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EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION THEORIES IN CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Employee motivation is a critical factor in enhancing organizational performance and achieving business success. This paper examines various employee motivation theories, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and their relevance in contemporary business management. The study explores how these theories can be applied in modern organizations to improve employee performance, engagement, and satisfaction. It also discusses the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors on employee behavior and productivity in a competitive business environment.

Keywords: *Employee Motivation, Motivation Theories, Organizational Behavior, Employee Engagement*

INTRODUCTION

Motivation is a driving force behind employee performance and organizational success. In contemporary business management, understanding and applying motivational theories are essential for leaders and managers to optimize workforce productivity and morale. Classical motivation theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, have evolved over time to address the changing needs of the modern workforce. This paper explores the foundational motivation theories, their application in today's business environment, and how they can be used to enhance employee engagement and organizational outcomes.

1. Foundational Theories of Employee Motivation

Employee motivation is a critical factor in driving performance, job satisfaction, and engagement in the workplace. Over time, scholars and psychologists have developed several influential theories to

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help understand what motivates employees. Below are three foundational theories that have shaped how organizations approach motivation in the workplace:

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Applying Basic Human Needs to Work Environments

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is one of the most well-known motivation theories, proposing that humans have a set of needs that must be fulfilled in a specific order. According to Maslow, individuals are motivated by five hierarchical levels of needs, ranging from basic physiological needs to more complex psychological needs.

1. The Five Levels of Needs:

Maslow categorized human needs into five levels, with each level building on the one below it. They are:

- **Physiological Needs:** These are the basic survival needs, such as food, water, and shelter. In the workplace, this relates to ensuring employees' basic needs are met, such as fair compensation and a safe working environment.
- **Safety Needs:** The need for safety and security, including physical and emotional well-being. In an organizational context, this can include job security, health benefits, and a safe working environment.
- **Social Needs:** The need for love, belonging, and social interactions. In the workplace, this relates to building strong relationships among colleagues, promoting teamwork, and creating a supportive work culture.
- **Esteem Needs:** The need for self-esteem, respect from others, recognition, and achievement. In the workplace, esteem needs can be met through recognition programs, opportunities for advancement, and feedback from managers.
- **Self-Actualization Needs:** The desire to realize one's full potential and pursue personal growth. In a work context, self-actualization occurs when employees are given opportunities to use their skills, take on challenging roles, and grow within their careers.

Application in the Workplace:

To apply Maslow's theory, organizations can focus on satisfying employees' lower-level needs (e.g., adequate compensation, job security) before moving on to higher-level needs (e.g., opportunities for career development, recognition). Employees who have their needs met at all levels are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and productive.

- Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory: Motivation Factors vs. Hygiene Factors

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (also known as the Motivation-Hygiene Theory) posits that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposite ends of the same spectrum, but rather are influenced by two distinct factors: motivators and hygiene factors.

Motivators:

Motivators are factors that lead to positive job satisfaction and increased motivation. These are related to the nature of the work itself and the opportunities for personal growth, achievement, and recognition. When these factors are present, employees are motivated to perform at their best.

Examples include:

Achievement and recognition

Opportunities for advancement and growth

Challenging work that provides a sense of accomplishment

Responsibility and autonomy in decision-making

Hygiene Factors:

Hygiene factors are elements that, if absent or inadequate, can lead to dissatisfaction but do not necessarily motivate employees when they are present. These factors are primarily extrinsic and relate to the work environment or conditions rather than the job content itself. Hygiene factors are essential for maintaining a baseline level of satisfaction but do not actively drive motivation.

Examples include:

Salary and compensation

Company policies and administration

Work conditions and facilities

Job security

Relationships with colleagues and supervisors

Application in the Workplace:

To apply Herzberg's theory, organizations need to address hygiene factors (e.g., salary, job security, and work environment) to prevent dissatisfaction. However, to truly motivate employees, organizations must focus on the motivators that create meaningful and fulfilling work experiences, such as opportunities for recognition, career growth, and personal achievement.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory: The Link Between Effort, Performance, and Outcomes

Vroom's Expectancy Theory suggests that employee motivation is influenced by the expected outcomes of their actions. This theory is based on the premise that employees will choose to act in ways that they believe will lead to desired outcomes, and the level of effort they put in will be proportional to the perceived likelihood of achieving those outcomes.

The theory is built on three core components:

Expectancy:

Expectancy refers to the belief that effort will lead to a certain level of performance. If employees believe that their efforts will result in achieving specific goals, they are more likely to be motivated to put in the effort. For example, if an employee believes that working overtime will result in a promotion or bonus, they are more likely to put in the extra effort.

