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Moti-Faction: Retaining and Engaging Employees Using Motivation Profile Based Rewards

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Abstract

Organizations are searching for opportunities to increase job satisfaction, motivation for higher performance, and retaining their top talent. This study explores an assessment tool to aim rewards to individual motivation profiles so that companies can reach their potential. A survey exploring employee's attitudes on these types of rewards and an assessment tool to determine employee's individual motivation profiles was created and tested within a manufacturing corporate office through use of an online survey tool, Survey Monkey. Results showed that motivation profiles are evident and a relationship exists between rewarding based on the motivation profile's reward preferences and employee satisfaction and performance. In conclusion, this study has made apparent a need for further research including a possible longitudinal study that explores how age groups, job titles, and change in personal desires over time can affect an employee's motivational profile.

Keywords: motivation, employee engagement, rewards, job satisfaction, bonus

Introduction

In an economy that cannot afford large bonuses and salaries, businesses are seeking alternatives to keep their employees motivated and satisfied (Wegge, et al., 2010). There is an abundance of research covering the need for motivating employees and how doing so can have a positive effect on performance and job satisfaction.

Positive psychology explores the healthy aspects of human understanding and how life experiences can affect satisfaction (Money, Hillenbrand, and da Camara, 2008). By understanding what makes employees satisfied in life, one could understand how to motivate them within the workplace. Incentives and rewards used to motivate employees that appeal to their desires leads to intrinsic motivation which in turn leads to creativity (Grant & Berry, 2011). When that motivation is harnessed, employees are naturally motivated by the increase in productivity and performance (Robinson, 2010).

Historical theories have expressed the importance of human needs and desires and how they participate in motivation. Maslow (1943) discusses how people need to fulfil one step before they are able to move onto the next. An employee that is struggling

to pay their bills is motivated by meeting the basic needs on the first two steps in the pyramid. This employee could only move up in the pyramid to *esteem needs* and *self-actualization* once those needs are met. By understanding what this employee is motivated by, it could be more effective to reward based on those needs. Skinner (1953) believed that a person's actions were related to their desires and when a positive outcome derived from that behaviour occurred, the desired behaviour continues. Skinner and Maslow's theories could imply that if an employee is rewarded according to their personal desires and needs, behaviours related to job performance could increase, therefore increasing the likelihood of job satisfaction. Employees that are performing well and are engaged due to gratifying rewards could enhance the organization's chances of retaining employees. An organization that embraces these theories focuses on individual needs versus focusing on large bonuses.

Not all employees are motivated to increase performance when management uses cash bonus plans (Pittman, Tykocinski, Sandman-Keinan, and Matthews, 2007). Compensation cannot be denied as an initial motivator for employees (Mani, 2002) since people need a certain amount of income to meet their needs and desires. However, most employees would agree that how they are treated by management is just as

important. Acknowledgement, development, autonomy, and engaging tasks are responsible for increasing job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1974). In order to reach the level of motivation and performance organizations covet, job satisfaction must first be in place (Wegge, Piecha, et. al., 2010).

Looking past compensation and focusing on our employees as human beings, management could learn what drives each person. How people accomplish their objectives is linked to their individual characteristics, including their necessities, ideals, and personal circumstances (Latham & Pinder, 2005). Employees want to feel as though the company they work for cares about their well-being and appreciate their needs (Dewhurst, Guthridge, and Mohr, 2010). If reward programs were directed at individualistic needs, organizations could tap into their employees' motivational force leading to the performance levels sought after.

Research is limited but has been done in the field of salesperson motivation, exploring the career stages and the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Miao, Lund & Evans, 2009). Intrinsic motivation research has also been completed in the educational fields, but there is a need for investigation in other organizational settings (Salamon, 2000). Experimental possibilities are endless in the topic of employee motivation. However, theories in this field normally only explore one single aspect of motivation (Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge, & Bakker, 2003). Employers generally raise compensation to attempt higher motivation and job satisfaction but rarely reward based on individual employee need (Nelson & McCann, 2010). Organizations may attempt to investigate alternatives but peer-reviewed literature and research is scarce.

