

THE LOCUS OF FREDERICK IRVING HERZBERG'S MOTIVATION-HYGIENE THEORY IN PRESENT DAY STATE SETTINGS (THE CASE OF LITHUANIA)

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Abstract

Today, about half a century since the appearance of psychologist Frederick Irving Herzberg's book about employee motivation, scholars are still debating whether the author's Two Factor motivation theory is a suitable model in research and practice. Author of the article argues in favour of the latter scenario, invoking research conducted in the period ranging 2003 to 2009, with over 1660 respondents polled. The article features recommendations on how to best apply Herzberg's theory in the work setting.

Key words: human resources management, employee motivation, employee needs, hygiene factors and motivators, challenges.

Classification JEL: M12 – Personnel Management

1. Introduction

When conducting various studies on human resource management one often comes across information where an employee claims discontent with their manager's skills to properly motivate his subordinates to produce more effective output. Moreover, according to one of today's most renowned experts in human resource management, most managers also believe that people are simply no longer motivated when it comes to work (Robbins, 2003). This opinion may be bolstered by many a manager's conviction that their employees can be driven only by good pay, flexible working hours and profit from health insurance and pension benefits, etc, while more appealing work activity, achievements and the like are not considered requisite for productive work output. This point of view is not incompatible with that of experts both from Lithuania and abroad, which find the current situation to be a result of unfit management and work organisation (Kini, Donahue, 2005; Robbins, 2003; Sakalas, Sanaviciene, 2003). Research conducted by the author on how ready managers are to participate in change also testify to the fact that managers display the least skills when it comes to motivating employees to be active participants in underway changes (Grazulis, Jagminas, 2008).

The goal of this article is to reveal and assess – employing a comparative analysis of academic literature, the results of personal and outside research and discussions of Herzberg's Two Factor Theory in scientific sources – the motivational priorities of employees in Lithuania's present day work settings.

2. Discussions and Reality

Discussions on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs¹ have brought to light that certain historic circumstances have prevented this theory from answering one important question for the practice of management. This question asks of the role of primary needs in a country where the quality of life capacitates a person to fulfil them, and a manager's efforts to motivate employees with additional benefits and the policy of protection does almost nothing to increase their motivation to perform better at work. These facts spurred much confusion on how managers should behave, or how they could impact the behaviour of their employees in one or another case scenario. The uncertainties that arose from attempts to motivate employees have prompted some

¹ See GRAZULIS, V.: *Personnel Management and the Vitality Phenomenon of A. Maslow's Theory of Needs*. Human Resources Management and Ergonomics Nr. 2/2007, p. 14 – 21. Technical University in Zvolen

behaviourists – including Herzberg – to continue research concerning the content of employee needs.²

Herzberg was among the first scholars interested in employee motivation to notice that individuals experiencing a surplus of factors he called *motivators*, such as achievement, responsibility, advancement, etc, are more satisfied with their work activity. This makes an employee better prepared to overcome challenges and tolerate drawbacks concerning wage, working conditions, relations with co-workers and other environmental factors, which he called *hygiene* factors. Herzberg was convinced that salary, various benefits, work conditions and company policy have an external impact not directly influencing work activity and tend to materialise as hygienic factors in the work process, making them insufficient for an employee to yield their best effort at work (Herzberg, 1968).

Research conducted by the author allows concluding that times described by Dinesh D'Souza, when people used to experience a strong sense of satisfaction and meaning for being able to sustain their family and protect their children from poverty (2000) have passed, or are at least becoming a thing of the past³. It seems that the answer to the question of the reasons behind Herzberg's Two Factor Theory lies precisely within change in social-economic environment.

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, just as any other a renowned theory on motivation, was subject to rigorous criticism. Herzberg's research methods were the cornerstone of most criticism, as it was questioned whether with its limited applicability – orientation towards the white-collar employees – the theory could be considered a theoretical basis for the motivation mechanism (Hewstrom, Devis, 2000). Experts oftentimes base their criticism on the fact that so far the practice of management has failed to warrant sufficient fulfilment of self-realisation needs for all seeking it. For example, summarising the results of over 30 different reviews of Herzberg's Two Factor theory, R. J. House and L.A. Wigdor concluded that the same factor could bring job satisfaction to some employees and dissatisfaction to others (House, Wigdor, 1967), and argued that different people in certain situations can be motivated not just by motivators but hygiene factors as well.

