The Role of Work Motivation Based on Values in Employee’s Retention in the 21st Century

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Organizations in the 21st century have to address the problem of employee’s retention as it has direct and indirect costs for the organisation. In regards to this issue several theories have emerged pointing out the strong relationship between retention and employee’s motivation. This last topic is not trivial, as it includes factors from different disciplines such as the psychological or managerial ones. The aim of this paper is to analyse the current literature related to different work motivation theories in order to identify patterns, which might help to understand better the dynamics between motivation at work and its impact on employee retention. In order to do so a detailed revision of the literature has been done classifying the main motivational theories in needs, traits, values, and cognition.

Results of the above analysis highlight the “satisfaction of a need” as a common denominator in the motivational theories. Need theories explain why someone must act but they do not explain why particular actions are followed in specific situations. One of the insights is that values are the ones that unveil what drives individuals to achieve a goal. Therefore it is vital for organizations to learn and understand which ones are the employees work values in order to retain them and keep them motivated.

Keywords: work motivation, values, retention, organizational turnover

Introduction

Employee leaving intentions is a topic that has attracted several scholars and practitioners alike for a century and nowadays remains to be a topic of concern as organizational researchers have shown that turnover has a repercussion in various productivity related processes in the organization (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017). The rate differs between sectors, companies, gender or division, but what does not differ is the cost that companies face when an employee leaves. In fact, in today’s extreme competitive labour market, there is a large amount of evidence stating that organizations are facing retention challenges independently of their size, market focus, or technological development (Ramlall, 2004). Employee turnover is costly as it includes direct and indirect costs, but it is often underestimated. For example, there are costs associated with time to recruit and fill a vacancy; furthermore, there are costs to be considered in terms of training for the new...
employee in order to get familiar with the working environment and to acquire the necessary skills to be effective and independent. Then, there are costs linked directly to the team morale who has to adapt to a new person and potentially work harder until the new colleague is fully trained (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000). A lower turnover rate implies less organizational costs and consequently a positive correlation with organizational effectiveness (Koys, 2001).

The goal of this paper is to analyse different work motivation theories in order to identify potential patterns, which might help to understand better the dynamics between motivation at work and its impact on employee retention. The analysis highlights the importance of work motivation based on values as a key element to generate organizational retention strategies.

This article is organized as follows. Next section shows a review of the main motivational theories based on a detailed study of the state of the art using as a reference the widely known classification system of Latham and Pinder (2005). Then a discussion based on the previous insights is developed highlighting how they can contribute to generating organizational retention strategies. Finally, conclusions and future lines of research are drawn.

**Classification of Work Motivational Theories**

The golden age of work motivation theories was in the mid of the 1960s where scholars were interested in understanding the processes behind work motivation. But by the 1990s, the interest of work motivation decreases and as a consequence theoretical developments on work motivation declined (Steers & Mowday, 2014). This is quite a paradox since companies nowadays see having motivated employees as a source of competitive advantage, as motivation is related with a lower turnover rate (Ramlall, 2004).

The Latin root of motivation means “to move” and that is why motivational experts study what moves individuals to act and why people acts in a particular way (Weiner, 1992). In other words, to study motivation means to study individual’s actions (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) and it is a topic that has been approach from different disciplines and it has evolved across the years. While psychologists have been studying the relationship between motivation and instincts, managers have been more interested in pragmatic issues (Steers & Mowday, 2014).

Pinder (1998) defined work motivation as “a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual’s being, to initiate work-related behaviour and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration”. Later, Latham and Pinder (2005) proposed a motivational framework based on needs, traits, values and cognition because these elements have a direct connection with work motivation. For example, elements such as national culture, job design characteristics or person-context fit influence in how people set their goals and strategies based on their needs, values, and situational context.

