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Application of Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor theory in assessing and understanding employee motivation at work: a Ghanaian Perspective

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Abstract

This paper critically examines Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory and assesses its application and relevance in understanding the essential factors that motivate the Ghanaian worker. The two-factor theory of motivation explains the factors that employees find satisfying and dissatisfying about their jobs. These factors are the hygiene factors and motivators. The hygiene factors when absent can lead to dissatisfaction in the work place but when fully catered for in the work environment on their own are not sufficient to satisfy workers whereas the motivators referring to the nature of the job, provide satisfaction and lead to higher motivation. This paper adds to the understanding of what motivates the Ghanaian worker most and creates the platform for a re-evaluation of the thinking and viewpoint that workers rate motivator factors higher than the hygiene factors in the work setting.

Keywords: Frederick Herzberg, hygiene factors, motivators, employee, Ghana

1. Introduction

There are numerous motivation theories that have influenced the way organisations manage employees to achieve a motivated work force. These theories attempt to explain why people behave the way they do and advice on factors and strategies which when employed can get the best out of employees in terms of their commitment to work. Notwithstanding, because of the complex nature of the issues worth considering when motivating people, it is always not an easy task when it comes to organisations motivating workers for effective performance. Vroom and Deci (1970) put it: "The question of what motivates workers to perform effectively is not an easy one to answer". Indeed, a motive is something, which impels a person to act, a reason for behaviour. Motivation refers to the forces within an individual that account for the level, direction and persistence of effort expended at work Schermerhorn et al (1985).

Competition as a result of globalisation, information technology and industrialisation has compelled managers all over the world to seek to motivate their employees in order to get the best out of them and to stay competitive. This has led managers to employ all sorts of techniques to motivate and satisfy their employees. Although managers are quick to sometimes provide incentives like salary increases, provide security and good working relationships and opportunities for growth and advancement; the question is; do these incentives motivate and satisfy employees to give off their best at the workplace?

Frederick Herzberg in a bid to understand this question and the issue of employee satisfaction and motivation in the 1950s and 60s set out to determine the effect of attitude on motivation by asking people to

describe situations where they felt really good and really bad about their jobs. Herzberg found out that people who felt good about their jobs gave very different responses from the people who felt bad. The results formed the basis of Herzberg's 'Motivation-Hygiene Theory' also known as the 'Two-Factor Theory'. The conclusions he drew from this theory were extraordinarily influential and still form the bedrock of good motivational practices in organisations today. Herzberg revealed that certain characteristics of a job are consistently related to job satisfaction while different factors are associated with job dissatisfaction Ratzburg (2003).This is classified into motivator factors and hygiene factors which form the basis of his Motivational-Hygiene Model.

2. Motivational-Hygiene Model

The motivational-hygiene model states that employee motivation is achieved when employees are faced with challenging but enjoyable work where one can achieve, grow, and demonstrate responsibility and advance in the organisation. That is, when the employees' efforts are recognized, it brings about job satisfaction and motivation.

Environmental factors, such as poor lighting, poor ventilation, poor working conditions, low salaries, and poor supervisory relationships are causes for dissatisfaction in a job. These for Herzberg are basic needs and for that matter, is the responsibility of society's businesses and industrial institutions to provide for its people in order to self-actualize.

According to Herzberg, the work one considers to be significant leads to satisfaction. Thus factors that depict job satisfaction are completely different from those factors that lead to job dissatisfaction. Therefore, these feelings are not polar opposites: in other words the opposite of job dissatisfaction is not job satisfaction, but no job satisfaction.

2.1 Hygiene Factors

The hygiene factors are also referred to as the maintenance factors and comprise of the physiological, safety and love needs from Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They are factors that are not directly related to the job but the conditions that surround doing the job. They operate primarily to dissatisfy employees when they are not present, however, the presence of such conditions does not necessarily build strong motivation, Gibson (2000). These factors include; company policy and administration, technical supervision, interpersonal relations with supervisor, interpersonal relations with peers and subordinates, salary, job security, personal life, work conditions and status. Herzberg called these hygiene factors, since they are necessary to maintain a reasonable level of satisfaction and can also cause dissatisfaction. The hygiene factors are not direct motivators but are necessary to prevent dissatisfaction and at the same time serve as a starting point for motivation. However, improvements in these conditions do not create motivation, Huling (2003).