Herzberg's theoretical attitudes have also drawn criticism among Lithuanian scholars. While V. Barvydiene agrees that Herzberg "expanded the concept of motivation", she finds that his "theory doesn't take into account most situation-defining changes which are related to the situation. This means that in order to explain the mechanism of motivation, many behavioural and environmental parameters have to be taken into account" (Kasiulis, Barvydiene, 2005). V. Barvydiene, alike many foreign experts (Oldcorn, 1999), also notes that "motivation should be considered a process of probability – that, which motivates an individual in a specific situation".

It is universally agreed that no two individuals are exactly alike, it can therefore be expected that Herzberg's Two Factor theory as well as all other motivation theories should be analysed from this point of view. Having taken this into account, it must be stated that the purpose of motivation theories is not to do its, but to reveal – according to a certain system of attributes – all possible tendencies of human behaviour. The attitudes declared by motivation theories, just as all theoretical insights intended for analysing social processes amid ongoing change, should be assessed from the aspect of the human factor, i.e. the diversity of behavioural

² Somewhat later – in 1993 – Herzberg in one of his letters questioned the presumptions used by researchers as both job satisfaction and dissatisfaction were being assessed in one system of coordinates, which he felt led them to arrive to invalid conclusions.

³ It would seem that the current global financial and economic crisis works not only against disproving the presented conclusion, but, on the contrary, confirms the fact that the priorities of human needs amid an ever changing environment are dynamic, hence the crisis bringing out the physiological and security needs for most involved.

choices. It is precisely for this reason that no motivation theory can literally warrant its full implementation.

By singling out in the concept of human needs environmental and work-related factors, which carry an autonomous impact, Herzberg provided proof that amid a high quality of public life, managers can use motivators under a certain system to successfully motivate their employees. Herzberg's research for the first time answered the question that much plagued experts in this field, which is why employees, whose primary needs have been sufficiently fulfilled, cannot be motivated on the physiological, security and even the social level, all of which in the long run become just hygiene factors in the work setting.

3. Underlying employee motivation factors in Lithuania

Surveys since 2003 conducted by the author of the article with a total of 1227 college and university undergraduate and graduate students and 394 employees from 9 private and public companies clearly demonstrated why most managers in Lithuania have serious grounds for considering Herzberg's Two Factor Theory in view of properly motivating their employees.

The respondent sample includes over 80 percent of all students who were at the time enrolled in personnel/human resource management, with about 75 percent of them also employed during the period in question. The sample was non-random, meaning the attitudes expressed by the respondents could not be said to reflect that of all employed Lithuanians, however the data collected in this study is important in a qualitative sense and reveals certain tendencies in how motivation processes are perceived in Lithuanian organisations.

In view of determining respondents' motivational priorities according to salary, relations, work appeal, responsibility and similar factors, informants were asked to provide their opinion on 56 different work situations. The significance of different situations was assessed on a 5-point scale, where 0 indicates that a respondent views a specified situation as completely unimportant and 5 signifies key importance.⁴

In a qualitative sense, research results were assessed on a 100-point scale, with answers that received:

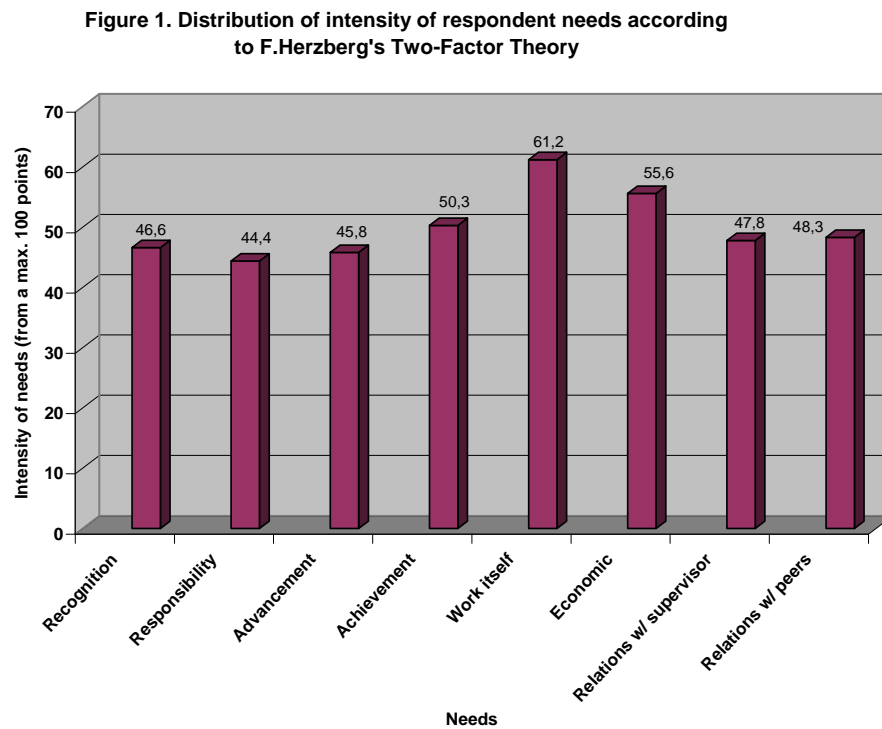
- a) 25 points or less evaluated as needs with low priority;
- b) 26 to 50 points revealing that the level of needs is moderately expressed;
- c) 51 to 80 points testifying to needs that carry a strong impact, i.e. strongly expressed needs;
- d) 81 or over points indicate very dominant needs.

