



Employee motivation: a Malaysian perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify the motivating factors of employees working in various Malaysian organizations.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey method was adopted. The survey questionnaire consisted of two parts: respondents' personal information were obtained through Part A and in Part B, they were asked to rank the ten motivating factors in terms of their effectiveness. The motivating factors were compiled from the existing literature and refined through consultation with human resource professionals.

Findings – An ordered set of motivating factors for employees working in Malaysian organizations. Demographic factors like gender, race, education, etc. were found to have impact on the ranking of the factors.

Originality/value – The findings are expected to provide useful guidelines to managers while developing employee motivation programs.

Keywords Motivation (psychology), Employee involvement, Job satisfaction, Malaysia

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The term motivation is derived from the Latin word “movere” which means to move. Motivation is what moves us from boredom to interest. It is like the steering wheel of a vehicle that directs our activities. Motivation represents those psychological processes that cause the arousal, direction, and persistence of voluntary activities that are goal oriented (Mitchell, 1982). Bartol and Martin (1998) define motivation as a force that energizes behavior, gives direction to behavior, and underlies the tendency to persist. This definition recognizes that in order to achieve goals, individuals must be sufficiently stimulated and energetic, must have a clear focus on what is to be achieved, and must be willing to commit their energy for a long enough period of time to realize their aim. Since, a leading function of management involves influencing others to work toward organizational goals, motivation is an important aspect of that function. Stewart (1986) cites John Harvey-Jones, chief executive of ICI: “the real purpose of management is motivation of the group to use its energy to achieve objectives.” Steers and Porter (1983, p. 32) write:

Managers have the responsibility to create a proper climate in which employees can develop to their fullest potential. Failure to provide such a climate would theoretically increase employee frustration and could result in poorer performance, lower job satisfaction, and increased withdrawal from the organization.

The authors express sincere thanks and gratitude to all the respondents for their participation in the survey.



In today's highly competitive labor market, there is extensive evidence that organizations regardless of size, technological advances, market focus, are facing retention challenges (Ramlall, 2004). Fitz-enz (1997) stated that the average company loses approximately \$1 million with every ten managerial and professional employees who leave the organization combined with the direct and indirect costs; the total cost of an exempt employee's turnover is a minimum of one year's pay and benefits. Ahmad and Bakar (2003) mention that voluntary turnover is a major problem for companies in some Asian countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, etc. Job-hopping has become so rampant in these Asian countries that it has, in part, become culture. Ramlall (2004, p. 52) writes:

Given the large investments in employee retention efforts within organizations, it is rational to identify, analyze and critique the motivation theories underlying employee retention in organizations.

Motivation constitutes a central element when going through the process of human learning. If the organization does not possess the ability to motivate its employees, the knowledge within the organization is not practically used to a maximum. Therefore, it becomes the aim of every learning organization to find the factors that enable it to motivate its employees to continuous learning and to take advantage of this knowledge to ensure its living (Osteraker, 1999). In today's business environment, the future belongs to those managers who can best manage change. To manage change, organizations must have employees committed to the demand of rapid change and as such committed employees are the source of competitive advantage (Dessler, 1993).

It is unlikely that employees will be committed if they are not sufficiently motivated. During the last 70 years, many psychologists and management gurus have conducted extensive research on various aspects of employees' motivation. For completeness of the paper, here we provide a brief account of the pioneering works.

Theories of employee motivation

Bartol and Martin (1998) have classified the major theories in motivation into three categories: needs theory, cognitive theory, and reinforcement theory. The most popular needs theory is owing to Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1970) and it is known as Maslow's motivation theory of hierarchical needs. The hierarchy includes five basic levels of needs, which should be satisfied consecutively.

Alderfer (1972) proposed an alternative to Maslow's theory known as ERG theory. He consolidated five levels of Maslow's hierarchy into three levels: existence (E), relatedness (R), and growth (G). Existence needs include physiological factors such as food, shelter, clothes, good pay, fringe benefits, good working conditions, etc. Relatedness needs address our relationship with others such as families, friends, work groups, etc. Growth needs are associated with Maslow's last two levels, i.e. self-esteem and self-actualization.

Herzberg *et al.* (1959) developed the 2-factor (motivators and hygiene factors) theory in employee motivation. Herzberg (1968) argued that eliminating the cause of dissatisfaction (through hygiene factors) would not result in a state of satisfaction. Satisfaction (or motivation) would occur only as a result of the use of motivators. On the other hand, McClelland (1985) studied three types of needs: achievement, affiliation, and power. One of the best known cognitive theories, known as expectancy theory

originally proposed by Victor H. Vroom argues that the strength of a tendency to act in a certain way depends on the strength of an expectation that the act will be followed by a given outcome and on the attractiveness of that outcome to the individual (Robbins, 1993).

