

LIBRARIANS' WORK MOTIVATION ASSESSMENT: A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK BASED ON EQUITY THEORY

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Abstract: *The paper presents a framework for the assessment of the librarians' work motivation. The methodology is based on equity theory, a slightly explored conceptual approach in this particular occupational field. The equity theory concepts and predictive assumptions are presented. Three main multiple choice questions for data collection are exemplified and the analysis and interpretation scheme is pointed out. Finally, there are outlined the main practical and managerial implications of equity theory, that can be applied by academic and research library and by other similar organisations.*

Key words: *work motivation, equity theory, methodological framework*

1. Introduction.

The work motivation subject has been widely studied and debated in social sciences, O'Reilly considering it as "the most frequently researched topic in micro organization behaviour" [6, p. 431). Although after 1990 has been noticed a decrease of researcher's interest in the issue of motivation, comprehensive reviews of work motivation theory and research [4,5] dispute the idea of the field decline and call for additional research. The increasing number of publications in the last five years (January 2005 to April 2011), sustain the hypothesis of the field "reviving": 1573 Social Science articles with main topic "work motivation" are indexed in ISI Web of Knowledge. Steers, Mowday and Shapiro argued: the suggestion that work motivation is no longer a pressing issue in organisations is not plausible, by contrary, "a motivated workforce is frequently cited as a hallmark of competitive advantage." [8, p. 383].

The academic and research libraries are organizations that have to manage change into a competitive and fast moving setting, both in terms of technology and knowledge sharing. In this context, the library personnel motivation and job satisfaction have a central role, Tella, Ayeni and Popoola recently noted: "there is need for strong and effective motivation at the various levels, departments, and sections of the library" [10, p. 2].

In this context, the paper presents a methodological framework for the assessment of the librarians' work motivation, based on equity theory, a conceptual approach slightly explored for this particular type of organisation. Also, a particular data collecting and analysis scheme is proposed for a specific Romanian university library, namely Transilvania University of Brasov Library. The framework aims to provide information on employee's behaviour and directions for motivation strategy development that can be useful for library's management.

2. Equity theory as a conceptual framework for work motivation assessment.

From all major motivation theories, Adams' equity theory [1, 2] was considered soon after its publication "among the more useful middle-range theories of organisational behaviour" [11, p. 435] and nowadays is listed in textbooks as a classical process theory. Although there were highlighted certain limitations regarding concepts clarity and inequity reactions [7, 9] basic propositions of the theory are generally well supported [3, 6].

According to this theory, when the ratio between the contributions and the rewards is considered unfair by the employees, they will be motivated to restore equity, through cognitive or behavioural changes. The theory develops four key concepts: Inputs, Outputs, Person and Referent Other. The inputs are defined as contributions for which the employee expects a just reward; the outcomes as rewards received by an individual; the Person is the individual that make the comparison and the Referent Other can be „any individual or group used as a referent when he makes social comparison of his inputs and outcomes" [1, p. 277].

In previous studies, the *inputs and outcomes* have been often operationalized by a single indicator, the inputs being equalised to the effort/work and the outcomes with pay/financial reward. Adams argued the variety of these two components, as the inputs may be: education, intelligence, experience, training, skill, etc., and the outcomes may be: pay, rewards intrinsic to the job, seniority benefits, etc. Regarding *referent Other*, this is the least investigated construct, several authors [7, 9] began the "search of Adams' Other" and tested a series of hypotheses about the referent selection from inside or outside the organization.

Regarding the inequity concept, Adams stated that "inequity exists for Person whenever his perceived job input and/or outcomes stand psychologically in an obverse relation to what he perceives are inputs and/or outputs of Other" [1, p. 278]. As *reactions to inequity*, the theory suggests eight strategies based on behavioural adjustment or on inputs and outcomes cognitive distortion (increase or decrease inputs or outcomes; psychologically distort inputs or outcomes; tray to increase or decrease inputs or outputs of Others or cognitively distort them; change the referent group and ultimately "leave the field". From all kind of inputs, the effort is more likely to be reduced, because the other inputs (education, age, gender, skills, etc.) are "givens" and their acquisition is not reversible.

3. The methodological framework for librarians' work motivation assessment: the case of Transilvania of Brasov Library.

The methodological framework includes the techniques that can be applied for data collection and the conceptual scheme proposed for data analysis and interpretation.

Since 2008 Transilvania University of Brasov Library went through a period in which there were concentrated efforts to improve and develop the services for academic community. All 55 library employees have been involved in multi-tasking activities and the expected level of performance was enhanced. In this context can be argued that the issue of motivation plays a central role in the human resources development strategy, and the first step in order to design the motivation strategy, is to assess the current motivation level.