The priorities of respondent needs are presented in Figure 1. As evident, respondents are most motivated by the factor **work itself** (61.2 points), i.e. the opportunity to engage in appealing and purposeful work activity, which could earn them praise. The study revealed that every third to fourth respondent would like to be engaged in interesting and purposeful work activity, even if this type of work may carry little responsibility for the employee and be not so well paid. This group of respondents agrees to do difficult work as long as it brings them satisfaction and not boredom. Also, a large portion of such respondents place work that brings satisfaction above the opportunity to advance in the career ladder. It therefore seems that interesting and purposeful work activity can be a strong motivating measure for most employees, therefore managers should be concerned with work activities that carry appeal for employees and allow them to personally apply their skills.

On the other hand, study results revealed that every sixth to seventh respondent cares little for appealing and purposeful work activity, which turned out to be their least motivating factor.

⁴ Research was conducted amid Lithuania's rapid economic growth. It is likely, that this same research amid the current economic slide would change, with employees likely to prioritize economic aspects.

Figure 1: Distribution of intensity of the respondents' needs according to F. Herzberg's Theory



Source: own

Other needs, which were ranked among the highest among polled employees, are those concerned with sustenance, i.e. economic factors such as wage systems for primary and secondary work activities, monetary benefit programs, etc. **Economic factors** were also highly expressed among the study sample with their relevance rated at 55.6 points and every fourth to fifth respondent finding them as most important. While Herzberg considered economic factors to be hygienic, this group of respondents were most concerned about getting good pay for their services even if their line of work is boring, unchallenging, personally unrewarding and offers no opportunities for advancement. By placing utmost priority on monetary rewards, such respondents would even agree to work in a work setting where they are unpopular.⁵

A question may arise as to just how motivated are respondents who stress the importance of economic factors. In the author's opinion, the responses of those that gave priority to economic factors at the expense of work appeal, authority among peers and even future prospects only confirmed Herzberg's conclusion that economic factors are not directly related with the need for better work performance thus their being hygienic in nature.

In this case scenario, managers are faced with the main goal of neutralising the economic factor's insufficient motivating impact for effective work output and seeking to better unfold a person's motivators.

A mere four percent of the polled found the economic factor as insignificant, as most of them felt they've already secured the economic well-being they needed.

Unfortunately, **work achievements** were the strongest motivator for only the ninth to twelfth respondents, receiving an average of 50.3 points and attributable to factors that are more expressed than not so. This group of respondents finds it more important to master challenging

⁵ It is important to ascertain to what extent such answers are accidental, however, keeping in mind that Lithuania is among the EU outsiders according to wages and the level of living, it is likely that these answers reflect the way most people feel.

work activity than work a simple yet well-paid job. These individuals are more concerned with personal and public recognition of their work achievements than with pursuing at whatever price to have good relations with their managers or get complimented by their co-workers. Many of this group of individuals' attributes more weight to constant success, even if it comes at the expense of peer support.

The need for achievement is a serious motivator as it helps the achievement-aspiring individuals realise their potential in their work. In the other case scenario, this group of respondents would be likely to resolve to pursue another line of work.

Respondents ranked **good work relations supervisor** and **peers** fourth and fifth among needs in Herzberg's system of motivation with 47.8 points and 48.3 points, accordingly. Even though these needs can generally be considered less than moderately expressed, it can be seen that the social factor was most important for every tenth to fifteenth respondent. These informants valued good interpersonal relations at work above all public information on their achievements. Most of the polled employees pertaining to this group acknowledge that it is better to maintain good relations with the boss rather than to, say, sacrifice them in pursuit of advancement up the career ladder.⁶

Moreover, such individuals have the need to belong to a group with good interpersonal relations, they like to be able to rely on their colleagues and pursue success, even if it is fickle. These respondents value the said priorities above advancement possibilities, especially if this would mean them having to separate from their co-workers. Some of these individuals place more weight on peer support than on good relations with the boss or other factors related to the work environment.

