor built his theory of predispositions managers can have regarding staff based on Maslow’s works during the 1950s (Pink, 2009).

McGregor stresses the importance of understanding the relationship between motivation and human nature. He believes that managers usually attempt to motivate employees by one of two basic approaches which he calls Theory X and Theory Y. *Theory X* is the traditional view of management that suggests that managers are required to coerce, control, or threaten employees to motivate them. In contrast, McGregor proposes an alternative philosophy of human nature, which he refers to as Theory Y. *Theory Y* is a view of management by which a manager believes people are capable of being responsible and mature. According to Theory Y, staff members do not require coercion or excessive control by the manager to perform effectively. McGregor believes that Theory Y is a more realistic assessment of people (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2013).
McGorog also indicates that sometimes a manager may have to initially operate from a Theory X perspective due to a staff member’s negative attributes. However, the manager must work with the staff member to enable him/her to eventually be effectively supervised and motivated by Theory Y attributes. McGregor believes that the enlightened and progressive manager will usually utilize the Theory Y philosophy (McGregor, 1960). Figure 2 summarizes descriptors for Theory X and Theory Y.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory X</th>
<th>Theory Y</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The average staff member inherently dislikes</td>
<td>The expenditure of physical and mental effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work and will avoid it if possible.</td>
<td>in work is as natural as play or rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of the dislike of work, most staff</td>
<td>Staff members will exercise self-direction and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>members must be coerced, controlled,</td>
<td>self-control in the service of objectives to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directed, and threatened with punishment to</td>
<td>which they are committed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get them to perform effectively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The average staff member lacks ambition,</td>
<td>Commitment to objectives is a function of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoids responsibility, and seeks security and</td>
<td>rewards associated with achieving them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economic rewards above all else.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most staff members lack the creative ability</td>
<td>The average staff member learns, under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and are resistant to change.</td>
<td>proper conditions, not only to accept but to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>seek responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since most staff members are self-centered,</td>
<td>The capacity to exercise a relatively high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they are not concerned with the goals of the</td>
<td>degree of imagination, ingenuity, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organization.</td>
<td>creativity in the solution of organizational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>problems is widely—not narrowly—distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the population (McGregor, 1960).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Summary of McGregor’s theory X and theory Y.

Herzberg’s Motivation Theory (Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers)

A premise of Herzberg’s (1968) motivation theory is that “the factors involved in producing job satisfaction (motivators) are separate and distinct from the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction [also called hygiene factors]” (p. 56). Hence, Herzberg’s Theory is often referred to as the two-factor theory (Robbins & Judge, 2013). The work environment dissatisfiers (hygiene factors) spring from a human’s biological needs and drive such as physiological and safety needs. The motivators (esteem and self-actualization needs) in Herzberg’s theory arise from a human need for psychological growth through “achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility and growth or advancement” (Herzberg, 1968, p. 57). The dissatisfiers (hygiene) factors cause unhappiness on the job, while the motivators prompt satisfaction at work for staff members. The dissatisfiers (hygiene) must be met for the motivators like job satisfaction to work effectively. According to Thomson (2015) “people will strive to achieve hygiene [dissatisfiers] because they are unhappy without them, but once satisfied the
effect soon wears off” (p. 4). Figure 3 lists the factors for Herzberg’s motivation theory for job motivators and job dissatisfiers (hygiene factors).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herzberg’s Motivators (Job Satisfiers)</th>
<th>Herzberg’s Dissatisfiers (Hygiene Factors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Interpersonal Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Itself</td>
<td>Company Policies and Administrative Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Working Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunity for Growth and Advancement</td>
<td>Status</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Job Security</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pay</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Benefits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Herzberg’s motivators and dissatisfiers.*

**McClelland’s Achievement Drive Theory of Motivation**

McClelland (1961) studied motivation in the context of how it caused people to contribute to an achieving society. McClelland’s theory of motivation indicates that three needs explain staff members’ motivation:

1. *Need for achievement* is the drive to excel; to achieve in relationship to a set of standards.
2. *Need for power* is the desire to make others behave in a way they would not have otherwise acted.
3. *Need for affiliation* is the desire for friendly and close interpersonal relationships (Robbins & Judge, 2013, p. 207).

Staff members with a high need for achievement perform well when the job environment has a substantial degree of personal responsibility, feedback is provided on progress, and there is a reasonable chance (at least 50%) of success. High need to achieve staff members may be more in it for themselves than being team players. If high need to achieve staff members perceive a goal is attainable, they will pursue it with a vengeance.

The need for power often prompts staff members to attempt to impose their will on others to cause them to behave in a supportive manner—which may be contrary to the others’ desires. The need for affiliation causes staff members to seek out situations that are indicative of strong interpersonal communications and positive relationships with others. Figure 4 provides specific information regarding McClelland’s Motivation Theory.
Need for Achievement
A staff member with a high need for achievement tends to be characterized as an individual who:
- wants to take personal responsibility for finding solutions to problems;
- is goal oriented;
- seeks a challenge—and establishes moderate, realistic, and attainable goals that involve risk but are not impossible to attain;
- desires concrete feedback on performance;
- has a high level of energy and is willing to work hard.