A practical assessment tool to be applied in organizations is an apparent need. The tool must be easy to use and time conscientious (Tremblay, Blanchard, Taylor, Pelletier, and Villeneuve, 2009). Barbara Moses (2000) gives a practical theory that could be used to create such a tool. Moses suggests that employees have different interests and, if given a choice, would not always prefer a cash incentive as their first choice. She goes on to argue that when incentives are geared towards individual partiality, the intended purpose of the incentive is more effectively received. In her theory, Moses gives descriptions of six different motivation profiles. An *Entrepreneur/Independent Thinker* is motivated by autonomy and prefers rewards such as bonuses, commissions, and cash. The *Careerist* seeks advancement and favours the opportunity to head a high-profiled project as their reward. *Lifestylers* are

stimulated with flexibility with a reward preference of vacation/flex time. Those who prefer teamwork would fall into the *Collegiate Seeker* profile and feel rewarded by sharing the recognition with their co-workers by having lunch for the department paid for. *Authenticity Seekers* are motivated by self-expression and feel appreciated by receiving gift certificates to their favourite retailers. Finally, *Personal Developers* are consistently seeking improvement so are best rewarded using tuition reimbursement or professional memberships. Moses explains that employees may fall into more than one category.

In order to find out if Moses is accurate in her presumption, it would make sense to conduct a study in an organizational setting. For the purpose of this research, the term *Moti-faction* has been coined as a way to combine motivation and satisfaction. In order to determine if businesses could apply Moses' hypothesis into their reward system, some assumptions must first be made. The first hypothesis is employees will have one or two dominant profile types based on Moses' six types of motivation. The second hypothesis is that employees will choose a reward that suits the profile they fall into. The third hypothesis is employees are more likely to perform at a higher level given a reward based on their choice versus a cash reward or no incentive. Finally, the fourth hypothesis is employees will state they are more satisfied with their place of employment when rewards are based on their profile type. To test these hypotheses, six rewards were created to match up with the six different motivation profiles. These rewards are not the only ones that could be used but fit the profiles to a manner which suited this study.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 75 salaried employees at a manufacturing plant in south-eastern Wisconsin. All employees included in the study are currently receiving cash bonuses if qualified under the corporation's bonus program. 67% were male and 33% were female, 33% were managers, 27% were technical experts (chemists, engineers, etc), 8% were project leaders, 15% were office support (HR, IT, accounting), and 17% were Internal Sales Staff. The majority, at 70%, has been employed for 10+ years at this facility and has held three or more positions while employed there. To ensure strict confidentiality, employees completed a survey using Survey Monkey from a link sent to them in their corporate email account. The survey consisted of five sections; the first being consent to take part in the research study. The second section

was demographic questions. Third was a word choice portion to determine motivation profile type. The fourth was a rating to ensure reliability of the word choice portion. Finally, the fifth section asked questions regarding reward preference, satisfaction, and performance.

Measurements

Motivation Profile. In portion 3 of the survey, employees were asked to choose one word in each of the 15 boxes of six words that most appealed to them. Each box contained one word that described an importance to those in each of the six categories from Moses' motivation profiles. These words were taken from a thesaurus based on words that Moses used to describe the motivation personality. The goal was to have a dominant category in which the employee fit into. Portion 4 of the survey asked employees to read each of the 12 statements and rank them individually on strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. These statements were also taken from Moses' article and elaborated on by the researcher. Two statements matched up with one of the six motivation profiles, and any response marked agree or strongly agree was scored along with the word choices.

Reward Choice. Section 5 of the survey asked employees to choose a reward they would like best based on scenarios given to them. These rewards also match up with a motivation profile and were included in the score for the profile type. Question 2 in the survey was not scored, since there was only three of the six motivation type rewards included in the answer choices.

Satisfaction and Performance. The second part of section 5 asked employees questions regarding satisfaction and performance if given a choice of reward. The final question asked the employee whether they would prefer a combination of cash reward and other choice from previously mentioned rewards or just a cash reward.

Results

Reviewing the first hypothesis stated earlier, employees will have one or two dominant profile types based on Moses' six types of motivation. Data showed that 53 (70.67%) of the respondents had three or less profile types that made up 60% or more of their answers. If scores were tied, all scores were included in the tally. All cases had one score that was higher than the rest, except for seven of the 75 (9%) which had the same score for the top two profile types.

The second hypothesis stated employees will choose a reward that suits the profile they fall into. When looking at how many respondents chose the reward that matched with their top profile type, only 36% chose the reward match. However, if using the top two profile types, such as most personality inventory tests do, then 62.7% chose a reward that matched with their profile types. Of the respondents that did not choose their top two profile types for a reward match, 9 of the 28 (32%) had evenly scattered scores among the profile types (*see Appendix*).

