

Workshop on Human Resources Management and Training in Statistical Offices 14-16 September 2010

Performing more than can be expected

Motivation in NSIs in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Autonomy, competence and responsibility has proven to be effective in making employees perform more than can be expected. This paper will discuss how to motivate staff at national statistical institutes (NSIs), in particular in development countries.

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1. The Challenge

It is imperative to make people *want* to do a good job, for the effectiveness and success of organisations. This is a challenge for most NSI leaders and human resource staff. The staff must be allowed to use their skills and feel responsible for the product. In return they should be given something they appreciate or that makes them grow. To identify the wishes and needs of the employees is an important quality of a leader. Examples of what people may want are respect, interesting tasks, autonomy at work, further education, a future career, having sufficient equipment, transport, a larger office or an economic reward. Making a persons work visible in different ways will also be a reason to work harder. We must encourage people to take initiatives; to really excite their minds.

I try to inspire them to work for their country. I give them hope, tell them that there are chances for education, opportunity for growth, even though I do not know if it is true. I tell them that we are pioneers, we are establishing something no-one has ever done before.

Martin Gama Abucha, IT Director,
Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation (SSCCSE)

Even if people are well qualified, they will not necessarily do a good job. If they do not feel that the organisation trusts, believes and invests in them, they probably will not produce high quality statistics. One should look at different ways of making people want to perform well at work and to make them feel obliged to it. There are several ways to influence an employees' attitude. It can e.g. be influenced by having autonomy and responsibility, getting recognition for publications, envisioning a career, as well as salary and other extrinsic motivators.

Resent HR studies have drawn attention to involvement and performance. The studies focus on Human Resource activities aiming at making the employees identify, get involved and

emotionally attached to their organisation. Development of staff skills, career opportunities, delegation of responsibility and a high degree of autonomy, are core elements in this respect (Verburg, Den Hartog and Koopman 2007, Combs, Liu, Hall, and Ketchen 2006, Kuvaas 2008). Further, it is found that involved staff will identify with the organisation's goals, cooperate constructively, be loyal and work harder, smarter and more responsible (Pfeffer and Veiga, 1999):

- Employees work harder as a result of more involvement, commitment and affection, resulting from a high degree of autonomy and control over work processes.
- Employees work smarter because they are encouraged to develop their skills and competence in general.
- Employees work more responsible, because more responsibility is in their hands.

All organisations want the staff to work harder, smarter and more responsible. The way to achieve it is through high autonomy, the possibility to develop and have responsibility. A person follows a path. The NSI should help him follow that interest or career. To build the staff's competence is to build the competence of the institution.

Self-interest does not provide a good explanation for actual behaviour, neither in nor outside organisations. This is now well established in contemporary research (Bazerman (2005) and Ferraro, Pfeffer and Sutton (2005)). Never the less we see a tendency to organise work life based on an assumption that people act on self-interest.

This paper will briefly look into the challenge of motivating staff. It will discuss different causes of motivation, rewards and obligations and goals as reasons to perform.

2. Motivation form inside or outside

Motivation may come from something outside or it may be genuinely perceived as something inherent in a person. The motivation from outside – or the extrinsic motivation – is driven by the urge to achieve something other than work itself. It is to be motivated by the payment for doing a job or complying to the norms of an organisation as a result of control. Inner (intrinsic) motivation on the other hand, is driven by the joy of work, work for its own sake. It is being motivated because the task itself is attractive, because you are looking forward to plan it, do it and see the results of it.

