

The Art of Motivation

In our modern-day society, workers are viewed upon as units of production and if managed in a particular way, will yield the highest level of productivity. The core belief is to isolate and manipulate the factors that can sway motivation positively, eventually leading to profit maximisation. As a result of globalization, the incentives that motivate employees have changed. Workers across the United Kingdom are facing unprecedented uncertainty in the midst of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. In this essay, the current context for motivating employees in a globalised and capitalist economy will be discussed. More specifically, the present work environment employees in the United Kingdom find themselves in will be illustrated. To comprehend the motivation of workers, Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*, McClelland's *Needs Theory* and McGregor's *Theory of X & Theory Y* will be critically assessed (Maslow, 1943) (McClelland, 1987) (McGregor, 1957). Finally, the most relevant motivational theory out of the 3 introduced, in regard to work context in the United Kingdom, will be selected and evaluated.

Globalization has given rise to a new set of challenges, when it comes to motivating employees. The concept refers to: "(...) a growth of transactions and interdependence between countries" (Scholte, 2008). As a consequence of this interconnectivity, an increased demand of flexibility is produced. Many organisations deem it necessary to expand their responsiveness to global demand changes, in order to survive let alone remain competitive. As a result, "atypical" employment, is becoming the new normal and workers are left vulnerable. According to the World Bank, flexibility in this sense is: "(...) a euphemism for pushing wages down and workers out" (Amadeo & Horton, 1997). There has been a shift from managerialism in the 1930s, to the cause of profit maximisation in the 1970s and onwards. Previously, organisations were intertwined with their respective communities, now company loyalty is a thing of old. Through the global division of labour, the rich have gotten richer and the poor have become poorer. The ever-flexible internal workforce, coupled with insourcing and outsourcing, has seen inequalities between peoples grow larger and larger. Subsequently, workforces globally inevitably separate so called core-workers and periphery workers. Globalisation has in essence escalated a divide between those who

benefit and those who are benefited from. Society today is fundamentally different to what it was before, employees contrast across a wide and diverse spectrum, this is essential when attempting to comprehend what motivates workers in our contemporary work context.

In the United Kingdom, the labour force is going through unprecedented times, all of which has a substantial effect on the motivation of workers. More specifically, the implications of Brexit have been haunting people across the globe, this encompasses “the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU)” (Morozova, 2017, p. 260). This has had devastating effects as: “Firms respond to trade policy uncertainty by deferring investment and choosing not to enter into new markets or to exit from existing markets (Crowley, et al., 2019). Employers are forced to downsize or file for bankruptcy, and a growing number of employees are facing redundancy. As a result, workers across the UK are putting their ambition and pride aside, for many the only aim has become to put food on the table for their families. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened the livelihood of workers in the UK and all around the world. The global markets are failing as: “(...) panic among consumers and firms has distorted usual consumption patterns and created market anomalies” (Baldwin & Weder di Mauro, 2020, p. 45). Motivation behind consuming and even going to work has changed, as people fear for their lives. Throughout the years, workers in the United Kingdom have benefitted from globalization and its division of labour. However, global interconnectivity has also come at a cost and brought a wave of uncertainty, in the form of Brexit and COVID-19. All in all, the paradigm has shifted, the very core of what motivates workers in the United Kingdom is currently being challenged.

Focusing on motivation will shed light on what drives workers in the United Kingdom toward objectives. The concept of motivation originates from the Latin word *movere*, which means to move (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998) (Ramlall, 2004). In essence, there are a mix of 3 drives that motivate us, biological, reward & punishment and the implementation of actions out of interest and amusement (Pink, 2010). Motivational theory helps us comprehend what compels individuals towards certain outcomes and goals. *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* is a motivational theory which is categorized in 5 sets of ranking goals; physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Maslow believed that employees are motivated by the longing to maintain or fulfil the different conditions that underpin these

basic satisfactions, in addition to more intellectual wants. To illustrate, an employer would satisfy the affiliation needs by fostering team spirit and arranging social activities outside of work. Another motivational model is *McClelland's Need Theory*, which encompasses the need for 3 key aspects; achievement, power and affiliation (McClelland, 1987). McClelland suggested that top managers ought to have a great need for power combined with little need for affiliation (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1998). In a workplace for example, rewarding performing employees who have a great need for achievement with accolades and plaques will significantly boost their motivation. Finally, *McGregor's Theory X and Y* depicts two opposing sets of assumptions of managers about their employees (McGregor, 1957). McGregor explains how *Theory X* tells us that humans are intrinsically lazy, whilst *Theory Y* deems that it is the organizations fault if people are passive on the job. For instance, if a worker is slacking on the assembly line, the blame is on the controlling management for ineffective philosophy, policy or practice. To conclude, comprehending motivational theory is decisive in deciphering what incentives matter to workers in the United Kingdom.