2.2 Motivator Factors

According to Herzberg, the motivator factors pertain to the job content, they are intrinsic to the job itself and do not result from "carrot and stick incentives". They comprise the physiological need for growth and recognition. The absence of these factors does not prove highly dissatisfying but when present, they build strong levels of motivation that result in good job performance. They are therefore called satisfiers or motivators. These factors include; achievement, recognition, advancement, the work itself, the possibility of personal growth and responsibility.

Combining the hygiene and motivator factors can result in some scenarios namely:

- High hygiene + high motivation, the ideal situation where employees are highly motivated and have few complaints.

- High hygiene + low motivation: Employees have few complaints but are not highly motivated. The job is then perceived as a pay check.
- Low hygiene + high motivation: employees are motivated but have a lot of complaints. A situation where the job is exciting and challenging but salaries and work conditions are not.
- Low hygiene + low motivation: the worse situation unmotivated employees with lots of complaints.

This theory sought to encourage managers not to be one-sided in considering factors to motivate employees but rather consider all the two factors in order to optimally motivate and satisfy employees to get the best out of them.

2.3 How do Managers eliminate job dissatisfaction?

According to Herzberg (1987) managers need to eliminate the dissatisfaction by doing the following:

- Fix poor and obstructive company policies;
- Provide effective, supportive and non-intrusive supervision;
- Create and support the culture of respect and dignity for all team members;
- Ensure that wages and salaries are competitive;
- Provide job security;
- Build job status by providing meaningful work for all positions.

The above actions help in eliminating job dissatisfaction in organisations and there is no point trying to motivate people or employees until these issues are addressed. Addressing the above issues should not be an end in itself but rather managers are to be aware that just because someone is not dissatisfied does not mean one is satisfied either. It is crucial in the work environment to identify conditions for job satisfaction.

2.4 How then do managers create conditions for job satisfaction?

Herzberg (1987) advanced that there is the need to address the motivating factors associated with work, this he called job enrichment. His premise was that every job should be examined to determine how it could be made better and more satisfying to the person doing it. Hence, managers need to consider and include:

- Providing opportunities for achievement;
- Recognizing workers contributions;
- Creating work that is rewarding and that matches the skills and abilities of the employee;
- Giving as much responsibility to each team member as possible;
- Providing opportunities to advance in the company through internal promotions;
- Offering training and development opportunities so that people can pursue the positions they want within the company.

Herzberg theory is largely responsible for the practice of allowing people greater responsibility for planning and controlling their work, as a means of increasing motivation and satisfaction. The relationship between motivation and job satisfaction is not overly complex. The problem is many employers and managers look at the hygiene factors as a way to motivate when in fact, beyond the very short term, they do very little to motivate. Perhaps managers like to use this approach because the thinking is that people are more financially motivated than they are, or it takes less management effort to raise wages than it does to re-evaluate company policies and redesigning jobs for maximum satisfaction. In seeking to motivate people, first management in organisations must identify and address things that make workers unhappy about the workplace environment. Furthermore management has a responsibility to ensure that workers are treated

fairly and with respect including helping workers to grow within their jobs and giving them opportunities for achievement.

Although Herzberg's theory was generally accepted, there are some criticisms that it applies least to people with largely unskilled jobs or those whose work are uninteresting, repetitive, monotonous and limited in scope. He was also accused of assuming a correlation between satisfaction and productivity though his research stressed satisfaction and ignored productivity. Recent research indicates that employee satisfaction does not necessarily contribute directly to productivity. Satisfaction may be viewed as a passive attribute, while more proactive measures such as motivation levels are viewed as more closely linked to behavioural change and performance Hayday (2003). Despite such criticism, there is still evidence of support for the continuing relevance of Herzberg's theory.