Application:

Organizations can increase expectancy by providing clear training, resources, and support to employees to ensure that they can meet performance standards. This ensures that employees feel confident that their efforts will lead to the desired outcome.

Instrumentality:

Instrumentality is the belief that a certain level of performance will lead to a specific reward or outcome. For example, an employee may believe that meeting sales targets will result in a performance bonus or promotion. Employees are motivated when they perceive a direct link between performance and rewards.

Application:

To enhance instrumentality, organizations must ensure that rewards are clearly linked to performance outcomes. Transparent reward systems and performance-based incentives can strengthen employees' belief that their effort will result in tangible rewards.

Valence:

Valence refers to the value an individual places on the expected outcome. It reflects the degree to which an employee values the rewards or outcomes that result from their performance. If employees place high value on the reward (e.g., career advancement, financial bonuses), they are more motivated to perform well.

Application:

To improve valence, organizations need to align rewards with employees' preferences and values. Offering personalized rewards or career development opportunities based on individual employee needs can enhance the perceived value of the outcomes.

Application in the Workplace:

Vroom's theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between effort, performance, and rewards. Organizations can apply this theory by ensuring that employees believe their efforts will lead to high performance (expectancy), performance will lead to valuable rewards (instrumentality), and those rewards are something they truly value (valence).

The foundational theories of employee motivation—Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Vroom's Expectancy Theory—provide valuable insights into understanding what drives employee motivation and satisfaction. By addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, organizations can create work environments that motivate employees at multiple levels. Applying these theories helps organizations create strategies for improving job satisfaction, increasing motivation, and ultimately enhancing performance and productivity. Understanding and leveraging these motivational theories is crucial for fostering a positive organizational culture and achieving long-term success.

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation in the workplace is often categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic types, both of which influence employee behavior and performance in different ways. Understanding these two forms of motivation is essential for creating strategies that drive employee engagement and organizational success.

Understanding Intrinsic Motivation: Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose

Intrinsic motivation refers to the drive to engage in an activity for its own sake, because it is inherently enjoyable, satisfying, or fulfilling. This type of motivation comes from within the individual, driven by personal interests, values, and goals. Research by Deci and Ryan in their Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that intrinsic motivation thrives when three key psychological needs are met:

Autonomy:

Autonomy is the need to feel in control of one's actions and decisions. When employees have the freedom to make choices about how they perform their tasks, they are more likely to feel motivated. For instance, giving employees control over their work schedules or the way they solve problems promotes a sense of ownership and intrinsic motivation.

Example in the workplace: A software company might allow its developers to choose which projects they want to work on based on their interests or passions, leading to higher motivation and creativity.

Mastery:

Mastery is the desire to improve skills and achieve competence in a task. When employees have the opportunity to develop their abilities and overcome challenges, they experience a sense of achievement and satisfaction, which enhances their intrinsic motivation.

Example in the workplace: Offering employees opportunities for professional development, training, or challenging projects allows them to build and showcase their skills, reinforcing the motivation to learn and grow.

Purpose:

Purpose refers to the need to feel that one's work is meaningful and contributes to a larger goal. Employees who understand the purpose behind their work are more likely to feel motivated to contribute their best efforts. This is particularly true when employees believe their work is making a difference to society or the organization's success.

Example in the workplace: A nonprofit organization that helps marginalized communities can motivate its employees by connecting their daily tasks to the broader social impact they are making.

Benefits of Intrinsic Motivation:

Leads to higher levels of creativity and innovation.

Fosters deeper engagement and satisfaction in work.

Employees are more likely to persist in challenging tasks.

Reduced reliance on external rewards.

The Role of Extrinsic Motivation: Rewards, Recognition, and Incentives

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, involves performing an activity to attain an external reward or avoid negative consequences. This type of motivation is driven by factors outside the individual, such as monetary rewards, recognition, or job security.

Rewards:

Rewards are tangible incentives offered by an organization to encourage specific behaviors or outcomes. These can include salary increases, bonuses, or commission-based pay, and they are commonly used to motivate employees to achieve predefined goals or meet performance targets.

Example in the workplace: A sales team might be motivated by commission-based pay, where employees earn a percentage of sales they generate, encouraging them to perform at their best.

Recognition:

Recognition refers to the acknowledgement of an individual's achievements, either publicly or privately, in front of their peers or managers. While recognition can be both intrinsic and extrinsic, it is generally viewed as an extrinsic form of motivation because it is provided by others and linked to specific behaviors.