Equity theory recognizes that individuals are concerned not only with the absolute amount of rewards they receive for their efforts, but also with the relationship of this amount to what others receive. Based on one's inputs, such as effort, experience, education, and competence, one can compare outcomes such as pay, recognition and other factors. When people perceive an imbalance in their outcome-input ratio relative to others, tension is created. Equity theory rests upon three main assumptions (Carrell and Ditttrich, 1978). First, the theory holds that people develop beliefs about what constitutes a fair and equitable return for their contributions of their jobs. Second, the theory assumes that people tend to compare what they perceive to be the exchange they have with their employers. The other assumption is that when people believe that their own treatment is not equitable relative to the exchange they perceive others to be making, they will be taking actions that they deem appropriate.

According to the goal-setting theory, if people are provided with a goal followed by a reward, then they will be motivated. The goals should be specific and measurable, challenging but attainable, relevant to the organization and must be accomplished within a specific period of time. It is usually considered as a powerful motivational tool.

The reinforcement theories (originally proposed by B.F. Skinner) are actually the antithesis of cognitive theories in the sense that the theories do not relate with human thought process. According to the reinforcement theory, our behavior can be explained by consequences in the environment, and therefore, it is not necessary to look for cognitive explanations. Instead, the theory relies heavily on a concept called the *law of effect*, that states behaviors having pleasant or positive consequences are more likely to be repeated and behaviors having unpleasant or negative consequences are less likely to be repeated (Bartol and Martin, 1998).

The theories mentioned above continue to provide the foundation for a significant amount of organization and managerial development practices. In addition to the above theories, during the last decade, numerous studies have been made on employees' motivation of which a brief account has been provided below.

Literature review

Lord (2002) contends that retention and productivity of workers is a function of their motivation. The author examines the responses from 29 engineers over the age of 55 regarding factors in the workplace and their effects on the retention and productivity of senior engineers. In his study, the main motivators are found to be accomplishment, job responsibility, recognition, etc. The author concludes by saying that successful application of motivators improves job satisfaction and therefore increases productivity. In a separate study, Wright (2001) does not find any convincing evidence in support of the following two assumptions:

- (1) The characteristics of public sector employees in working environment are different to the private sector.
- (2) Those differences have a meaningful impact upon work motivation.

The author concludes that public employee perceptions of weak relationship between reward and performance, greater procedural constraints and goal ambiguity may have a detrimental effect on their work motivation.

Rowley (1996) seeks to identify issues that have impact on the motivation of academic staff in higher education. In referring to the hygiene factors of Herzberg, the author mentions that frustration may develop from dissatisfaction which prevents staff from doing a good job, including poor timetable organization, inadequate maintenance of educational equipments, or too many assorted demands on their time. Peterson and Quintanilla (2003) link intrinsic motivation to socialization into social work values and norms with respect to the main organizational applications of intrinsic motivation, namely cognitive evaluation theory and job characteristic theory. They suggest that individual acceptance of societal values and norms that support productive work behavior contribute to intrinsic work motivation beyond what these theories would predict.

Mani (2002) surveyed four types of employees namely, ground workers, library clerks, patient relation representatives, and medical record assistants working at East Carolina University to know their motivation. The author found that good pay and recognition were the most effective motivators. On the other hand, benefits, working environment, co-workers also have effects on motivation but not as strong as the previous two. Milliken (1996) has described the Eastman Chemical Company way to motivate and retain its employees. The programs adopted are job security, performance-based appraisal system, extrinsic recognition through employee suggestion system, giving performance feedback, training in problem solving, etc. Kovach (1995) discusses the ranking of ten motivational factors made by the employees and their immediate supervisors. The author finds that the rankings made by the supervisors are significantly different to those made by the employees. He concludes that managers make mistakes by thinking that what will motivate them will also motivate the employees. In the context of international marketing channels, Mehta, Dubinsky and Anderson (2003) have examined the linkages among various leadership styles, motivation, and performance on data drawn from a sample of automobile dealers in USA, Finland, and Poland. The authors propose that the adopted leadership style and motivating factors should be in congruence with the national culture.

Ross (2002) assessed the motivation of chefs in seven New South Wales (Australia) hospitals by comparing the perceived presence of job dimensions and motivational outcomes (private and public). He found that chefs employed in smaller private sector hospital kitchens appear satisfied with their work, but this is not the case for public sector hospitals.