3. Literature Review

To better understand employee attitudes and motivation, there is the need to dive into other theories and the views of people about Fredrick Herzberg's theory. The content of Herzberg's theory has widely been accepted as relevant in motivating employees to give off their best in organisations. Further research has proved that the employee is more motivated by intrinsic factors as captured in Herzberg's motivator needs than anything else. For instance, a survey by the Development Dimensions International, published in the UK Times newspaper in 2004 interviewed 1,000 employees from organisations employing more than 500 workers. The survey found out that many of these employees were bored with their jobs, lacked commitment and were looking for new jobs. It further showed that, the main reasons why employees were leaving their jobs were lack of stimulus jobs and no opportunity for advancement. Employees wanted more challenging jobs that were exciting to do. The survey concluded that the factors that motivate employees most were found to be achievement, responsibility, personal growth among others. Clearly the provision of enriched jobs by managers has the capacity to make employees feel motivated. This is one of the main ideas captured in Herzberg's theory.

In their book, 'Understanding and Managing Organisational Behaviour', George and Jones (2005) highlighted on the attention Frederick Herzberg paid to motivator needs and to work itself, as determinants of job satisfaction. They therefore entreated managers to pay special attention to the important topic of job design and its effect on organisational behaviour and employee motivation. George and Jones (2005) advised managers to concentrate on designing jobs that would create job enlargement and enrichment thereby increasing the number of tasks an employee performs, increasing employee's responsibility and control over the work. By so doing, managers would be serving the motivator needs of employees as postulated by Herzberg.

To further highlight and give premium to the role of motivator needs in motivating employees, Frederick Herzberg published an article in the Harvard Business Journal in 1968 and with a thought provoking title: 'One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?' Herzberg emphasised that the psychology of motivation is very complex, but the surest way of getting someone to do something was what he termed as KITA (Kick in the Ass). He explained KITA as managing employees by 'direct action' whereby managers shout and kick employees literally to get a job done. He reckoned that KITA might produce some change in behaviour, but it does very little or nothing to motivate. This article sought to give further dichotomy between motivation and satisfaction as captured in his 'Two-factor' theory. He explained that things like praise, money, promotion and others do not motivate employees but rather, making their jobs interesting, getting achievement from their jobs, recognition, responsibility and the work itself do.

To provide strong support for Herzberg's theory of motivation and its impact on employees, a study by the Gallup Organisation captured in the book 'First, Break All The Rules: What The World's Great Managers Do', written by Marcus Buckingham appears to provide support to the division of satisfaction and dissatisfaction onto two separate scales. In this book, the author discusses how the study identified twelve questions that provide a framework for determining high performing individuals and organisations. These twelve questions align squarely with Herzberg's motivation factors while hygiene factors were determined to have little effect on motivating high performance.

In as much as some behavioural scientists agree with Herzberg that employees are well motivated when the motivator factors are achieved, there are other schools of thought that share different opinion. Some behavioural scientist also argue that there is more to motivating employees and getting them satisfied than just the motivator factors enumerated by Frederick Herzberg.

On another interesting note, some behavioural scientists have sought to invalidate Frederick Herzberg's motivation-hygiene claiming it lacks empirical support. One such scientist is King (2005). In his book; 'Clarification and Evaluation of the Two-factor Theory' which appeared in the Psychological Bulletin, he sought to explicate and evaluate five distinct versions of the two-factor theory of job satisfaction. He concluded that two of these versions are invalid as they are not supported by any empirical studies. He claimed that the other versions were also invalid as their alleged empirical support merely reflects 'e' coding biases.

Hackman and Oldham (1976) also criticized Herzberg's theory by suggesting that Herzberg's original formulation of the model may have been a methodological artifact. They further explained that the theory does not consider individual differences, conversely predicting all employees will react in an identical manner to changes in motivating-hygiene factors. Furthermore, Hackman and Oldham (1976) raised the concern that Herzberg's theory did not specify how motivation and hygiene factors are to be measured.

While some behavioural scientist raised issues with the 'critical incident technique used by Herzberg in collecting data as inappropriate, others like Bellot and Tutor (1990) had problems with the type of employees used. According to a research study conducted by Tutor in 1986 with Tennessee Career Ladder Program (TCLP), they concluded that not all employees are motivated by Herzberg's 'motivator needs' and that, teachers especially were more motivated by hygiene needs like money. They criticized Herzberg for using employees from only the industrial sector.