However, in contemporary work context the relevance of established motivational theories has often been debated. It is evident that (McGregor, 1957) hits out at the status quo and contests the assumption of *Theory X*; that workers intrinsically lack ambition and avoid responsibility. He aligns himself with (Maslow, 1943) in relation to Theory Y; the emphasis on higher level needs of employees, such as self-actualization or esteem. Although groundbreaking, the substantial weight placed higher level needs, implies a sense of exclusivity, an assumption that people nowadays are not driven by physiological or safety needs any longer. It can be argued, that this approach is too universal, an elitist methodology, that does not reflect upon the diverse labour force in the United Kingdom. Others can question McGregor and his background, that an affluent Caucasian male, does not inevitably speak for everyone, especially the UK work context, the same could be said for Maslow. Although academics conduct research to support their studies, the implication of bias is worth considering. In a study conducted on 2 companies by (Lawler & Suttle, 1972) there was little evidence that Hierarchy of Needs existed. Moreover, Maslow's theory indicates that if a certain need is satisfied, it does not act as a motivator anymore. This view on human needs can be perceived as static, whereas reality could indicate a more dynamic paradigm, where needs are never truly permanently or fully satisfied. (Baridam, 2002) On the contrary, many believe that

(McClelland, 1987) presents a more inclusive approach, however, some may say at the expense of practicality. According to (Robbins & Judge, 2009), application of the theory is problematic, as McClelland argued that needs are subconscious, meaning individuals may be in explicit lack of something without knowing. In the same way as the others, McClelland's theory is believed not to be sensitive to age, gender, religion, culture or other factors which can sway the motivation of workers. (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017, p. 171)

Perhaps the theories presented are better suited for homogenous workplaces, such as the fictional company presented by (Grugulis, et al., 2000, p. 106), where normative control is practiced: "Almost all *ConsultancyCo* staff were white, male and aged between twenty and forty". Consequently, it can narrow down the motivational needs of workers to a certain extent. Paradoxically however, there can be so many fundamental differences, even within such a bubble, which are not covered by the motivational theories presented. It must also be noted that the labour force in the United Kingdom is increasingly multicultural, however this does not disregard the fact that discrimination and institutionalised racism still exists. The United Kingdom boasts of workers in all walks of life, individual factors are decisive and therefore expose a major weakness in all of the motivation models introduced. At the same time, all 3 theories have undoubtedly contributed significantly to knowledge in the field of motivation. The models converge in deeming that all workers have needs, which, if not met will cause demotivation. Subsequently, the motivational theories presented, all suggest specific measures management can take to help their employees become self-actualized and thus driving the global economy forward.

Nevertheless, the question of which of the 3 theories best suit the UK work context remains. Through critically assessing the motivational theories it was evident that, different workers have distinct drives: "one size does not fit all". Conversely, *Theory X and Y* (McGregor, 1957) rooted in *The Hierarchy of Needs* (Maslow, 1943) both accentuate that self-actualization is the highest level of reward. In many ways, assuming that everyone falls under the same category which is paradoxical. Contrastingly, McClelland's *Theory of Needs* does not claim that people be classified into one of the three types of desires, rather asserting that individuals are motivated by all aspects but to varying proportions (Brandon, 2015). Some will argue that this is a more suitable approach, which embodies diversity of employees within the contemporary workforce. Moreover, McClelland's needs are not exclusively

connected with competencies, an employee could be strongly affiliation-motivated and even so be successful in a situation where that specific desire is not met (Brandon, 2015). This provides a realistic approach which is countered by the theories of (Maslow, 1943) and (McClelland, 1987), they for example indicate that physiological needs need to be met before esteem needs can be considered. Some may argue that the perspective held by Maslow and McGregor is restrictive and conventional, as it limits flexibility between the different levels of their pyramid. At the same time, all three theories could be left vulnerable in the case of *corporate psychopaths* (Boddy, 2011). According to (Babiak & Hare, 2006) these are: “They ruthlessly manipulate others, without conscience, to further their own aims and objectives”. In other ways, they are a different breed of people that do not necessarily abide by established motivational theories. A case can be made that they connect with *Theory X* (McGregor, 1957), due to the individual-goal orientation, however this defeats itself as corporate psychopaths are not inherently lazy, but will pursue aims at all costs. It is therefore more logical to assume that, in line with McClelland’s *Theory of Needs*, they have an abnormal lust for power.

Finally, in light of Brexit and COVID-19, it is fair to assume that the aspects that motivated workers across the United Kingdom have changed. For example, a manager at a car manufacturing plant might previously have sought after self-actualization but is now consumed with the safety needs of his family. Initially, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs seems adequate in this situation, figuratively however, if COVID-19 and Brexit were to blow over, the manager might not reclaim his initial motivations despite his basic needs being covered again. Along with other workers in the United Kingdom, he or she might simply want to cover basic needs, perhaps also esteem needs at most. In this instance, McClelland’s *Theory of Needs* is able to adapt to the flowing structure of motivation as he believes: “(...) human needs *changes* by life experiences and the opinion of their culture (...)”. (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017, p. 171) Overall, out of the 3 theories introduced, McClelland’s approach is therefore most suited the UK work context, due to its resilience and dynamic methodology.

To summarize, globalization encompasses new challenges in motivating employees, as society has drastically changed in a short amount of time. This is illustrated to the ever-increasing diverse spectrum of workers, that incorporate varying needs in a global labour force. Currently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit instability, core needs are

changing for workers in the United Kingdom. Motivational theory such as those from Maslow, McGregor, and McClelland help us decipher what incentives matter for employees across the nations. However, especially in uncertain times like these, the right lens needs to be utilized to interpret worker motivation. Looking forward, this is decisive as the economy in the UK and globally will need to recover. Motivating employees will increase productivity, as employees act as instruments for their organizations, ultimately there to make profit. Particularly, policy makers, managers and entrepreneurs will have to understand what drives employees in order to be able to profit maximize. Moving forward, based the assessment of theories introduced and literature review, McClelland's *Theory of Needs* is most suited the UK work context and through the motivation of workers can be a vital tool in rebuilding the British economy.

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