Kaufmann, Davies, and Schmidt (1994) have described the motivation gap among the East German employees immediately after reunification with West Germany. They also describe the measures taken by the government to address the issue. Eskildsen, Kristensen and Westlund (2004) studied the differences in intrinsic work motivation and job satisfaction among employees with different characteristics working in Nordic countries. The authors found that job satisfaction and intrinsic work motivation have a nearly linear relationship with age and that the employees with higher education reported higher level of intrinsic work motivation. Sarri and Trihopoulou (2005) have investigated the personal characteristics and motivation of female Greek entrepreneurs

in order to assist Greek policy makers in their future attempts to devise programs to support women entrepreneurs in the start-up phase. The study confirms that female entrepreneurs in Greece are motivated to undertake entrepreneurship mainly by factors that relate to economic reasons and self-fulfillment, including the needs for creativity, autonomy, and independence.

In addition to Greece, Sarri and Trihopoulou (2005) have also reviewed the case of some other European countries' female entrepreneurs. The authors mention that even though motives differ depending on the country, time period, and group of women, the prevalent trend in most European countries is pull factors as opposed to "no other choice." In Italy, female entrepreneurs tend to fall within the "life style entrepreneurs" category, meaning they are motivated by being in control of the choice of the kind of work they undertake in order to apply their knowledge and develop their expertise. A survey designed by Hogeschool van Amsterdam (1994), reports that the most frequently cited motives for women to start a business are: economic independence (47 percent), combining work and family (17 percent), and wanting to be one's own master (16 percent). In Portugal, "personal achievement" was found to be a women's driving force for starting a business.

During the last decade, China has attained phenomenal growth in economy. Establishment of foreign companies has significantly contributed to this growth. However, there has been an issue of motivation of Chinese workers in these foreign companies. Lu *et al.* (1997) reported that Chinese managers saw the highest cause of difficulties being expatriate managers without knowledge of the Chinese environment and the second highest cause being different management style. Jackson and Bak (1998) write: "It may be that Western concepts of motivation are not relevant in a socialist China, where people have been motivated perhaps only to do what was the best for the country with little overlap in practice to industrial productivity." The authors reemphasized Katz and Kahn's (1978) model of "rule enforcement", "external reward", and "internalized motivation" for Chinese workers.

In another paper, Bjoerkman and Lu (1997) reported that at a recent round table discussion with the government of China, 59 percent of participants from foreign invested enterprises (FIE) concluded that recruiting and retaining managers (a significant input into human resource management) was the most significant problem facing FIEs in China. Leung and Clegg (2001) have found that the younger executives working in the public sector in Hong Kong have higher level of career motivation and are striving to attain additional responsibility and authority in work assignment, while senior executives are concerned with holding their previous accomplishment and competence in their occupational role. The authors have also found that the more the ambiguity and uncertainty exist in the government offices, the lesser is the level of career motivation.

In an exploratory study, Kubo and Saka (2002) identify the three factors: monetary incentive, human resource development, and job autonomy that play as motivators to the knowledge workers working in the Japanese financial sector. In the past 20 years, there has been an 80.3 percent increase in women entrepreneurs in Singapore compared to 65.6 percent increase of male entrepreneurs. Lee (1997) has investigated the motivation behind female entrepreneurs and found four factors namely, achievement, affiliation, autonomy, and dominance behind this motivation.

Ahmad and Singh (2001) have identified key challenges faced by Malaysian managers working in various companies. They have also provided guidelines to the Malaysian managers to motivate their subordinates. Ahmad (2001) has discussed the common observations on how managers belonging to different ethnic groups, viz., Malays, Chinese, and Indians make decisions and motivate employees. Further, the author examines the impact of cultural values of the above ethnic groups on the leadership and motivational practices of Malaysian companies who employ Malays, Chinese, and Indian workers. Referring to a number of published works on leadership and motivation, he mentions that (p. 84):

[...] most of the studies with the exception of one by Asma Abdullah are either general or specific to one country and are not applicable to the Malaysian context. Such human resource management and leadership theories may lead to practices which are not directly transferable to other countries like Malaysia, owing to cultural differences.

Ahmad and Bakar (2003) have explained the relationship between training and organizational commitment among Malaysian managers. In particular, in one of the five hypotheses, the authors tested the relationship between motivation to learn in training and organizational commitment. The authors concluded that motivation to learn in training was found to be significantly and positively related with affective, narrative, and overall organizational commitment.

All the research findings that were applicable to the workers working in the Western countries may not be valid for the Malaysian workers. For example, Ahmad and Bakar's (2003) findings on Malaysian employees for the relationship between age and tenure with the organizational commitment contradicts the findings on the Western workers (Lok and Crawford, 2001; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). The authors say (2003, p.181) that:

[...] Malaysians have different attitudes towards organizational commitment. The older they are and the longer they stay within an organization do not imply that they will be committed towards their organization. This can be mainly attributed to the uncertain business environment in Malaysia.