Example in the workplace: Employee of the month awards, praise during team meetings, or public acknowledgment of accomplishments can motivate employees to continue performing well.

Incentives:

Incentives are rewards or inducements that encourage employees to perform in a specific way or achieve certain outcomes. They can be financial (e.g., cash bonuses) or non-financial (e.g., extra time off, gift vouchers). Incentives often create a sense of competition among employees and can be particularly effective for short-term goals.

Example in the workplace: A company may offer a performance-based bonus for employees who meet or exceed sales targets, motivating them to work harder and achieve the desired outcomes.

Benefits of Extrinsic Motivation:

Provides immediate rewards and recognition.

Helps achieve short-term goals and targets.

Can enhance motivation in employees who are motivated by external rewards.

Can be a useful tool for driving performance in measurable tasks.

Motivational Strategies for Contemporary Organizations

Organizations can leverage both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to create a work environment that encourages high performance, engagement, and job satisfaction. Understanding the different motivational theories can help businesses design effective incentive systems and recognition programs that align with employee needs and organizational goals.

How Businesses Use Motivation Theories to Design Effective Incentive Systems**Linking Motivation Theories to Performance-Based Rewards:**

Organizations can use motivation theories such as Vroom's Expectancy Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to design incentive systems that align with employees' expectations and performance goals. By ensuring that rewards are linked to performance outcomes (instrumentality) and the rewards are valued (valence), organizations can motivate employees to strive for better results.

Application:

A company might implement a performance management system where employees who meet their targets (expectancy) receive financial bonuses (extrinsic reward). Employees who value these bonuses (valence) will be more motivated to perform well.

Personalizing Incentives:

Using **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** as a guide, organizations can personalize incentive systems to align with employees' needs. For example, younger employees (Millennials and Gen Z) may value career development and recognition more than older employees who may prioritize job security and financial rewards.

Application:

An organization can offer flexible work hours or opportunities for remote work to employees seeking autonomy (intrinsic motivation) while providing competitive salaries and bonuses to employees motivated by extrinsic rewards.

Balancing Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation:

Successful incentive systems often balance both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. For example, an organization can offer extrinsic rewards like bonuses and gifts for meeting short-term goals while providing intrinsic rewards such as recognition, challenging projects, and opportunities for personal growth to motivate employees over the long term.

Application:

A company might implement a recognition program where employees are publicly acknowledged for their efforts, combined with an annual bonus structure based on performance.

Employee Recognition Programs and Their Impact on Motivation**Types of Recognition Programs:**

Employee recognition programs can take many forms, such as Employee of the Month awards, peer-to-peer recognition, or spot bonuses for exceptional performance. These programs aim to acknowledge employees for their contributions and reinforce behaviors that align with organizational values.

Examples:

Formal Recognition Programs: Award ceremonies, team recognition events, and public acknowledgment during meetings.

Informal Recognition: Sending thank-you emails, shoutouts on company-wide platforms, or informal team gatherings.

Incentives for Recognition: A small gift or voucher for employees who go above and beyond.

The Impact of Recognition on Motivation:

Recognition plays a crucial role in intrinsic motivation by reinforcing behaviors that employees value. It builds a sense of accomplishment, belonging, and validation, leading to increased job satisfaction, motivation, and engagement.

Benefits:

Boosts morale and motivation by making employees feel valued.

Reinforces desired behaviors and outcomes.

Enhances employee retention by increasing job satisfaction.

Encourages collaboration and a positive organizational culture.

Peer-to-Peer Recognition:

Peer recognition programs allow employees to acknowledge each other's contributions, which can increase team cohesion, collaboration, and positive working relationships. These programs help create a culture where employees feel more empowered to recognize and appreciate the efforts of their colleagues.

Benefits:

Encourages teamwork and strengthens relationships within teams.

Builds a supportive, collaborative work environment.

Helps identify high-performing employees and acknowledges their contributions.

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are essential drivers of employee performance and satisfaction. By leveraging motivation theories, businesses can design effective incentive systems and recognition programs that align with employee needs and organizational goals. Balancing both intrinsic motivators (such as autonomy and purpose) and extrinsic rewards (such as recognition and financial incentives) enables organizations to engage and motivate employees, leading to improved performance, job satisfaction, and long-term organizational success.

Challenges in Motivating Employees

Motivating employees can be challenging due to various factors, including generational differences in motivation preferences and the unique conditions of remote work environments. These challenges require leaders and managers to adapt their strategies to ensure that all employees feel motivated and engaged, regardless of their generational background or work setting.