Need for Power
A high need for power means that a staff member seeks to influence or control others. Such a staff member tends to be characterized as a person who:
- is concerned with acquiring, exercising, or retaining the power to have influence over others;
- likes to compete with others in situations that allow her/him to be dominant;
- enjoys confrontations with others.

Need for Affiliation
The need for affiliation is related to the desire for affection and establishing friendly relationships. A staff member with a high need for affiliation tends to be characterized as one who:
- seeks to establish and maintain friendships and close emotional relationships with others;
- wants to be liked by others;
- enjoys parties, social activities, and sharing personal information;
- seeks a sense of belonging at work and work-related activities.

Figure 4. Components of McClelland’s theory of motivation.

Pink’s Autonomy/Master/Purpose Theory of Motivation

Pink (2009) advocates intrinsic motivators—those desires and drives within staff members—are more effective for managers to use than extrinsic motivators such as compensation and awards. Hyatt (2018) stresses that extrinsic “motivators are rarely as long-lasting or effective as intrinsic motivators” (p. 157). This is supported by Weiss (2018) who states: “Financial rewards are less motivating than rewards related to intrinsic motivators” of staff members (p. 107). When staff members’ intrinsic motivators are driving their actions, they are in perpetual positive motion to perform at a high level (Cardone, 2011).

Pink’s (2009) approach to motivation is composed of three essential elements: “(1) Autonomy—the desire to direct our own lives, (2) Mastery—the urge to get better and better at something that matters, and (3) Purpose—the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves” (p. 204). Elaborating on these three essential motivational elements, Pink (2009) indicates that autonomy includes the desire to self-direct. “People need autonomy over task (what they do), time (when they do it), teams (who they do it with), and techniques (how they do it). Companies that offer autonomy, sometimes in radical doses, are out-performing their competition” (Pink, 2009, p. 207). Duhigg (2016) advocates giving staff members opportunities to make choices that provide them with a sense of autonomy and self-determination in the context of effective motivation.
Engagement produces *mastery* which is becoming better at something that matters to the staff members. Mastery begins with *flow*—optimal experiences when the challenges staff members face are exquisitely matched to their abilities. Mastery adheres to three rules:

1. **Mindset:** It requires the capacity to see your abilities, not as finite, but as infinitely improvable.
2. **Pain:** It demands effort, grit, and deliberate practice.
3. **Asymptote (an algebra concept meaning not following together):** It’s impossible to fully realize mastery, which makes it simultaneously frustrating and alluring (Pink, 2009).

Purpose represents “a cause greater and more enduring” than ourselves (Pink, 2009, p. 208). Within organizations, purpose is expressed in three ways: “(1) goals that use profit to reach purpose, (2) words that emphasize more than self-interest, and (3) policies that allow people to pursue purpose on their own terms” (Pink, 2009, p. 208).

**Haden’s Theory that Motivation is a Result of Achievement, Not a Cause of It**

Haden (2018) theorizes that motivation is a result, not a cause, of achievement. He believes that the way most people define motivation, regardless of the theory, is a myth flowing from their backward perspective of causation. This is because the common assumption about motivation is that it causes achievement or success. Haden indicates that *results from a staff member’s endeavor of a task*, as minuscule as they may be, should be celebrated as a positive step in the right direction because they are the motivators. This is supported by Achor (2018) when he states, “use progress to motivate people [staff members]” (p. 108). A series of these small steps motivates the staff member to continue, and even work harder to achieve the task. In sum, Haden advocates that *success breeds success* and true motivators are the successes toward task accomplishment.

**Summary and Closing Thoughts**

Interesting work and positive feedback from managers regarding achievement from managers are likely to be motivators for most staff members. Having a positive identity with the work environment—and the staff members composing it—is an important motivator for many staff members. Ideally, staff members’ basic physiological and safety needs—as well as common “dissatisfiers”—do not interfere with the aforementioned factors’ ability to be motivators. In reality, though, the changing work environments in many organizations over the past decade do not always adequately address the staff member’s perceived physiological needs, safety needs, and dissatisfiers. The bottom line is that managers have to motivate staff members in spite of this *declining work environment* in some organizations.

Managers are reminded that a staff member’s motivators, and their power in a given situation, are defined by the staff member—not motivators. There is no magic formula for managers to utilize that will motivate every staff member in every situation. Each staff member has his/her unique motivators that may vary in power from time-to-time and from one situation to another. Managers must engage in an ongoing quest to identify each staff member’s motivators and understand the circumstances that enhance her/his motivators in a given situation.
References

Footnote