Research methodology

If an employee lacks skills, appropriate training can be employed. If there is an environmental problem, altering the environment to promote higher performance is the key. However, if motivation is the problem, the solution is more complex and more challenging (Wiley, 1997). For motivational problems, the best source of information is the employee himself/herself. Employees must be asked on a regular basis what sparks and sustains their desire to work. Their responses may lead the employer to redesign jobs, increase pay, change the working environment, or give more credit for the work done. The key is, however, that managers avoid the assumption that what motivates them motivates their employees as well (Wessler, 1984).

One of the first surveys on employees' motivation was conducted in 1946 on industrial employees by the Labor Relations Institute of New York (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969). The respondents were asked to rank factors in terms of their perceived effectiveness to motivate them. The factors were:

- Full appreciation of work done.
- Interesting work.

- Feeling of being in on things.
- Good working conditions.
- Good wages.
- Sympathetic help with personal problems.
- Personal or company loyalty to employees.
- Promotion and growth in the organization.
- Job security.

Again in the US context, the survey was repeated in 1980 (Kovach, 1980), in 1986 (Kovach, 1987) and in 1992 (Wiley, 1997). The 1992 survey consisted of ten factors; tactical discipline was added with the previously quoted nine factors. The objective of the present research is to get the ranking of the same set of motivators from the Malaysian employees. This is to see whether or not difference exists between the two sets of ranking. To know the preference level on these factors, a survey was conducted in which 505 employees working at over 96 various Malaysian organizations participated. The survey questionnaire was designed in consultation with two professors in Human Resource Management from the authors' department. Subsequently, the questionnaire was pilot tested on 15 employees. The questionnaire had two parts. In part A, the respondents were asked to furnish their demographic details, e.g. gender, race, age, education level, marital status, type of employment (public or private), type of work (executive or non-executive), etc.

In part B, the respondents were asked to rank the ten motivating factors in terms of their effectiveness. The exact statement in the questionnaire was, "Please rank the following motivating factors in terms of effectiveness from your point of view. Most effective motivator[1], rank = 1, second most effective motivator, rank = 2, etc. the least effective of the ten factors will receive the rank 10". In the pilot survey, we observed that some respondents used the same rank for more than one factor. To avoid the problem in the actual survey, we added the following line with the previous statement: "Please do not use same rank for more than one factor. One sample is (assigned at random): 5, 1, 8, 10, 4, 3, 7, 6, 2, 9" Despite this additional guideline, in the actual survey, 12 completed questionnaires were not useable. The number of useable questionnaires is, as stated before, 505. Table I provides the demographic information of the respondents.

In part A, respondents were also asked to write the name and address of the organization where they were working. But to keep the responses absolutely anonymous, writing the name of the company was kept optional. Among 505 respondents, only 273 respondents wrote the names of their companies. We obtained 96 names of companies, but actually, the number of companies for all the respondents in this survey was certainly more than 96. The types of companies/organizations obtained were: academic, airlines, automotive, banking, construction, financial, government agencies, insurance, various types of manufacturing, petroleum, retailing, telecommunication, transportation, utility, etc. All the respondents were contacted personally and obtained their responses.

Results and discussion

Table II shows mean, standard deviation, 95 percent confidence interval for the means and overall rank of the ten motivating factors. Ranking has been determined based

Variable ^a	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	279	55.46
Female	224	44.54
<i>Race</i>		
Malay	367	72.96
Chinese	54	10.74
Indian	28	05.57
Others	54	10.73
<i>Age group</i>		
20 years or below	1	0.002
21-25 years	68	13.49
26-30 years	134	26.59
31-35 years	144	28.57
36-40 years	68	13.49
41-50 years	78	15.48
51 years and above	11	2.18
<i>Highest level of education</i>		
Certificate	142	28.69
Professional	39	07.88
Bachelors	228	46.06
Masters	56	11.31
PhD	30	06.06
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	162	32.14
Married	342	67.86
<i>No. of children (for married respondents only)</i>		
1-2	156	30.89
3-5	122	24.16
6 or more	7	1.14
<i>Type of the company</i>		
Manufacturing	65	13.21
Service	427	86.79
<i>Employee size of the company</i>		
Less than 100	134	26.80
100-200	44	08.80
200-500	81	16.20
More than 500	241	48.20
<i>No. of years the company exists</i>		
Less than 5 years	80	16.10
5-10 years	119	23.94
10-20 years	141	28.37
More than 20 years	157	31.59
<i>Type of employment</i>		
Public	182	36.69
Private	203	61.08
Self-employed	11	2.23
<i>Working as</i>		
Executive	362	73.87
Non-executive	128	26.13
<i>No. of years the company served</i>		
Less than 3 years	206	41.36
3-5 years	65	13.05
5-10 years	132	26.51
More than 10 years	95	19.08