Table 1 shows an extension of their work where other authors and work motivational theories are also included with the goal of identify if there are common patterns which might help to understand better the dynamics between motivation at work and its impact on employee retention as it is discussed in the following section.
| Classification | Construct | Authors | Main theories |
|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Needs         | Why I have to act? | (Maslow, 1943a) (R. Kanfer, 1990) (Wicker et al., 1993) (Ronen, 2001) (Kluger & Tikochinsky, 2001) (Klein, 1991) (Härtel, Zerbe, & Ashkanasy, 2010) (Payne, 1992) (Atkinson, 1957) (Herzberg, 1966) (Alderfer, 1969) (Gannon & Anna Boguszak, 1966) (Vroom, 1964) (McClelland, 1980) (Argyris, 1959) (Lawler & Porter, 1967) (Bernard Weiner, 2010) (Raynor, 1969) | Vroom’s (1964), Valence Instrumentality Expectancy Theory; Maslow (1954), Hierarchy Theory; Raynor (1969), Theory of Future Orientation Effect and Achievement Motivation; Weiner’s (1974), Attribution Theory; Herzberg (1966), Motivation Hygiene Theory; McClelland’s (1961), Learned Needs Theory; Atkinson (1978), The Dynamics of Action Approach; McGregor (1960), X and Y Theories; Porter and Lawler Model (1968). |
|               | Goal oriented. | | |
|               | Need structure. | | |
|               | People prioritize needs in different ways. | | |
|               | Provide an explanation for choice, effort and persistence. | | |
|               | Individuals acquire needs from culture and society (need for autonomy, achievement). | | |
|               | Motivation is defined as the process that determines how energy is used to satisfy needs. | | |
| Traits        | Personality | (Côté & Moskowitz, 1998) (Ruth Kanfer & Heggestad, 1999) (Mitchell & Daniels, 2003) (Schmitt, Cortina, Ingerick, & Wiechmann, 2003) (Ruth Kanfer & Heggestad, 1999) (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002) (Tett & Burnett, 2003) (Dweck, 1999) (Bono & Judge, 2003) (Digman, 1990) | Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, (2002), A Meta-analysis of a Self-monitoring Personality; Digman (1990), Five Factor Model; Judge (2009), Core Self Evaluations and Work Success; Dweck (1999), Self-theories; Deci and Ryan (1970), Self-determination Theory. |
|               | Need to express your traits | | |
|               | No recognize classification system. | | |
|               | Personality predicts what motivates you | | |
|               | Self-regulation (action and traits) | | |
|               | Personality defines performance | | |
| Values        | Needs are rooted in values | (Locke & Henne, 1986) (Foreman & Murphy, 1996) (Verplanken & Holland, 2002) (Malka & Chatman, 2003) (L. Arciniega & Gonzalez, 2017) (Ralston et al., 2011) (Kluchkohn, 1951) (Rokeach, 1973) (Super & Sverko, 1995) (Srivastava & Barmola, 2011) (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) (Elizur, 1984) (Schwartz, 1992) (Barrett, 2006) | Foreman & Murphy (1996), Valence Expectancy Framework; Elizur (1984), Model on Work Values; Schwartz (1992), Circular Model of Values; Kluchkohn and Strodtbeck (1951), Values Orientation Theory; Arciniega Ruiz de Esparza & Gonzalez (2000), EVAT Scale; Barrett (1997), The Seven Levels Model. |
|               | Basis to achieve goals | | |
|               | Influence choices and behavior | | |
|               | Determine job seeking behavior | | |
|               | Values are determined by the individual context and culture | | |
| Cognition     | Needs are rooted in values | | |
|               | Acquired by experience | | |
|               | Basis to achieve goals | | |
|               | Influence choices and behavior | | |
|               | Determine job seeking behavior | | |
|               | Values are determined by the individual context and culture | | |
|               | Knowledge is required to identify individual needs and to choose and achieve goals. | Weise and Carraher (1998) Weise and Cropanzano (1996) Parket (1998) Brunstein et al. (1996) Alderfer (1972) Deci (1975) Bandura (1977) Falk (1965) Hackman (1976) | Alderfer (1972), Existence Relatedness Growth Theory (ERG); Deci (1975), Competence and Self-determination; Deci (1975), Cognitive Evaluation Theory; Bandura (1986), Behavioural Framework; Bandura (1977), Social Cognitive Theory; Hackman (1976), Job Characteristics Model (JCM); Adam’s (1965), Equity Theory Organizational Justice; Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), Affective Events Theory. |
Work Motivation Based on Values as a Common Pattern

Ramlall (2004) stated that employee motivations influence retention rates and other behaviours within organizations. In fact, there is a large amount of evidence suggesting that there is a direct relationship between motivation of individuals at the job and lower turnover intentions (Upasna & Vishal, 2018) because when individuals are motivated at work they feel committed to the organisation (Kong, Sun, & Yan, 2016). Motivation at work is a complex topic as it includes a large number of theories, concepts and diverse information and it brings together scholars from the psychology and managerial sciences that try to unveil individual’s behaviour as a function (Chiang & Jang, 2008).

