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Adapting Herzberg's Two Factor Theory to the Cultural Context of Romania

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Abstract

For decades the field of work motivation has been mainly shaped by Western theories, neglecting the cultural factor and its potential impact on work motivation. But one cannot talk about work motivation without calling into question the cultural factor. Cultural values influence how an individual perceives and interprets a situation and, thus, have an influence on behavior and, respectively, on individual motivation. Some endeavors to identify the relationship between culture and motivation have been made, but not enough to clarify this issue. The present paper aims to test the validity of Herzberg's Two Factor Theory for Romania and to adapt it (if necessary) to the Romanian cultural context. The main conclusion of this research is that, as formulated by Herzberg and his colleagues, the Two Factor Theory is not appropriate for the cultural context of Romania. However, the premises of this theory are valid: the sources of work satisfaction are generally different from those generating dissatisfaction and intrinsic work elements are motivators acting within the satisfaction area. However, in order to be considered valid in Romania, the theory should be adapted to the cultural context. Other findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Motivation is a force acting on each individual making him choose an action or another, so it is understandable why culture (taking into account the definitions of the concept) has a significant influence on motivation. The same reward motivates employees in one culture, but not in others; the same aspect of the workplace has a powerful motivational potential in one culture, but not in others (Hofstede et. all, 2010). Cultural values influence how an individual perceives and interprets a situation and, thus, have an influence on behavior and, respectively, on individual motivation. Cultural values serve as criteria in evaluating different motivational factors, factors in workplace. Since people from different cultures use different cultural values to interpret the same situational factors, we should expect that what is perceived as a motivating factor in some cultures may be perceived as a de-motivator in other cultures (Erez, 2008).

Culture influences not only the behavior of individuals, but also the explanations given for that behavior. Thus, an American could explain the extra effort made by the money received, a Frenchman by personal pride, a Chinese by mutual obligations and a Dane by fellowship (Hofstede et. all, 2010). However, motivation is not synonymous with behavior. Motivation is only a determinant of behavior, and behavior can be determined by cultural factors, biological and situational.

Some endeavor to identify the relationship between culture and motivation has been made, but not enough to clarify this issue. Some specialists consider that there is a direct link between cultural dimensions and the key motivational factors (Marinaș, 2010; van Emmerik&Gardner, 2010). As Child's intercultural organizational research show, organizations are increasingly similar, while the behavior of the employees in these organizations keeps its cultural uniqueness (Geren, 2011).

Numerous cultural studies have analyzed and identified different correlations between cultural dimensions and behavior in the workplace, and between culture and work motivation. Some cultures promote individualist behavior, others collectivist behavior, so we can not apply the same motivational model for both cultures (Geren, 2011). For example, in cultures where masculinity prevalent, there is a high need for achievement; fulfillment is defined by recognition and wealth. Masculine cultures focus on material possessions and additional revenues, while feminine cultures place emphasis on working conditions, job satisfaction and employee participation (Greckhamer, 2011). In feminine cultures leisure time is more important than money, so extrinsic rewards may not produce any effect on motivation and, respectively, on work performance. In masculine cultures money are more important than free time; financial rewards are a sign of recognition and success, which are important for individuals in masculine cultures (Hofstede et. all, 2010; Hofstede, 2001). This suggests that motivational practices from feminine culture will be less or not at all effective in a masculine culture (Matei & Abrudan, 2013).

The importance given to different work aspects has great implications for motivational models. This may explain why in many motivational theories (mostly American, so developed in individualistic cultures) freedom and challenge are considered strong intrinsic motivators. However, it must be examined whether the same factors are motivators in collectivistic cultures as well, or development, physical conditions and use of skills are better motivators in these cultures. This brings to mind Herzberg's Two Factor Theory that, although we consider efficient as principle of separation the work factors (in hygiene and motivational), is applicable as is only in individualistic cultures. We believe that within collectivistic cultures some hygiene factors become motivators and vice versa.

2. Herzberg's Two Factor Theory and the Romanian culture

In terms of culture, Herzberg's Two Factor Theory corresponds to an environment where power distance is small, and uncertainty avoidance is weak (as is the cultural context in which the theory was developed). In countries with large power distance, "supervision" should not be seen as a hygiene factor, because in these cultures the dependence on stronger individuals is a fundamental need which can be a significant motivator. In countries with intense uncertainty avoidance aspects related to the "policy and administration of the organization" should not be viewed merely as hygiene factors, because of the motivating potential this aspects may have in those cultures (Hofstede et. all, 2010).

In order to be applied in a culture different from that in which they were conceived, motivational theories should be adapted and their validity should be tested. An example of testing the validity of a motivational theory is given by

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