Note: ^aMissing entries are not considered in the table

Table I.
Respondents'
demographic information

Table II.
Ranking of the
motivators: Malaysian
perspective

Motivator	Mean	SD	Confidence interval (95 percent)	Rank
Job security	4.6250	2.8256	(4.37, 4.87)	4
Promotion	4.5040	2.7011	(4.26, 4.74)	3
Good working condition	4.2103	2.2977	(4.01, 4.41)	2
High wages	3.7996	2.8025	(3.55, 4.04)	1
Interesting work	4.9107	2.4877	(4.69, 5.13)	5
Management's help to solve personal problems	8.1190	2.1874	(7.93, 8.31)	10
Full appreciation of work done	5.6270	2.5072	(5.41, 5.84)	6
Sensible company rules, regulations, procedures, and policies	7.1587	2.5361	(6.94, 7.38)	9
Providing opportunities to grow through learning new things	5.6567	2.5821	(5.43, 5.88)	7
Job responsibility	6.3651	2.5902	(6.14, 6.59)	8

upon the mean value of the factors. The lower the mean, the higher is the rank. The smallest and the largest mean values are observed to be 3.7996 (high wages) and 8.1190 (management's help to solve personal problems), so their respective ranks are 1 and 10.

From the table, we observe that the six most effective motivating factors are the following:

- (1) High wages.
- (2) Good working conditions.
- (3) Promotion.
- (4) Job security.
- (5) Interesting work.
- (6) Full appreciation of work done.

All the above factors were included in the surveys conducted in the USA in 1946, 1980, 1986, and 1992. Table III provides a comparison of the results.

From Table III, the following observations can be made:

In all the three surveys conducted in the US in 1946, 1980, and 1986, high wages was placed in the fifth position among the ten motivating factors; however, in 1992 it jumped to the number one slot. This means that, of late, money has been a strong

Table III.
A comparison of the
ranks of the motivating
factors for US and
Malaysian employees

Factors	1946 (US)	1980 (US)	1986 (US)	1992 (US)	2004 (Malaysia)
High wages	5	5	5	1	1
Good working conditions	9	7	7	7	2
Promotion	7	6	6	4	3
Job security	4	4	4	3	4
Interesting work	6	1	1	5	5
Full appreciation of work done	1	2	2	2	6
Management help to solve personal problems	3	9	10	10	10

motivating factor for US industrial workers. This contradicts many people's belief. Darling *et al.* (1997, p. 1) write:

At one time, money was considered the best employee motivation technique. But today, the use of money as motivation has several strikes against it. The impact of a monetary reward is often short-lived. Non-cash rewards of high intrinsic recognition value – such as merchandise credits or time off – often work better. When given a cash incentive, an employee may spend the money on groceries or the electric bill. If merchandise is offered, however, employees will constantly be reminded of the incentive each time they look at the gift.

Human resource consultant Sullivan (2000, p. 36) writes:

I have never been a big fan of awarding small cash reward as a prize, because it has no “trophy” value. If you hand a team member a \$29 bill as a gesture of gratitude, the emotional buzz lasts anywhere from 12-15 s. The cash goes into the wallet and disappears.

Despite the above statements, money is still considered as an effective motivator. Wiley (1997, p. 271) justifies the top rank for high wages in 1992 survey as follows:

Over these years the industries and economics changed, and so did the workers values. By 1946 and 1986, after almost 40 years of relative prosperity, workers had experienced a significant rise in their living standards. By the 1990s after the acquisitions and mergers of the previous three decades in response to intensified competition, it is not surprising that the importance placed on various motivational factors had changed.

Further, he maintains that the external environment has placed many workers in a position of insecurity and uncertainty. In such time, basic needs may be regarded as most important motivators. Furthermore, Wiley finds good wages as the No.1 motivator regardless of gender, occupation, age, income or employment status. Citing Maslow's hierarchy theory, he writes (p. 277):

With respect to the *Hierarchy of Needs Theory*, pay is an important reward because it may satisfy several of the needs in the hierarchy. It provides employees with the means to purchase items which satisfy their physiological needs, and it enables them to meet their esteem needs, since it is one measure of relative worth.

Table III also shows that compared to the US in Malaysia good working condition is widely favored. Since, money is perceived as a good motivator, it is expected that promotion will receive higher priority. Indeed, in the US, over the years, promotion has been continuously pushed to higher priority. So is the case for Malaysia. We observe that job security has maintained stability in its ranking. We further note that promotion and job security have interchanged their positions for the two surveys, Malaysia: 2004 and US: 1992. It seems that contrary to Malaysia, Americans are more concerned with job security over promotion matters. In the 1980 and 1986 surveys, “interesting work” has maintained the middle ranking among the factors in all the surveys conducted in the US and Malaysia.