To test the third hypothesis, participants were asked if they believed their performance would increase if given the choice for reward over a cash incentive or no incentive at all. Respondents replied with 22.7% saying they would be more likely, and 33.3% saying likely. Forty percent were indifferent to the matter. The majority that chose more likely or likely did match with reward choice and profile type (*see Appendix*).

The fourth and final hypothesis stated that if able to choose their reward, employees would be more satisfied with their job and how their hard work was appreciated. Participants were asked if able to choose their reward, would they be more satisfied, indifferent, or less satisfied with their job and how their hard work was appreciated. An astounding 84% said they would be more satisfied (*see Appendix*).

Discussion

After scoring the tests, introspection showed that portion four of the test could have produced more accurate data if done as a force-ranked section with only six statements instead of twelve. This could have provided a more comprehensible picture of each individual's profile. Future research could revise the test for better understanding.

It can be said that employees would prefer to choose their own reward and that in most cases the reward would match up with their motivation profile. A profile test given at the beginning of employment could give management an insight on how to best motivate their employees as well as how to reward them. This would not only offer an environment of higher employee engagement, but also higher satisfaction which would affect the bottom line of the company.

Data shows that employees are more satisfied when recognized by more than just a cash bonus. Participants in this study shared, in a comment section on the survey, their appreciation when management understands that not all people are the same and

deserve recognition that is individual to their needs. However, using employee introspection rather than applying the method and recording the actual results gives a basis for further research studies. Previous research done in educational settings along with this study can provide grounds for an applied study within an organization.

Implications. Management struggling to retain employees, increase job satisfaction, and job performance could view this research as a possible indication that current methods of rewarding employees are ineffective. This research implies that employees are diverse in their needs and motivational triggers. As data revealed in this study, employees seek communication from management and feel appreciated when acknowledged either with words or rewards appropriate to their desires. Management could make an effort to ask their employees what rewards they individually prefer, rather than assuming all are motivated by the same reward.

Summary

Motivation is the driving force behind employee's actions (Wegge, et al., 2010). This study shows that motivation profiles are a reality and if used correctly, could improve employee relations. Organizations that want to retain high-performing talent, increase job satisfaction and production, and propel their company to the next level could look at using an assessment tool such as this to do so.

Many questions arose after this study was completed. Are there distinct profiles that match a career? Do age groups differ, and if so, why? Would employees change profiles over time to meet their personal needs? These questions could warrant a longitudinal study to determine a motivational theory that can be applied in the workplace. Further studies could alter the way businesses increase performance while addressing employees desires to be cared for.

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Appendix A Correspondence Table

Profile	Reward						Totals
	Careerist	Entrepreneur	Lifestyler	Collegiate Seeker	Personal Developer	Authenticity Seeker	
Careerist	2	1	0	0	0	1	4
Entrepreneur	0	16	1	1	0	0	18
Lifestyler	0	3	15	2	0	2	22
Collegiate Seeker	0	1	1	12	0	0	14
Personal Developer	0	2	3	1	5	0	11
Authenticity Seeker	1	1	2	2	0	0	6
Totals	3	24	22	18	5	3	75

Gender breakdown

	Frequency	Percent
Female	24	32.0
Male	51	68.0
Total	75	100.0

*Relationship between
motivational style and
preferred reward*

n=75

	Frequency	Percent
under 30	4	5.3
31-40	12	16.0
41-50	31	41.3
over 51	28	37.3
Total	75	100.0

*Age groups were defined
as: under 31, 31-40, 41-
50, and over 51*

Respondents Job Titles

	Frequency	Percent
Manager	25	33.3
Technical Expert	21	28.0
Project Leader	5	6.7
Office Support	11	14.7
Internal Sales	13	17.3
Total	75	100.0

	Frequency	Percent
More	63	84.0
Indifferent	5	6.7
Less	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0

Would employee be more satisfied, indifferent, or less satisfied with how their hard work was acknowledged if rewarded based on their preference?

Would employee be likely, indifferent, or not likely to perform at a higher level if reward was based on their preference?

	Frequency	Percent
likely	43	57.3
indifferent	27	36.0
not likely	5	6.7
Total	75	100.0