4. The Application: The Case of Ghana

Some managers in African organisations particularly Ghana, perhaps because of societal norms and expectations emphasise bureaucratic practices with total reliance on rules and regulations that workers obey without questioning or offering constructive criticisms. This culture is prevalent in the Ghanaian civil and public sectors. The bureaucratic practice usually creates an impersonal organisational climate, often not conducive to the achievement of organisational goals. This leads to the employees working as robots and following rules and regulations without taking initiatives of their own. This impersonal and mechanistic environment, according to Kippis (1976), alienates workers from both their jobs and the organisations. Consequently, workers behaviour as a result of this is often directed towards meeting their personal needs instead of those of the organisation. Furthermore, managers, engaged in these bureaucratic practices, are often more interested in exercising absolute power over their employees than in working towards organisational goals and objectives through their employees. The managers, as pointed out by Jaeger and Kanungo (1990), have patronising attitudes towards their employees, criticizing them openly, maintain a certain psychological and physical distance from them, and use a legal, rigid and coercive style of management. Employees who work under such organisations or environments are often not motivated to do their work; they feel powerless, reluctant, hostile and unable to take initiative of their own.

In spite of this behaviour on the part of some Ghanaian employers and managers in both public and private organisations, managers often complain about the low productivity of their workers. There are also complaints that the workforce is lazy, not committed, indifferent to the product of their labour and are frequently absent from work. Managers in Ghana often blame their failure to succeed on the poor work ethics of their employees. However, the important question to be asked and thoroughly examined is whether managers in Ghana are applying relevant motivation techniques in getting the best out of their workers.

According to Jaeger & Kanungo (1990), the African worker is often portrayed as content with just having employment of any kind rather than facing the threat of hunger from unemployment. In as much as the African worker and for that matter the Ghanaian is much interested in getting employment for survival, it is

important for managers in Ghanaian organisations to note that employees can be well motivated to work without being perceived as driven purely by the financial benefits that are to be gained because of the work they do. However, this will require an understanding of the needs and strategies that will unleash the total commitment of workers in pursing organisational objectives.

4.1 Hygiene factors: The Ghanaian situation

The Ghanaian employee like everyone else is also faced with "bread and butter" issues and more so because of the high cost of living and sometimes unfavorable economic conditions. It is therefore not surprising that most labour issues that flock the National Labour Commission (NLC) in Ghana borders on wages and salaries. A more recent labour issue the NLC settled was with nurses concerning their salaries. Lecturers at public universities and Polytechnics in Ghana sometimes lay down their tools as a result of wage issues. Often challenging economic conditions and the expectations by society (family members) from workers have made money a big issue in the labour front. One cannot be wrong in suggesting that the Ghanaian worker becomes dissatisfied when commensurate pay is not received for work done. This is typical of a hygiene factor in the Fredrick Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation. In July 2010, the government of Ghana placed members of the security services such as the Ghana Police, Immigration and Fire Services on the Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS) and there was increase in wages for most personnel. The SSSS was proposed under the new pay reforms in Ghana to ensure equitable salary for workers within the public sector. This has been due to the failure of the Ghana Universal Salary Structure (GUSS) to address pay disparities. In the past, workers resulted to strike, threats and other means to negotiate for more pay; the introduction of the SSSS has been seen to be essential in contributing significantly to addressing problems with pay in the public sectors. The SSSS places all public sector workers on a scale, based on qualification and other job considerations.

The morale of some of the security services was highly boosted and more motivated to work because of the improvement in an aspect of hygiene factors (money). However, some public service workers have expressed concerns with the SSSS. For example in July, 2010, the Civil Service and Local Government Staff Association (CLOSAG) went on a strike action for days demanding better working conditions: fringe and end of service benefits and allowances with money being their major focus. These scenarios go some way to show that the Ghanaian worker is more motivated by money in other words the hygiene factors. The SSSS has overall however been well received nationally.