It seems that Malaysian workers are not much concerned about the appreciation of their work done compared to the above factors. This is in sharp contrast to their counterpart in the US. All the while, “full appreciation of work done” has been overwhelmingly favored by the American workers. Overall, it is observed that monetary incentive plays a major role in motivating Malaysian employees. This is clear from the higher ranks assigned to “high wages” and “promotion”. Therefore, when the question of choice is put forward, they prefer to go for monetary incentives in lieu of appreciation by

the management. On the other hand, perhaps American employees are relatively better paid, so they are more concerned about reward/recognition and appreciation from the management. However, in both countries, workers are least bothered about the “management’s help to solve their personal problems”. This conclusion is drawn despite the fact that it received 3rd rank in the 1946 survey in the US. Over the years, the employees have been more and more concerned about other factors rather than favoring management’s help to solve their personal problems.

Table IV reveals some interesting facts. We observe that 27.9 percent of the respondents articulated “high wages” as their No. 1 motivator; in fact, nearly half (46.9 percent) of the respondents have said high wages as their either No. 1 or No. 2 motivator. It is to be noted that no other motivator comes even closer to high wages. After high wages, 17.8 percent (2nd largest) of the respondents have said that their No. 1 motivator is “job security”, though it holds overall 4th rank. It is clear that the majority of the respondents 1st and 2nd preferred motivators are high wages (141 persons) and promotion (105 persons), respectively. This shows again that money has been a predominantly preferred motivator. It is also to be noted that good working condition has been uniformly favored through the ranks 1 to 5 and this has brought it into the 2nd position, ahead of promotion and job security.

Analysis based on demographic factors

Demographic factors of the respondents, e.g. gender, age, education level, etc. may affect their preference of the motivating factors (here we have used the term preferences to indicate that if the motivating factors are offered to the employees, then individually they can rank them (factors) in terms of effectiveness to motivate them). Kovach (1980) writes:

Individuals at different organization levels, with different earning power, may have different motivational values. Hence, what motivates individuals at one level of the organization may not motivate those at another level. This necessitates differentiating by income level and other demographic factors when analyzing attitudes for motivational purposes.

We have computed ranks of the previously mentioned ten motivating factors separately based upon: gender (male, female), race (Malay, Chinese, Indian), age (21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-50 years), education (certificate, professional, bachelors, masters, PhD), marital status (married, single), employment status (termed as “working as”) (executive, non-executive). Details are shown in Table V. The table reveals that the overall ranking of all the ten factors (see Table II) are more or less corroborated by the

Preference	1	2	Way 3	4	5
1st	141 (27.9)	55 (10.9)	56 (11.1)	90 (17.8)	49 (9.7)
2nd	96 (19.0)	84 (16.6)	105 (20.8)	51 (10.1)	50 (9.9)
3rd	46 (9.1)	87 (17.2)	59 (11.7)	68 (13.5)	65 (12.9)
4th	47 (9.3)	74 (14.7)	64 (12.7)	57 (11.3)	60 (11.9)
5th	37 (7.3)	62 (12.3)	47 (9.30)	53 (10.5)	85 (16.9)

Table IV.
Preference level on the
five most preferred ways
of motivators

Notes: 1, High wages; 2, Good working condition; 3, Promotion; 4, Job security; 5, Interesting work

people belonging to different levels of the demographic factors. Take the example of high wages. Its overall rank is 1 and this has been the rank for majority of the people across various demographic factors. The rank of “management’s help’, which is ten across all type of people, is exactly the same as the overall rank. Further, the overall ranks of “sensible company rules’ and “job responsibility’ are nine and eight, respectively. The corresponding rows in Table V reveal a uniform pattern that match with the overall ranks. A similar phenomenon is observed for the other factors.

For each combination of levels within each factor, Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient (RCC) has been computed and corresponding non-parametric hypothesis test has been performed using SPSS version 11.0. The results have been shown in Table VI. All the RCCs are significant at $p = 0.01$. The minimum and maximum RCCs were found to be 0.782 (Malay and Chinese) and 0.988 (professionals and bachelors), respectively. The results widely show that the ranks are correlated, i.e. there is no significant (except Malays and Chinese) difference in the preference on the factors. This means that the ranking of the factors is statistically same, i.e. it does not depend upon the demographic factors: gender, race, age, education level, marital and employment status.

