Profiling work motivation of project workers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the constructs of work motivation in project-based organizations. We first juxtapose work motivation in traditional and project-based organizations to put forward an operational definition of work motivation for our study. We then present the research methodology where we profile work motivation as perceived by project workers using principal component analysis. We obtain a five factor structure of work motivation. Finally, we discuss these results by putting them within the project management perspective and suggest managerial implications.
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1. Introduction

Work motivation is a driver to organization's performance. As organizations are increasingly becoming project-oriented, juxtaposing work motivation in traditional and project-based organizations is of primary interest. Though work motivation has been well-researched in organization behavior literature, its understanding has been limited in project management research. Further, a non-managerial perspective of this issue has been ignored. We address this lacuna in research.

Thus, we set forth the following objectives of this study:

- What is work motivation and how is it different in traditional and project-based organizations?
- What are the constructs that constitute work motivation in project-based organizations?

In this paper, we will first bring forward the dimensions of work motivation by reviewing content and process based-theories of motivation. Then, we will juxtapose work motivation in traditional and project-based environments. Having established a context and framework for work motivation in projects, we will describe our research methodology to investigate the dimensions of work motivation. This will be followed by a discussion of results, conclusion, and the managerial implications of this study.

2. Theory

2.1. Origins of work motivation

Work motivation is a set of energetic forces that originate both from within and beyond the individual's being leading to work-related behavior in terms of determining the form, direction, and intensity of this behavior (Pinder, 1998). These notions of work motivation are firmly grounded in theories of motivation such as theory of needs (McClelland, 1961), Equity theory (Adams, 1963), Goal setting theory (Locke, 1968), and job characteristic model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) where references to specific

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features of work that are motivating to the employees have been given.

Early studies alluding to work motivation was given by Taylor through scientific management and then later by Weber, Foller, and Benedix in the 1930's. The focus was on managing the job design to improve performance. These studies gave rise to the

'content based approach' to motivation.

Work motivation was well-researched in *content based-theories of motivation* through the works of Maslow (1943; satisfaction of security, affiliate, and recognition needs), Herzberg et al. (1959; nature of work and pay), and McClelland (1961; collegiality and autonomy). This conceptual understanding of work motivation later gave rise to the job characteristic model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976).

The Process based-theories of work motivation gained prominence in the 1960's. These theories view motivation as being dynamic across time (during the tenure of the individual's employment), looking for causal factors pertaining to time (tenure), and events (job content, and job context). Most notable contributions came from Vroom's Expectancy theory (1964), Porter and Lawler (1968), and Locke (1968).

Through these theories, we know that work motivation has been characterized by dimensions such as secured and interesting job, ability to perform the job, recognition from superiors and colleagues, adequate pay, and feedback on performance.

In the last twenty five years, there has been an increasing interest in defining work motivation through the identification of constructs for work motivation such as 'Challenging nature of work' (Jung et al., 1986), 'feedback on performance', 'enjoyable nature of work' (Campion and Thayer, 1987), 'task identity', 'task significance', and 'job autonomy' (Tyagi, 1985) were the constructs that were identified.

In the last seven years, issues of work motivation in relation to groups and teams came to fore. Thus, constructs such as 'shared identity', 'need for relatedness', and 'cohesiveness', and 'communication' were suggested. Importances of documented information that will help the employees to perform their tasks effectively (deTreville and Antonakis, 2006) have also been discussed.

Based on this understanding of work motivation, we now juxtapose this concept in conventional and project-based organizations.

2.2. Work motivation in traditional versus project-based organizations

Traditional organizations are characterized by vertical structures for flow of authority and communication. The unit of performance is a specific function (engineering, HRM, marketing). There is little customer focus. However, recent developments in the business environment (technology, market position, stockholder demands) influenced the operations of traditional organizations (Nicholas, 2001).

On the other hand, projects are temporary structures engaged in the creation of unique products or services. They require cross-functional skills for successful execution. They are characterized by performance constraints and environmental uncertainties (Turner and Simister, 2004).

From the theory standpoint, we observe that job characteristic model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) seems to be very dominant when explaining work motivation in traditional organization set-ups (c.f. Rungtusanatham, 1999). The five dimensions of work motivation-skill variety¸ task identity, task significance, training, and feedback are incorporated in the jobs through formal techniques. Some of them are elucidated below.

Studies from the manufacturing sector underscore the importance of providing autonomy, and skill variety to the workers which are otherwise absent (Cummings and Blumberg, 1987). On the other hand, Adler (1991) observed that manufacturing organizations rely on job rotation, and voluntary job switching to motivate the employees. More recently, in a survey of 5000 manufacturing firms by SESSI (Industrial Statistics Department of the French Ministry of Economics, Finance, and Industry), it was observed that practices such as autonomy at work, incentives to promote creativity have been adopted to motivate the employees (Galia, 2008).

Another example is that of using Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on the shop floor which motivates the employees Suzaki (1993). Similar is the impact on adoption of Kaizen in American manufacturing firms. The workers experienced greater task significance because they were given considerable autonomy in decisions on their production targets, and extensive training (Cheser, 1998).

Another similar example is the use of Statistical Process Control (SPC). It's implementation will involve formation of natural work units, combining tasks, establishing client relationships, vertical loading, and establishing open feedback channels, that will improve the quality of working experience and individual productivity .This will result in job enrichment¸ direct feedback, autonomy and a sense of task significance to front-line workers (Rungtusanatham, 1999).

Thus, in traditional environment, the perception of work motivation is largely guided by 'job design' where degree of autonomy, ability to apply skills, and opportunities to obtain feedback to develop professionally constitutes work motivation.

Through these observations, we construe the dimensions of work motivation to be limited in case of traditional organizations. However, they are put in place through formal processes in the organization.

As compared to the traditional organization structures¸ studies on work motivation in project management has been limited. However, it has been more diversified.

In addition to the constructs of work motivation presented above (task significance, autonomy, feedback on performance leading to development), satisfaction of status motives through recognition (Roberts et al., 2006), task variety, and challenging work especially characterize pro-