Another issue that affects the Ghanaian worker is job security, an example of the hygiene factor. Ghanaian employees would normally do everything possible to secure their jobs. As earlier stated, the Ghanaian employee is saddled with bread and butter issues and therefore job security means survival to most employees. Furthermore, there is generally the perception that most Ghanaian employees prefer working in the public sector than the private. This is not coincidental because most Ghanaian workers hold the view that in the private sector lifelong work is not guaranteed which therefore becomes a threat to job security. Money and job security are two key factors in Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory and looking at the Ghanaian experience, it is not unreasonable to suggest that hygiene factors play a major role in motivating Ghanaian workers. It is however worth emphasising that in as much as it appears the Ghanaian employee is more concerned with wages and job security and hence the hygiene factors, the motivators also play a role in employee motivation although they may not be the dominant motivator in the Ghanaian situation.

4.2 The motivators: the Ghanaian situation

Workers in Ghana as those in other parts of the world desire quality employment. A study conducted by Negandhi (1985), in six African countries with similar work ethics and environment as Ghana revealed that, workers in Africa and those of other countries in Europe and America, want not only wages and job security but also opportunities for advancement, fair treatment, better working conditions, challenging and interesting jobs, autonomy on the job and responsibility. Thus, the Ghanaian worker is also motivated by the motivator factors as postulated in Herzberg's theory. For most organisations teamwork and group

cohesiveness have been seen to be essential for a conducive working environment and important in establishing positive workgroup relationships. Teamwork approach to work encourages a feeling of belongingness and is able to bring about innovative ways of doing things through brainstorming. This enhances synergy at the workplace among colleagues and could have a positive impact on performance a motivator factor which is very much appreciated in the Ghanaian workforce.

4.3 How Then Should Ghanaian Managers Motivate Employees?

Based on the above analysis, the Ghanaian manager and organisations should do more to make the work environment more challenging and interesting. It is an acknowledged fact that, a bored employee is not motivated or productive. More often than not, workers in most Ghanaian public institutions are accused of being unmotivated and unproductive at the work place. The Ghanaian worker cannot be said to be lazy, just that their jobs are often not designed in a way that will constantly challenge them to be innovative and doing away with repetitions and monotony in their work.

Cognizant of this, managers in collaboration with human resource departments should redesign jobs and responsibilities so that new challenges are presented to workers on a regular basis. This, Herzberg termed as 'Job Enrichment', that is, augmenting routine tasks with special assignments. In addition, it is essential for managers to assure their employees of commensurate pay but essential to emphasise to employees that pay is based on performance and that 'bonuses' and other benefits are awarded for extra effort put in by those who are committed to advancing the fortunes of the companies they work for. Tying performance and salary increases to work outputs may be one of the ways to encouraging commitment and advancing organisations aspirations. Generally some private institutions in Ghana especially the financial institutions have adopted policies that practice performance related pay approach in giving financial rewards to their workers. Workers in these organisations are given specific tasks to accomplish and they are assessed based on the result of their work. This approach encourages employees to extend themselves for the good of their organisations knowing that they will be rewarded adequately. Furthermore workers are motivated not only by the financial rewards but also by the recognition that they get from their managers. Additionally, the Ghanaian employee can be motivated through building effective and efficient work groups or teams where organisational goals are personalised for teams and departments and emphasis placed on the importance of each department in the overall performance of the organisations. Additionally avoiding micromanaging, ensuring fairness in pay structures, promotions and work allocations and eschewing favoritism, nepotism and cronyism by managers would be essential to addressing employee motivation issues in the Ghanaian setting.

5. Concluding remarks

As Frederick Herzberg explained in his theory, it does not take only the motivators factors to motivate employees neither does it take the hygiene factors to remove dissatisfaction. To motivate and satisfy employees, managers need to effectively blend the factors well to suit the special needs of their employees. In Ghana, it would be more prudent for managers to strike a balance between the motivator factors and hygiene factors with more emphasis on the hygiene factors since it appears to motivate the Ghanaian worker better. After all, there is a popular saying in Ghana that 'a hungry man is an angry man' and certainly a hungry and an angry man's performance and commitment to work is likely to be affected negatively and invariably affect organisational performance and therefore these need to be well managed for efficiency and effectiveness in Ghanaian organisations.

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