Despite the absence of significant difference in preferences across various demographic factors, this does not mean that the people with respect to one particular demographic factor, e.g. gender, i.e. males and females concur on the same rank for all the ten motivators. In fact, this is not the case. Details are discussed in the following:

- *Gender.* Though the rank correlation coefficient between the ranks of all the ten factors made by males and females is 0.915, however, they placed promotion in ranks 2nd and 5th, respectively, (see Table V). Statistically, males demand promotion more than females ($p < 0.001$). On the other hand, females want the option “sensible company rules’ more than males ($p < 0.001$), despite the fact both groups have placed the same rank (9th) on the option. This shows that the groups differ in terms of mean values (males: 7.50, females: 6.70). No significant difference in gender was observed in any of the remaining eight factors.
- *Race.* The factor “opportunity to grow’ has been ranked as 7th, 2nd, and 5th by Malays, Chinese, and Indians, respectively, (refer to Table V). This shows that Chinese strongly favored the factor compared to Malays and Indians ($p = 0.001$). The matter is also clear from Table VII (the table has been discussed later). In fact, to the Chinese, the first five motivating factors (arranged in accordance of preference, vide Table V) are: high wages, opportunities to grow, good working conditions, promotion, and job security. On promotion matter, Indians (2nd rank) prefer the motivator significantly ($p < 0.05$) more than the Chinese (4th rank). Though Malays rank the factor as 3rd, but no statistical difference between Malays and Chinese was found. On interesting work, Malays prefer the factor more than Chinese and Indians.
- *Education.* It is interesting to observe that Certificate holders have placed high wages in the 3rd position behind good working conditions and promotion, whereas professionals, bachelors, and masters degree holders’ first preference is high wages. Statistically, ($p < 0.05$) these three groups of respondents prefer high wages more than Certificate holders. We also observe that Certificate and PhD holders place the same rank, i.e. 3rd for high wages and 1st rank for good

Table V.
Ranking of the
motivators based upon
demographic factors

No.	Motivator	Gender		Race			Age					Education			Marital status		Working as				
		G ₁	G ₂	R ₁	R ₂	R ₃	A ₁	A ₂	A ₃	A ₄	A ₅	E ₁	E ₂	E ₃	E ₄	E ₅	M ₁	M ₂	W ₁	W ₂	
1	Job security	4	3	5	5	4	5	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	2	2	4	4	4	3	
2	Promotion	2	5	3	4	2	3	5	4	2	2	2	2	3	4	5	5	3	3	4	
3	Condition	3	2	2	3	3	1	2	3	4	1	3	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	1	
4	High wages	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	2	
5	Int. work	5	4	4	7	6	4	3	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	
6	Help	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
7	Appreciation	7	6	6	6	7	6	7	6	7	6	7	7	7	6	6	6	7	7	6	6
8	Rules	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	9	9	9	9	9
9	Opportunity	6	7	7	2	5	8	6	7	7	7	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	6	8	8
10	Responsibility	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	8	8	8	7	7

Notes: G₁, Male; G₂, Female; R₁, Malay; R₂, Chinese; R₃, Indian; A₁, 21-25; A₂, 26-30; A₃, 31-35; A₄, 36-40; A₅, 40-50 years; E₁, Certificate; E₂, Professional; E₃, Bachelors; E₄, Masters; E₅, PhD; M₁, Single; M₂, Married; W₁, Executive; W₂, Non-executive

Table VII.
Duncan's multiple
comparison test results

Demographic factor	Motivator	Subsets for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Race	Promotion	R ₃ , R ₁ , R ₂ [*]	R ₁ , R ₂	
	High wages	R ₂ , R ₃ , R ₁	R ₃ , R ₁	
	Interesting work	R ₁ , R ₂	R ₂ , R ₃	
	Help	R ₁ , R ₃	R ₁ , R ₃ , R ₂	
	Appreciation	R ₂ , R ₁	R ₁ , R ₃	
	Opportunity	R ₂	R ₁ , R ₃	
	Premium	R ₁ , R ₃	R ₃ , R ₂	
Age	Promotion	A ₅ , A ₄ , A ₃ , A ₁	A ₄ , A ₃ , A ₁ , A ₂	
	Interesting work	A ₂ , A ₄ , A ₁	A ₂ , A ₄ , A ₁ , A ₃	A ₄ , A ₁ , A ₃ , A ₅
	Help	A ₁ , A ₄ , A ₃	A ₄ , A ₁ , A ₃ , A ₂ , A ₅	
Education	Working condition	E ₅ , E ₁	E ₁ , E ₂ , E ₃ , E ₄	
	High wages	E ₂ , E ₃ , E ₄	E ₃ , E ₄ , E ₅ , E ₁	
	Rules	E ₄ , E ₅ , E ₁ , E ₃	E ₅ , E ₁ , E ₃ , E ₂	

Note: ^{*}For legend, = Refer to Table V

working conditions. Further, PhD degree holders prefer good working conditions more than bachelors and masters degree holders (in both the cases, $p < 0.05$). However, on the same factor, we did not find significant difference between certificate holders and bachelors ($p = 0.391$) or masters ($p = 0.240$).