Research shows that the intrinsic motivating factors are most important to us when working (DeVoe and Iyengar, 2004). Sheldon, Elliot, Kim and Kasser (2001) found that among ten fundamental needs, autonomy, competence, relatedness and self-esteem are the most important. Money and luxury are perceived as the least important. We find more or less the same order of the needs across cultures; employees constantly report intrinsic motives over extrinsic. How wealthy a nation is does not seem to influence the findings. The evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa is however limited, but some research has been done. Mathauer and Imhoff (2006) find in a study based on 99 in-depth interviews from Benin and Kenya that increased salaries are by no means sufficient to solve the problem of low motivation among health personnel: More money does not automatically imply higher motivation. Roll-Hansen, Cooper, Lillegård, Finnvold, Kjøsterud, Opdahl, Tønnessen and Hem (2009) have found that lack of material and fear of your superior are challenges for the motivation of health workers in several developing countries. Where income is insufficient to meet even the most basic

needs of professionals and their families, worker motivation in a developing country context has to involve a mix of financial and non-financial incentives (Mathauer and Imhoff, 2006). Employees hence must earn sufficiently to be able not to worry about money, and to be able to focus on their work. The size of the regular salary is perceived as a sign of how valuable a colleague is to an organisation. Therefore, the regular salary is partly an intrinsic motivator.

Recalling Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory, it seems reasonable to assume that a need for an intrinsic motivating work environment would be less salient if more basic needs are not met. According to Maslow, our basic, lower order needs must be met before we start focusing on higher order needs like needs for social interaction, self-esteem and self-actualisation. Humans needs are however not all that structured, and research have found limited support for the theory (Greenberg and Baron, 2008). The question of whether or not autonomy matters if your children are starving, seems to give an intuitive support to Maslows ranking of needs: If basic needs of professionals and their families are not met, financial issues are bound to gain importance. We also find an argument that autonomy matters even under relatively deprived circumstances from Henry Ford's factories in the US in the early 20th century. The factories were designed by tayloristic principles, leaving each worker only to do one specific task, like a piece in a machine. The assembly line was the guiding principle. Despite the salary of five dollars a day – a significant amount at the time – Henry Ford did not manage to keep turn-over down.

Regardless of the relative importance of being intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, our colleagues in the south find it particularly demotivating to be deprived of external motivators, in this case the delay or reduction of payment.

We got 25 per cent extra pay for working with the Census. Everyone was affected when it disappeared. But I think people understood it. They know that it is necessary to contribute to the nation.

Mr. Charles Agdno Mona, GSI Director SSCCSE

Most staff members were not so forthcoming towards the salary reduction. Payment of salaries is also frequently delayed. This is causing both problems and frustration for the staff.

No matter if salaries in developing countries often are low, that is no reason to fail to use the possibilities inherent in motivating staff through giving autonomy, developing competence and delegating responsibility. There is no reason to believe these organisational tools will not benefit motivation across the world.

3. Rewards

Rewarding people for performing more than can be expected have several advantages. You want to make your staff aware that you know they have done a good job and give them something extra for it, and you want to inspire the behaviour you want them to continue. But important aspects of the job that are not rewarded may be overseen. Cooperation among colleagues to perform the best, may be substituted by competition for the reward. The three most important factors we should consider are to reward people in a way that:

- Inspire joy of work
- Inspire cooperation
- Is perceived as fair

Rewards that inspire joy of work are generally more effective, cheaper and better. This can give employees autonomy to decide how to perform work, give them responsibility for tasks and recognition for work well done. It is also giving staff training and allowing them the possibility to develop through learning on the job, taking on new and interesting tasks and to develop in other ways.

If a reward is given to a group as a whole, it encourages people to work together to achieve results. Hence, collective rewards are preferable to rewards that are given to an individual.

Salaries in public service in many countries – and particularly in developing countries - are low, both in the actual amount and compared to salaries in the private sector. Participating in workshops and in-service travelling either for field-work or abroad is generally compensated more generously. Hence, in-service travelling can increase the salary of civil servants substantially. Ideally, employees should not be encouraged to focus only on the tasks with the highest economic return, instead of producing high quality statistics. This could be helped by increasing the regular salary and reducing the compensation for travelling. As a second best option, one may try to correct the problems associated with the present incentive structure, by diluting its effect. This may be done by also giving incentives for other important tasks, like teaching, writing publications and other important tasks, not necessarily associated with travelling. The present incentive structure is counterproductive as it contributes to pulling staff out of the headquarter and makes staff focus on an economic reward, not on statistics.

