Employee performance and motivation in organizations, a brief review

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Foundations

The fields of employee motivation and employee performance are solidly grounded in the researcher of Maslow, Taylor, and Herzberg, to name just a few. The concepts of motivation and performance are constructs within the larger organizational behavior model. While each of these constructs can be reviewed on their own, employee motivation is linked closely to employee performance. To help review these constructs and show how they are linked, this brief literature review focused on finding peer reviewed journal articles with an “employee motivation” keyword and the term “case study” within the text.

By conducting the search in this manor, the resultant articles were specific case studies of employee motivation in various organizations. The resultant case studies looked at a range of topics on both employee motivation and employee performance and how these constructs can be connected. One particular study looked specifically at “the followers” of an organization and what key factors a leader needs to know about the various types of followers.
More Recently

The case studies in this review expand upon the work of Maslow, Taylor, and Herzberg. In *Beyond the Fringe*, Simms discusses how various organizations utilize tailored versions of “non-cash rewards” as employee incentives. Simms suggests that Herzberg’s view of salary as not being a motivator holds. The ability to hold up an incentive that doesn’t get absorbed by the employee’s monthly bills has a larger effect on employee motivation. He also suggests is may be more acceptable to boast about a special award or party rather than an employee’s salary raise. Simms then goes on to expand the discussion of non-cash rewards such as flex time, employee of the month, and tailored goal incentives. Simms argues it is important for employers to communicate these benefits to employees because many employees don’t understand their total compensation package. By communicating the total package, the employer reinforces their commitment to the employees and helps to motivate the employee. This motivation leads to greater employee satisfaction and performance (Simms, 2007).

The case study of the Harrah’s Entertainment sales teams lays out the use of team incentives to increase sales across the various branches of the Harrah’s Entertainment family of products. However, the core to the incentive packages, that Jakobson discusses, is the use of Merchandise Awards. Jakobson states that Merchandise Awards are even more effective than Top Seller Trips. Harrah’s also uses simple employee motivation tactics such as recognition at weekly and monthly sales meetings of the top sales teams (Jakobson, 2007). These non-cash rewards fall into the similar category as Herzberg and Simms.

Whiteling looks at the cases of Reuters and supermarket giant Salisbury’s to show how important it is to create a culture where employees become directly involved in suggestions for change. By creating a culture where employee input is valued and utilized, the changes faced by
the organization are better understood and receive the support of the employees. This also has
the side effect of creating employee motivation to support and accomplish the organizations
goals and change efforts (Whiteling, 2007). Silverman utilizes a similar strategy to create a
high-performance workforce. Silverman suggests keeping employees engaged by working with
storytelling. Employers can systematically ask employee’s to tell their story for good or not-so-
good situations. In this way, an employee/employer relationship can be forged which can help
foster mutual support and idea sharing (Silverman, 2006). Similar to Whiteling, Silverman
suggests that the organizations culture needs to be developed around the concept of storytelling.
Employees need to feel their stories are being heard, understood, and valued by those requesting
the stories. By forging these relationships, the employee feels valued by the employer,
supervisor, and organization as a contributor. This value translates into higher work
performance and stake within the organization (Silverman, 2006; Whiteling, 2007).

Sharbrough’s study looks at the correlations between leader’s use of Motivating
Language (ML) and employee job satisfaction and the perception of a supervisor’s effectiveness.
In both cases, there was a statistically significant correlation in this study between a leader’s use
of ML and employee job satisfaction and the perception of a supervisor’s effectiveness. This
correlation can be utilized by organizations to measure a leader’s use of ML and determine levels
of employee satisfaction as well as determine the perceived effectiveness of a supervisor
(Sharbrough, 2006).

Kellerman has expanded the work of Zaleznik, Kelley, and Chaleff to create what he calls
a level of engagement to classify the followers of an organization (Kellerman, 2007). This
employee continuum ranges from “feeling and doing absolutely nothing” to “being passionately
committed and deeply involved.” In this way, a leader can assess their subordinates and tailor a leadership approach to maximize the affect a particular effort will have on employee motivation.

A common thread of communication between employers and employees emerges as a requirement for employee motivation (Simms, 2007; Jakobson, 2007; Whiteling, 2007; Silverman, 2006; & Sharbrough, 2006). Many of these case studies link high employee motivation with increased employee performance (Simms, 2007; Jakobson, 2007; Whiteling, 2007; Silverman, 2006; & Sharbrough, 2006). By first utilizing Kellerman’s “level of engagement” classification, an organization can tailor the use of ML and motivational techniques in the organization. In this way, employee motivation can be maximized to increase employee performance by focusing the use of ML and motivational techniques.
References