- *Marital status.* Married and unmarried people significantly differ in promotion ($p = 0.007$). As expected, married people prefer the option more than the unmarried people. No other significant difference is observed in any of the remaining factors.
- *Employment status.* We find that executives prefer promotion ($p = 0.011$) and opportunities to grow ($p = 0.037$) more than non-executives. On the other hand, non-executives prefer management's help to solve personal problems ($p < 0.001$), sensible company rules ($p = 0.023$) more than the executives.
- *Age.* Here too many significant differences are observed but we mention below only less. Except 21-25 years group, the other groups have placed first rank to the high wages. However, significant difference ($p = 0.023$) exists only between 21-25 years group and 26-30 years groups. The group 36-40 years prefer job security more than the group 21-25 years ($p = 0.018$). The group 26-30 years prefers the motivator interesting work more than the group 41-50 years ($p = 0.001$).

For demographic factors which have more than two levels, (e.g. race, age, and education), one-way ANOVA has been performed. The results are discussed above. Duncan's multiple comparison test has also been performed to know which pair of levels differ significantly. Duncan's homogenous subsets are shown in Table VII. As expected, the previous observations are attested in the test. For example, on further opportunity to grow, Malay and Indians belong to one subset whereas Chinese belong to another. Similarly and somewhat surprisingly, certificate and PhD holders belong to the same subset for most of the motivating factors.

Managerial implications

How can we motivate people to work? How can we create a situation in which people can achieve their personal goals while fulfilling the goals of the organization? These questions are frequently asked by managers. Yet, they make mistakes by assuming what motivates them, also motivate others. Motivation is an intrinsic matter to a human being. Since human beings are of widely varied nature, so are their motivators. Schein (1980) saw human nature as complex, with human needs and motivation varying according to the different circumstances people face, their life experiences, expectations, and age. Rowley (1996, p. 11) writes:

The effective manager needs to recognize that different motivators are appropriate for different staff and that different staff will demonstrate differing inherent levels of motivation in setting their own targets and striving towards them.

Organizational resources are scarce and all efforts should be made to utilize these resources in the best possible manner. The staff development plan is expected to motivate the staff, but if it does not, then there is something wrong. We maintain that employee involvement is the key in designing an effective motivation program. The findings of the present research may provide some clue in this regard.

As it has been mentioned before, monetary incentives play an important role in motivating Malaysian employees irrespective of gender, race, age group, etc. So, managers are expected to include them in their organizations' reward and recognition system. Special attention needs to be paid to the promotion matter. Furthermore, good working condition has been widely favored by the employees. An employee's suggestions system is expected to be in place to know their suggestions in order to improve organization's working condition. It is widely known that an effective suggestion system improves organization's working conditions and saves organization's resources from being wasted (Polzin, 1998; Trunko, 1993).

Managerial actions on the basis of demographic factors are described below:

- *Gender.* It is noted that females prefer "sensible company rules" more than males. Managers are expected to pay more attention to protect the rights of female employees and all care should be taken to ensure that they are not harassed.
- *Race.* To motivate Chinese employees, in addition to "high wages", special attention should be paid to "opportunity to grow". Some options are: training on various issues, attending conferences and workshops, management/team leadership experience, etc. Job enlargement and enrichment are also relevant in this regard.
- *Education.* Employees possessing higher qualifications like PhDs require good working conditions and job security. Since they are relatively on the upper edge, they may have plentiful opportunities outside; managers/administrators should provide a good working condition in retaining them. Special emphasis should be placed on their reward and recognition and job design.
- *Employment status.* Though "management's help to solve personal problems" is least preferred among the motivators surveyed, as far as this is concerned, managers should keep in mind that non-executives need their help more than executives.

Conclusions

Productivity improvement requires more than just customer service, technology, decentralization, or process reengineering. Whether these approaches succeed or fail will depend largely on the motivation of the employees who are asked to implement them. Reis and Peña (2001) held the view that motivating employees to work in the twenty-first century with theories conceived in the 1880s and early 1900s is likely not to be feasible. The world scenario has been changing rapidly. Any management development program should be incorporating the factors that affect the working lives of the workers. Furthermore, this kind of programs may fail if the inputs from employees are not adequately taken into consideration. In fact, people have witnessed failures of numerous programs even before they are kicked off. We would like to emphasize that employee involvement is crucial for a successful design of a motivation program. The present work has provided “guidelines” that are to be seriously considered at the time of developing employee motivation program. Future works are expected to be carried out in other countries along the same lines and a possible comparison with Malaysian setting can be made.

Note

1. Here the term motivator is used not in the sense of Herzberg; the list not only consists of Herzberg’s motivators but also some hygiene factors.

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