Table 1 illustrates the main work motivation theories and their authors organized in needs, traits, values, and cognition following the classification elements proposed in Latham and Pinder’s study (2005). For each one of the classifications, the main constructs are identified based on the analysis of the literature review and the “need” concept appears as a common denominator.

Many scholars studied the relationship between satisfaction of needs and employee motivation and they stated that the failure of satisfying a need will lead to pain associated with unmet needs (Alderfer, 1969; Argyris, 1959; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000; Maslow, 1943; Gannon & Boguszak, 1966). Therefore, human resources practices that satisfy employee’s needs will have a higher motivational workforce (Green, Finkel, Fitzsimons, & Gino, 2017).

Needs are directly related with values in the sense that needs cannot be translated into goals unless they have a cognitive representation through values. According to Schwartz’s ideas, people choices are affected by the set of values that each individual has (Arciniega & Gonzalez, 2005) and, in the professional environment, the behaviour of employees is affected by their values. For example, an employee may end up working in a particular position depending on the satisfaction of a certain need which is translated via their values (Ariza-montes & Han, 2017).

Needs and values are as well related in the sense that need theories explain why someone must act, they do not explain why particular actions are followed in specific situations to achieve a goal (Kanfer, 1990). For this reason, it is crucial when talking about work motivation to look at values. According to the philosopher Alain Locke (1885-1954), values are elements that mediate motivational processes transforming needs in intentions, being intentions conscious processes (Harris, 1989). Looking at the professional environment it can be seen that goals are considered the expressions of values. According to Elizur, Bong, Hunt, and Beck (1991) organizational values refer to an object, situation, or behaviour with high importance for the individual or group, consequently, work values refer to those situations, behaviours, or objects within the work context. Values include work intrinsic, extrinsic, and social situations. Furthermore, values are directly linked to needs in the sense that they respond to three universal requirements: the need that individuals have from a biological point of view, the need for appropriate social interaction, and the requirement of a proper functioning of a group (Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999).

The identification of values is a very relevant tool for most organizations interested in continuously measure the level of motivation of their employees (Arciniega & González, 2017). This identification helps them to create either short or long-term strategies in order to improve employee’s welfare and reduce turnover (Ertas, 2015). Ralston et al. (2011) for example, analysed a sample of business managers and professionals across 50 societies assessing workforce work values using the framework provided by Schwartz (1992).
Another example will be Barrett (2006) who developed several cultural transformation tools for organizations based on values with the objective of driving effectiveness and corporate profit (Barrett, 2008). The above are just some examples that highlight the fact that organizations recognize the importance of understanding the motivational paradigm in order to retain talented employees. Talented employees will be able to survive within the changing organizational world providing a competitive advantage (Hussain, 2013).

**Conclusions and Further Work**

Retaining employees is a topic of concern within organizations as it has economical repercussions and threats organizations survival. Studies have revealed that employee motivations impact on retention rates suggesting that having motivated employees directly relates to a lower turnover ratio.

This paper analyzes different work motivation theories with the objective of identifying patterns that might help to understand better the dynamics between motivation at work and its impact on employee retention.

From the above study, it can be concluded that motivational theories have the satisfaction of a need as a common denominator. Although need theories explain why someone must act they do not explain why particular actions are followed in specific situations to achieve a goal. If motivation has to do with the satisfaction of needs and needs depend on individual values then which ones are the work values of employees? This is a question that organizations might want to consider when establishing their human resources strategies as the identification of their employee’s work values might help organizations to generate organizational retention strategies.

Within the fast pace changing rhythm of organisations another interesting fact to have into account is that employees from different generations have different work preferences and work values (Dokadia, Rai, & Chawla, 2015). In this line, numerous scholars have researched what drives people according to their generational cohort (Eversole, Venneberg, & Crowder, 2012; Lyons, Schweitzer, & NG, 2015; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). Further work includes studying what different generation’s values in regards to their generational cohort and more particularly the Millennial generation as it will represent a 74 per cent of the world’s working population by 2025 (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

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