The feeling of belonging for individuals most concerned with good interpersonal relations with the co-workers is a strong motivator to become and remain a member of a team, however the question remains whether that is enough to be personally motivated to take pride in what they do and how this affects their identity and feeling of self-worth within an organisation (Kini, Donahue, 2005). It would seem that in an attempt to promote good relations within the work setting, managers also have to unfold what motivates their employees.

One in five respondents cared little about relations with their supervisor or peers, which has little impact to their motivation.

It is widely acknowledged in management theory and practice that in order to increase employee motivational factors, managers should focus on employee recognition, development of their sense of responsibility and their career advancement options. As we can see from Figure 1, respondents attribute far less importance to Herzberg's motivator factors than those concerning work itself or salary, which leads to conclude that they are not sufficiently expressed in Lithuania's present day settings. While recognition, responsibility and advancement needs are motivators in Herzberg's theory, respondents on average gave them 44.8 to 46.6 points, meaning they are among the most expressed employee needs. For example, only 5 – 7 percent of polled respondents indicated the **recognition** to be the strongest motivator. Such employees are more concerned with getting recognition from their peers or supervisors, even if it is for a minor task, than with getting a major task and tackling it efficiently, but without recognition for their trouble. On the other hand, 12 percent of respondents felt that recognition is not an important motivating factor for them.

⁶ The author's studies show that an individual's social needs is the most stable factor of one's motivational system and despite of environmental influence, these people remain true to this particular aspect of their behavior. It should also be noted, that individuals prone to communication are more quick to adapt in a work setting and to pick up on the social norms inherent therein, which in the end has a significant impact on the work results of an organization.

According to study results, only one out of twenty to twenty five respondents have a clearly developed need for **career advancement**. The opportunity to climb up the career ladder is a factor that best motivates this group of individuals, even if that would come with less pay or mean separation from their co-workers. These individuals are likely to change jobs if they feel their current position cannot provide career advancement. However, almost every second to third of all polled respondents were not motivated by career advancement needs.

The concept of a person's perception of career is changing in present day human resource management theory (Baruch, 2004; Child, 2006; Drucker, 2004; Hall, 2002), with a more flexible approach to employee career planning and management paving its way in practice. Even if the prospect of a career is a powerful tool to motivate workers for self-advancement and the said flexible approach to career management is the right way to go about motivating employees, it is still unclear just how concerned most people are with their careers and how ready organisations are to provide career opportunities for everyone. This aspect of the career factor becomes especially evident in the practice of management, because it is so tightly interconnected with the mechanism of career planning and management.⁷

The study revealed that only one in every eight to nine respondents attributed most importance to the need to take on responsibility.⁸ Employees that are motivated by this need are keen on having more responsibility even if this complicates relations with their boss. Also, a large portion of this group of individuals are more stimulated by the responsibility of carrying out an important task than a potential advance up the career ladder. Some of these individuals also prefer responsible work activity even if it is boring. Individuals with a strongly developed sense of responsibility often don't mind getting less recognition for what they do.

Every tenth to twelfth respondent didn't see responsibility as essential to their motivation, as they are more concerned with good work relations and the like. This confirms S. Robbins' conviction that many people like to dodge responsibility (Robbins, 2003). It is widely recognised that the need for responsibility is connected with another concept important to the process of management, namely delegating authority to employees, therefore the main managerial goal for company managers is to co-ordinate the necessity to share authority with those employees, which are first of all motivated to take on responsibility for their work performance. The study also intended to determine whether the environment in a company, where people learn/work has an influence on how expressed certain needs are. Figure 2 includes the results for this particular inquiry.

When comparing organisations, we can see that the extent of the needs connected with recognition, responsibility, achievement, work itself, and relations with peers or supervisor is rather similar throughout the respondent sample. This points to a conclusion that these needs hold similar relevance for most Lithuanians and are more connected with the prevalent employee motivation systems in the country. Also, testing results revealed essential differences across organisations when assessing the extent of needs connected to career advancement and economic factors, ranging from 39 to 49.3 points and from 49.1 to 58.1 points, accordingly.

