

One more time: How do you motivate employees?

Frederick Herzberg, Harvard Business Review, September 1987

Herzberg is well-known for his *motivation hygiene theory*. His great insight: the factors that lead to job satisfaction are different from those that lead to job dissatisfaction. Essentially, what Herzberg said was that *job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are not opposites*.

Two kinds of needs are involved. One comes from our *animal nature; i.e. the need to avoid pain, and basic biological needs*. For example, hunger is a basic biological drive, and we need money to ensure that we are not hungry. The absence of money leads to job dissatisfaction. Thus, salary is a *hygiene factor*. The second set of needs relates to *achievement and a sense of psychological growth*. For example, our job should be interesting and challenging. These are the *growth or motivator factors*.

While hygiene factors such as salary, working conditions and security are extrinsic to the job, motivator factors such as achievement and growth are intrinsic to the job.

There are three general philosophies when it comes to managing people:

- Organizational theorists believe in a pragmatic approach, as human needs are varied and irrational. They argue that the proper organization of jobs will lead to an efficient job structure. Favourable job attitudes will follow as a matter of course.
- Industrial engineers maintain that human needs are best met by aligning the individual with the most efficient work process. They believe in putting in place the most appropriate incentive system, and designing the specific working conditions, so that people are most efficiently utilized.
- Behavioural scientists emphasize one or more of the various hygiene and motivator needs. They lay stress on instilling healthy employee attitudes, and fostering a favourable culture in the organization, through training and other interventions.

The motivation hygiene theory suggests that the key to getting more out of employees is to *enrich the job*. Job enrichment is quite different from horizontal loading.

In horizontal loading, the quantity of output expected from employees is higher, meaningless tasks are added, or some difficult parts of the job are removed. In contrast, vertical loading or job enrichment is centred on motivator factors. These include:

- removing controls while keeping accountability
- giving a person a complete natural unit of work
- giving employees more freedom, and empowering them to do their work
- making information more easily available to workers
- adding new, more difficult components to the job
- enabling employees to specialize, and become experts in specific areas

Conclusion

Not all jobs can be enriched. But even if a small portion of the current focus on hygiene factors is diverted towards job enrichment, industry and society would greatly benefit.

Herzberg ends his article on a very powerful note. If we have employees, we must know how to use their talent properly. If we do not, we must either automate the process or have less qualified people. If we have employees in the workplace and cannot utilize them fully, we will certainly have a motivation problem.