Dealing with Generational Differences in Motivation Preferences

Different generations in the workforce—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z—often have distinct values, goals, and motivations. Understanding these generational differences is key to tailoring motivation strategies effectively.

Baby Boomers (Born 1946-1964):

Motivational Drivers: Baby Boomers tend to value job stability, benefits, and work-life balance. They are often motivated by recognition for their experience, job security, and opportunities for leadership roles.

Motivation Strategy: Offering longevity-based incentives (e.g., retirement plans, healthcare benefits), recognition programs, and mentoring roles can be effective in motivating Baby Boomers.

Generation X (Born 1965-1980):

Motivational Drivers: Gen Xers are highly independent and value work-life balance and career growth. They are motivated by a combination of flexibility, autonomy, and the opportunity to develop new skills.

Motivation Strategy: Providing flexible work options, career development opportunities, and recognition for individual accomplishments will resonate with Gen X employees.

Millennials (Born 1981-1996):

Motivational Drivers: Millennials are driven by the opportunity for personal growth, meaningful work, and workplace flexibility. They prioritize purpose-driven work and career advancement over financial rewards alone.

Motivation Strategy: Offering purpose-driven projects, opportunities for continuous learning, and flexible work schedules or remote work options can effectively motivate Millennials. Providing regular feedback and mentorship also helps foster their motivation.

Generation Z (Born 1997-2012):

Motivational Drivers: Gen Z tends to prioritize work-life integration, technological advancement, and social responsibility. They expect to work with cutting-edge technology and seek employers who align with their values.

Motivation Strategy: Providing technology-driven tools, workplace diversity, and opportunities for social impact initiatives will motivate Gen Z employees. Encouraging innovation and offering rapid career progression are also key.

Challenges:

Balancing Expectations: Different generations may have conflicting expectations regarding work-life balance, career growth, or compensation. Managers must navigate these differences while maintaining organizational cohesion.

Adapting Motivational Strategies: It can be difficult for managers to develop a one-size-fits-all motivational approach. Adapting leadership styles and rewards systems for each generation's unique needs is essential for sustaining motivation across diverse age groups.

Overcoming Barriers to Motivation in Remote Work Environments

Remote work has introduced new challenges to employee motivation. While remote work offers flexibility, it also presents barriers to maintaining motivation and engagement. Leaders must adapt their strategies to address these challenges.

Isolation and Loneliness:

Barrier: Employees working remotely may feel isolated from their colleagues, leading to decreased engagement and motivation.

Solution: Regular virtual check-ins, team-building activities, and the use of collaboration tools like Slack or Microsoft Teams can help remote workers feel connected. Creating a sense of community through informal virtual events (e.g., coffee breaks) can help mitigate feelings of loneliness.

Lack of Clear Boundaries:

Barrier: Remote employees often struggle with establishing clear boundaries between work and personal life, leading to burnout and disengagement.

Solution: Encourage employees to set work hours, take regular breaks, and respect personal time. Offering flexible work schedules allows employees to balance their professional and personal responsibilities while maintaining productivity.

Reduced Supervision and Feedback:

Barrier: In remote work environments, employees may feel a lack of feedback and direction, leading to decreased motivation and job satisfaction.

Solution: Frequent feedback and performance evaluations should be conducted via virtual meetings to ensure employees feel supported and engaged. Managers should provide clear expectations and regular performance updates to keep remote employees on track.

Distractions and Lack of Focus:

Barrier: Working from home can present distractions, from household chores to family obligations, which can undermine motivation and productivity.

Solution: Encourage employees to create a dedicated workspace, implement time management techniques, and utilize tools for task prioritization to minimize distractions.

Practical Implications for Leaders and Managers

Leaders and managers play a pivotal role in motivating employees, whether working in the office or remotely. By applying motivation theories and adapting their leadership strategies, they can create a motivated and engaged workforce.

How Managers Can Apply Motivation Theories to Improve Team Performance

Applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:

Managers can ensure employees' basic needs are met (e.g., job security, fair pay) while also offering opportunities for self-actualization (e.g., career growth, meaningful work). By aligning job roles with personal and professional goals, managers can fulfill employees' needs at every level of Maslow's hierarchy.

Using Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory:

Managers should focus on creating a positive work environment (addressing hygiene factors like job security, compensation, and work conditions) while simultaneously providing motivators (e.g., career advancement, recognition, and challenging tasks) that lead to increased job satisfaction and motivation.

Implementing Vroom's Expectancy Theory:

Managers can design performance-based reward systems that align with Vroom's Expectancy Theory. This can involve offering rewards that are directly tied to employees' efforts and performance, making sure they understand the link between their actions and outcomes (instrumentality).