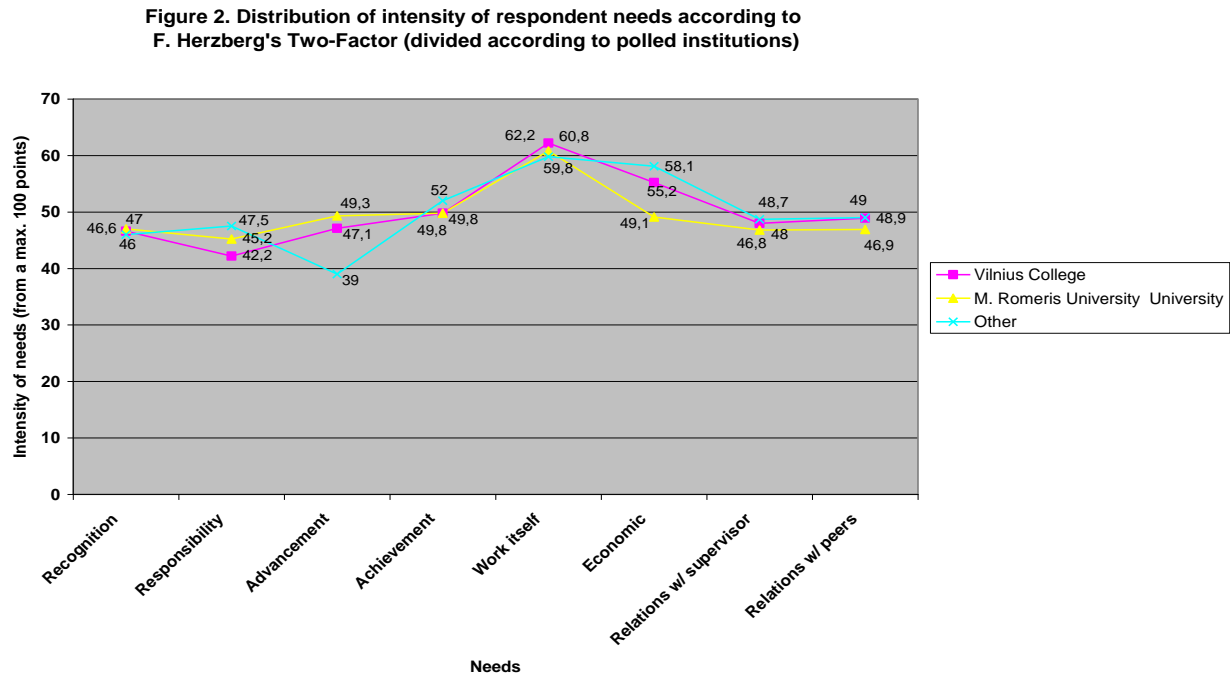
Organisation size, company goals and work organisation in a specific company should be noted among factors that influence the extent of the need for career advancement. According to research, students within higher education institutions have more expectations to advance in their careers (47.1 points attributed by undergraduate college students and 49.3 points by university graduate students) than individuals employed in organisations (39 points). On the other hand,

⁷ For example, 96 of Lithuania's businesses are small companies with under 10 employees. Obviously, career opportunities for an employee in such an organization are very limited, which calls for a different approach to the process of a person's career.

⁸ It should be noted that one in four of all polled respondents associates responsibility with a particular post one occupies in a company and decision-making opportunities that go along with that position.

when comparing different higher education institutions, it is evident that universities more so than colleges steer students to aspire careers, as the goal of the latter is to prepare highly qualified experts within the realm of a certain profession. College students exhibit slightly lower expectations to strive for a career than university students. It is also clear that as small businesses are prevalent in Lithuania, and, as had been mentioned before, with managers unprepared to involve their employees in change processes, employees have a less expressed need to advance in their career.

Figure 2: Distribution of intensity of respondents' need according to F. Herzberg's Theory



Source: own

Moreover, we can see that the achievement and advancement needs of university graduate students (49.8 and 49.3 points, accordingly) are no less evident than economic factors (an average of 49.1 points), which reflects a more advanced social and economic situation these respondents have attained in the labour market.

4. Conclusions

Results of the study invoking the model of Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory allow concluding that with an increasing quality of living, individuals are becoming less motivated by primary needs, which gradually become hygienic factors in the work setting. This process requires time along with significant efforts of economic and organisational nature. The theoretical provisions of Herzberg's theory on employee motivation could undoubtedly be applied in Lithuania's managerial settings in view of warranting continued improvement in the quality of living. Results of this study reflect the opinions prevalent among current and aspiring white-collar workers, therefore, we may agree that the research structure may be different when researching other respondent groups. However, this is not a serious motive for generally disproving Herzberg's employee motivation concept.

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