Evaluating librarians' work motivation entails to indentify the answer to four questions: How do librarians define the inputs? How do librarians define the outcomes? Which is the dominant reference group or peer group used for comparing input (contribution) with outcome (reward)? What is the dominant strategy to reduce inequity? To find answers to these questions is proposed a qualitative methodological approach, based on face-to-face semi-structured interview.

The main multiple choice questions to assess the equity can be: *Looking globally and sincerely, how do you asset what you get from the employer comparing with what you expect to receive? Choose the response option that best fits your appreciation:*

1.1. Is far beyond what I expect to receive

- 1.2. Is somewhat more than I expect
- 1.3. Is very close to what I expect
- 1.4. Is somewhat below what I expect
- 1.5. Is far below what I expect
- 1.6. Other option (please specify)

The main multiple choice question to identify the general comparison frame can be: *When you've decided what option to choose when you compared what you get with what you expect from the employer; to what you reported in yourself? Choose the response option that best fits your appreciation:*

- 2.1. What I think it is normal standard of living for the social category I belong
- 2.2. What I think it is normal for a decent living, now in Romania
- 2.3. The objective needs that I and my family have
- 2.4. What I think it is normal to a person with my training and my experience
- 2.5. What I think it is normal to the work and effort require by my job
- 2.6. Other (please specify)

The main multiple choice question to identify the reference group or the peer group can be: *When you've decided what option to choose when you compared what you get with what you expect from the employer, with who have you compared? Choose the response option that best fits your appreciation:*

- 3.1. With colleagues in the library that have the same job
- 3.2. With superiors of mine
- 3.3. With subordinates of mine
- 3.4. With former classmates (who are not employed in library domain)
- 3.5. With other librarians from academic and research library outside the city
- 3.6. With others (please specify which)

Data analysis and interpretation can be made taking into account the three typical situations that may arise when the contributions (inputs) and rewards (outcomes) are assessed:

1. equitable exchange: the employee interpret the relationship with the company as fair;
2. under-reward (negative inequity): employees receive less than they expect;
3. over-reward (positive inequity): employees receive more than they expect.

For individual evaluation reports the following principles are proposed:

1. Fair situation generates satisfaction and employees are expected to have proper work behaviour for a long term if the equity is stable over time;
2. Under-rewarded situation generates dissatisfaction and employees are expected to react to inequity mainly by: effort reduction, which entails decreasing labour efficiency; increasing other rewards that the employee has access (theft); absenteeism, protests, waste of library resources; leaving the employer.
3. Over-rewarded situation waste the library resources and is not a recommended option; the expected reaction to this positive inequity may be: availability for the effort, helping colleagues, volunteering for additional tasks and "overtime" as a demonstrative act.

4. Managerial and practical implication.

The proposed methodological framework based on Adams' theory provides information about the overall level of employees' satisfaction, and directions for corrections in order to restore the equity within the workplace. The results have to be integrated into a broaden approach regarding employees' motivation and has to be applied taking into account the main practical and managerial implications of Adams' theory:

1. It is necessary that both parties (employer and employee) to recognize and to value the inputs. If the organization does not recognize a valued input by the employee (e.g., age, ethnicity, positive thinking, etc.) then the inequity will occur. Similarly, there may be a waste of resources from the organization if the rewards are not valued by the receiver (e.g., gym

facilities when the employee expects a pay raise). Offering rewards without perceived utility for the employee generates dissatisfaction.

2. The reactions to inequity are culturally and historically determined, as Adams point out. The perception of employees on the exchange with the organization should be assessed taking into account the broaden evaluation of Romanian work values and work culture.

3. Predictable reaction when employees' experience inequity is to reduce effort.

4. Over-rewarding can increase productivity or work quality for a short term period. However, over-reward or overpay is not a solution for the organization, first because it creates inequity and second, because waste resources for establish the equity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed methodological framework can be used for librarians' work motivation assessment and can be extended to other organizations. Through its application in the Transylvania University of Brasov the managerial staff will get specific information on employee's motivation, including inputs (contributions for which employee expect rewards, such as effort, work performance, professional experience etc.), outcomes (reward expected by librarians for their contributions) and peer group (comparison group). Additionally, the framework proposed will get directions on predictive work behavior for each employee depending on individual perception of the exchange with the organization (under-reward, over-reward or equitable relation). The results can be a useful starting point for future human resources procedures: reward management, performance appraisal, career development.

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