One alternative way to reward staff is to put all extra remuneration in a common fund and distribute it evenly among all employees. This will create a feeling of working together for a common good. This approach may have to be modified somewhat to cover expenses for travels etc. Anyway, the allowances that are paid in addition to salaries ought to be kept to a minimum and they should be standardised as far as possible. You should e.g. try to avoid spending time and energy on negotiating the specific per diem rates for each survey. This removes the focus from doing a good job and often creates conflicts.

Acknowledgement and recognition from a superior for the work done is seen as valuable by the staff, as is it to be accepted as a professional by the Ministries and other decision making bodies. Getting credit for publications is also valuable. Training others is an important contribution to any NSI and ought to be valued highly.

Further, rewards must be perceived as fair and it must be distributed according to clear guidelines. Fairness does not mean that everyone has the same reward package – it means that differences between the rewards employees get need to be clear and understandable. If only one person can receive an increase in salary, it ought to be someone who for a substantial period of time has done a good job.

4. Creating an obligation

To be able to make an employee perform good, the employer have to know his abilities, what knowledge he needs and what motivates him to do a good job. The employee needs to know what is expected of him and to be assisted in achieving the goals that are set. Goals can make staff feel an obligation either to an organisation or to society.

The Chairman at SSCCSE is referring to the recent war situation and uses this for general motivation of his staff. And he tells them the way forwards.

Labanya Margaret Mathya Ugila,
Director General, SSCCSE, Southern Sudan

The Chairman of the SSCCSE uses the recent civil war and the need to rebuild society as way to motivate his staff. He makes them feel obliged to contribute to the reconstruction process. Also, the staff are proud of several achievements: The Population Census, the Consumer Prize Index and three household surveys. People tend to want to be working with these tasks. And; they want to take part in building the country, which his makes them feel as part of something bigger than themselves.

Setting goals

It is essential to ensure that workers have clear and attainable goals to achieve. Effective performance goals ought to be specific, difficult, acceptable and attainable. Further it is important to provide feedback on goal attainment (Greenberg and Baron, 2008).

Specific goals are measurable, unambiguous and behaviour-changing. They outline exactly what needs to be accomplished, and when it will be considered as being achieved. Having organisational goals that are consistent with personal goals is also an advantage. If goals are inconsistent, the resulting confusion and incompatibility may cause employees to do nothing or work in different directions. If goals are too rigid one may be motivated to cut corners in order to reach them. And if nothing is expected from you, it is not problematic to admit that you do nothing:

You do not know what is happening in the local offices and we do not know what is happening here at the headquarter. Do you know what I do when my people are sleeping? I join them.

Director of local NSI office

Challenges are important, due to the observation that we get what we expect. Up to a point, the more one expect from someone, the harder they will generally work. The idea is that you need to link high effort with high performance, and high performance with a positive

outcome. With those two linkages established, people are motivated to work hard to achieve a positive outcome. This is the basic idea behind the Expectancy Theory (Noe , Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wriarth (2008)).

It is equally important to make sure you give your team members what they need to achieve them. If you are setting goals, then you need to make sure that they are attainable, and you do that by providing the necessary support, tools, resources, and training.

To be able make an employee perform good, the employer have to know his abilities, what knowledge he needs and what motivates him to do a good job. The employee needs to know what is expected of him and how to achieve the targets set.

You can stimulate high performance through providing interesting and challenging work, helping people set and achieve meaningful goals, and recognising and rewarding high performance in ways that are valued by each individual.

5. The future

Treating staff with respect, giving them influence over work and making them feel invested in, increases productivity, quality and reduces turn-over. Not trusting your colleagues tear down their motivation and creates a scene where conflict is a core element. Even though counterproductive, still control remain a core element in many national statistical institutes. To have staff work harder, smarter and more responsible we have to involve all employees, give them autonomy, encourage them to develop their competence and place more responsibility is in their hands.

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