

Topic: Motivation - Theories

There are a number of different views as to what motivates workers. The most commonly held views or theories are discussed below and have been developed over the last 100 years or so. Unfortunately these theories do not all reach the same conclusions. Therefore, the HRM department needs to rely on a combination of these theories in order to devise varied motivation schemes from time to time and for employees at different positions and nature of job.

Taylor

Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856 – 1917) put forward the idea that workers are motivated mainly by pay. His Theory of Scientific Management argued the following:

Workers do not naturally enjoy work and so need close supervision and control

Therefore managers should break down production into a series of small tasks

Workers should then be given appropriate training and tools so they can work as efficiently as possible on one set task.

Workers are then paid according to the number of items they produce in a set period of time- piece-rate pay.

As a result workers are encouraged to work hard and maximize their productivity.

Taylor's methods were widely adopted as businesses saw the benefits of increased productivity levels and lower unit costs. The most notably advocate was Henry Ford who used them to design the first ever production line, making Ford cars. This was the start of the era of mass production.

Taylor's approach has close links with the concept of an autocratic management style (managers take all the decisions and simply give orders to those below them) and Macgregor's Theory X approach to workers (workers are viewed as lazy and wish to avoid responsibility).

However workers soon came to dislike Taylor's approach as they were only given boring, repetitive tasks to carry out and were being treated little better than human machines. Firms could also afford to lay off workers as productivity levels increased. This led to an increase in strikes and other forms of industrial action by dis-satisfied workers.

McGregor

According to McGregor, workers can be classified into two categories, Theory X and Theory Y.

Theory X type workers basically dislike work and are therefore reluctant to work hard. Money is the only motivator for them but even then they have to be supervised and pushed to work hard. The threat of being dismissed for poor performance may be necessary as a way of getting such employees to work productively.

Theory Y type workers are self-motivated and derive pleasure from working. While monetary benefits are important, it isn't the only motivator for them because they are motivated by more work responsibility as it makes them feel important.

Mayo (Hawthorne Effect)

Elton Mayo (1880 – 1949) believed that workers are not just concerned with money but could be better motivated by having their social needs met whilst at work (something that Taylor ignored). He introduced the Human Relation School of thought, which focused on managers taking more of an interest in the workers, treating them as people who have worthwhile opinions and realising that workers enjoy interacting together.

Mayo conducted a series of experiments at the Hawthorne factory of the Western Electric Company in Chicago. He isolated two groups of women workers and studied the effect on their productivity levels of changing factors such as lighting and working conditions.

He expected to see productivity levels decline as lighting or other conditions became progressively worse. What he actually discovered surprised him: whatever the change in lighting or working conditions, the productivity levels of the workers improved or remained the same.

From this Mayo concluded that workers are best motivated by:

Better communication between managers and workers (Hawthorne workers were consulted over the experiments and also had the opportunity to give feedback)

Greater manager involvement in employees' working lives (Hawthorne workers responded to the increased level of attention they were receiving)

Working in groups or teams. (Hawthorne workers did not previously regularly work in teams)

In practice therefore businesses should re-organise production to encourage greater use of team working and introduce personnel departments to encourage greater manager involvement in looking after employees' interests.

His theory most closely fits in with a paternalistic style of management.

Maslow

Abraham Maslow (1908 – 1970) along with Frederick Herzberg introduced the Neo-Human Relations School in the 1950's, which focused on the psychological needs of employees. Maslow put forward a theory that there are five levels of human needs which employees need to have fulfilled at work.

All of the needs are structured into a hierarchy and only once a lower level of need has been fully met, would a worker be motivated by the opportunity of having the next need up in the hierarchy satisfied. For example a person who is dying of hunger will be motivated to achieve a basic wage in order to buy food before worrying about having a secure job contract or the respect of others.

A business should therefore offer different incentives to workers in order to help them fulfill each need in turn and progress up the hierarchy. Managers should also recognize that workers are not all motivated in the same way and do not all move up the hierarchy at the same pace. They may therefore have to offer a different set of incentives from worker to worker.

Herzberg

Frederick Herzberg (1923-) had close links with Maslow and believed in a two-factor theory of motivation. He argued that there were certain factors that a business could introduce that would directly motivate employees to work harder (**Motivators**). However there were also factors that would de-motivate an employee if not present but would not in themselves actually motivate employees to work harder (**Hygiene factors**).

Motivators are more concerned with the actual job itself. For instance how interesting the work is and how much opportunity it gives for extra responsibility, recognition and promotion. Hygiene factors are factors which 'surround the job' rather than the job itself. For example a worker will only turn up to work if a business has provided a reasonable level of pay and safe working conditions but these factors will not make him work harder at his job once he is there. Importantly Herzberg viewed pay as a hygiene factor which is in direct contrast to Taylor who viewed pay, and piece-rate in particular.

Herzberg believed that businesses should motivate employees by adopting a democratic approach to management and by improving the nature and content of the actual job through certain methods. Some of the methods managers could use to achieve this are:

Job enlargement – workers being given a greater variety of tasks to perform (not necessarily more challenging) which should make the work more interesting.

Job enrichment - involves workers being given a wider range of more complex, interesting and challenging tasks surrounding a complete unit of work. This should give a greater sense of achievement.

Empowerment means delegating more power to employees to make their own decisions over areas of their working life.