Creating a Motivated and Engaged Workforce Through Leadership Strategies

Lead by Example:

Managers should model the behavior they expect from employees. Demonstrating a strong work ethic, maintaining a positive attitude, and embracing company values can inspire employees to emulate these behaviors. Leaders who prioritize motivation and engagement set the tone for the entire team.

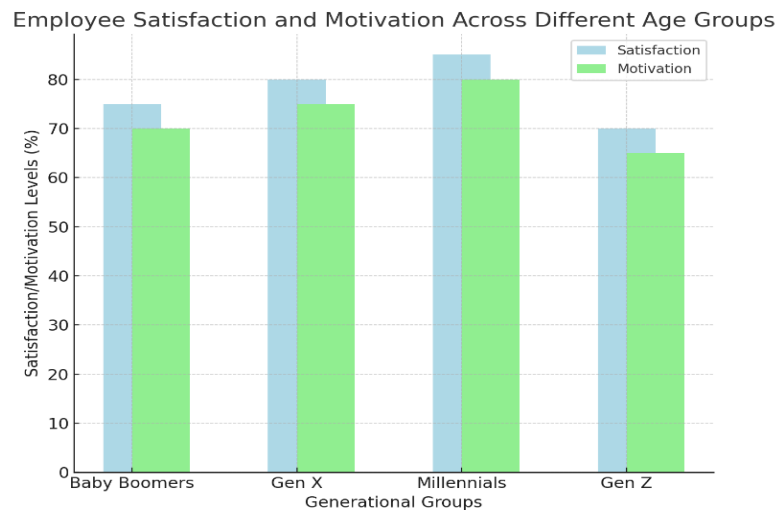
Foster a Culture of Feedback:

Regular feedback helps employees stay on track and understand their strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders should encourage a two-way feedback system, where employees feel

comfortable providing feedback to their managers, which creates a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad's research on Pakistani state-owned enterprises provides a comprehensive assessment of inefficiencies, financial challenges, and governance weaknesses. Ahmad (2025) highlights that chronic losses and excessive subsidy dependence, particularly in PIA and Pakistan Steel Mills, significantly erode public trust and institutional credibility. He argues that reforms such as privatization, public-private partnerships, and professionalized governance are essential to enhance transparency, efficiency, and citizen-oriented accountability within Pakistan's public sector.

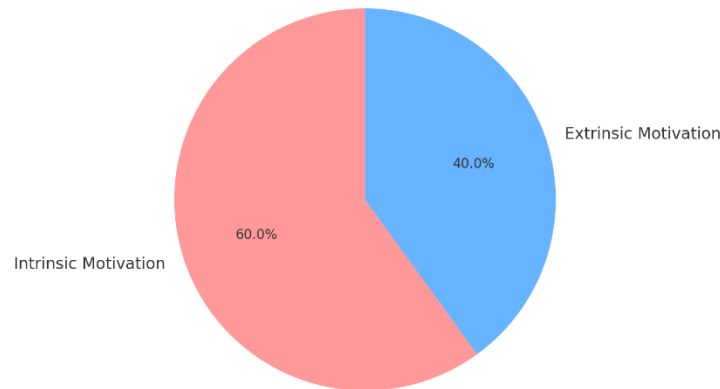
Ahmad (2025) examines how AI tools impact productivity, error rates, and ethical considerations in professional knowledge work. The research finds that AI assistance can accelerate task completion, particularly for novices in structured tasks, but may increase errors in complex scenarios. Ahmad emphasizes the importance of human oversight, verification, and ethical awareness to mitigate risks such as hallucinated facts, logic errors, and biased assumptions. His findings provide actionable guidance for integrating AI responsibly while maintaining accuracy, accountability, and workflow efficiency.



Employee Satisfaction and Motivation Across Different Age Groups

This chart compares employee satisfaction and motivation levels among different generational groups (e.g., Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z).

Impact of Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation on Employee Performance



Impact of Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation on Employee Performance

This chart shows the relative impact of intrinsic and extrinsic factors on employee performance in organizations.

\Summary:

Employee motivation remains a key determinant of organizational success. By understanding and applying classic motivation theories like Maslow's, Herzberg's, and Vroom's, managers can create work environments that enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. With the evolving nature of work, particularly in remote and hybrid settings, it is essential for leaders to adjust their motivational strategies to accommodate the changing needs and preferences of a diverse workforce. Effective application of these theories can lead to higher employee engagement, increased productivity, and improved organizational outcomes.

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