

Positive Manipulation Theory

A Base for Continuous Motivation

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Summary

The aim of Positive Manipulation Theory is to facilitate delivery and maintenance of a functional, productive employee equally beneficial for both, the organisation and the individual involved. It is to ensure 'can do' attitude in all situations, even when the task employee is assigned with is not perceived as a desirable one. Positive Manipulation is not about taking advantage of the organisation's powers and it is not defined in a purpose of exploitation or mishandling of employees. It draws from several theories taking present time and current global economic situation in consideration.

Assumptions

- 1) Ceteris paribus, if employees are motivated to achieve results, then management will be less demanding task. In some situations, motivation has to be strong enough to motivate people "to do what they don't want to do" (Ward, 1999, p.29). Based on that, the assumption is that task employees are asked to accomplish will not always be perceived as desirable.
- 2) It will be assumed that managers are selected, among other characteristics, on a base of their ability to recognise and understand other peoples' emotions and assimilate them in thoughts, making them capable to regulate their and others' emotions. Thus, it will be assumed that managers possess high level of emotional intelligence (as defined by Matthews, Zeinder and Roberts, 2004, p.xv).
- 3) Work results greatly depend on the employee's attitude towards the task assigned. Particularly important is the relation between the attitudes expressed and employee's needs, especially in a case of the attitude being of high valence (as per attitude characteristics defined by Rao and Narayana [as cited by Shajahan, 2007, p.47]). It will be assumed that the manager, possessing required level of emotional intelligence, is capable of recognising those needs and is in a position to offer an avenue for satisfying the needs, making sure that the organisation benefits as much as the individual satisfying the needs does.
- 4) It will be assumed that the unemployment rate is at the relatively high level globally and that forecasted global economic situation is not predicting soon recovery. Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco notes that even "natural"¹ unemployment rate has risen from 5% to 6.7%, implying that even factors other than just recession (e.g. wrong set of skills) are increasing the total unemployment rate (FRBSF, 2011; Daly, Hobijn & Valleta, 2011).

Positive Manipulation Theory Explained

Word manipulation has somewhat negative connotation. Typically, it is perceived as a word used for describing unethical conduct (Caroselli, 2000), even though its two definitions in the Merriam-Webster dictionary carry positive meaning. A definition of relevance to Positive Manipulation Theory is "skilful handling or operation, artful management or control" (Merriam-Webster, 2011).

Positive Manipulation Theory is about indirect inclusion of low level needs in organisation's motivational efforts; particularly through presenting job loss as a potential consequence of insufficient performance. Targeting different level needs, Positive Manipulation is considered complementary to the existing motivational theories and is suggested to be used as another layer of motivational endeavours. It is considered to be particularly effective in a time of economic downturns when jobs are scarce.

Positive Manipulation Theory defines manager as responsible for its practical application. Manager is considered as possessing a high level of emotional intelligence and able to efficiently communicate messages, either through official channels or by using unofficial networks as Grapevine². Manager has to be perceived as strong, but ethical individual, capable of making difficult decisions, like terminating someone's employment. Manager has to be able to recognize attitudes and their underlying needs and to offer avenues for satisfying those needs. Employees caring negative attitudes, especially of high valence, are to be reminded, directly or indirectly, about potential punishment reinforcement (termination of employment) at the first stage. If the behaviour persists, a procedure defined by organisation outlining appropriate punishment reinforcement is to take place.

Positive Manipulation is constantly available motivation option. Manager is to make the employee aware of that and to use it when he/she considers it is required. This is particularly applicable to situations when the motivation targeting higher level needs is expected to be much less efficient or completely inefficient. The example would be an attempt to motivate well paid, poorly performing employee. Monetary based motivation would be 10% pay increase, while if Positive Manipulation used, employee would be kindly reminded that a loss of 100% of salary (termination of employment) can be a consequence of current inefficient performance. Positive manipulation approach is expected to be much more efficient, with both parties benefiting, organisation from increased productivity and employee from keeping the job despite of a period of poor performance.

Theoretical Foundation of Positive Manipulation Theory

Literature points out that individual needs and their underlying drives are considered to be a base for motivation. Needs are defined as deficiencies triggering drives as behaviours for maintaining inner stability (McShane & Travaglione, 2009).

Maslow's needs hierarchy theory organises needs in five levels stating that individuals are motivated simultaneously by several needs, but the strongest source of motivation is lowest unsatisfied need at the time (McShane & Travaglione, 2009). Needs are organized in lower level needs (Physiological, Safety and Belongingness) and higher level needs (Esteem and Self Actualization). Some authors built their motivation theories on Maslow's work (Schermerhorn, 2010), while some gave it historic value only (McShane & Travaglione, 2009). Positive Manipulation Theory benefits from lower level needs being strong motivators. It also predicts that individual whose satisfied lower needs are threatened will try to protect the status quo, ensuring these needs are unaffected.

Herzberg's Two Factor Theory addresses job satisfaction, outlining two main aspects, hygiene and motivational factors. This theory says that if certain factors are present, they can prevent dissatisfaction among employees. Examples are reasonable salary and benefits, or good and safe working environment. As motivators, Herzberg notes factors related to employee's self esteem and self-actualization (Davies, 2007). According to Herzberg, although presence of motivators does not predict job satisfaction, it is unusual that highly satisfied employee will be present if those factors are not satisfied (Shriberg & Shriberg, 2009). Positive Manipulation Theory argues that some factors listed under hygiene factors (e.g. salary, job placement) are of better use as motivators if presented as that they could be lost.

Reinforcement perspective on motivation does not directly take in consideration employees' needs. It follows the relation between employee's behaviours and its consequences and adjusts the behaviour in a purpose of achieving expected results. Behaviour is modified (repeated or inhibited) by the use of reinforcement - positive, negative, punishment or extinction (Daft, 2007). The type of reinforcement of particular interest for Positive Manipulation Theory is Continuous Reinforcement, which presents reinforcement over the course of time where every significant occurrence of positive or negative behaviour is reinforced by appropriate action.

McGregor's Theory X (TX) and Theory Y (TY) originate from 1960s and draw from the Maslow's work. Both, TX and TY present beliefs managers hold about the motives of their employees (Shriberg & Shriberg, 2009). TX motives are said to be related to the basic needs, particularly money and security (physiological, safety), while TY motives are related to higher needs, like esteem and self-actualization. McGregor argues that satisfied need is no longer a motivator and points that all basic needs are likely to be satisfied in modern societies; thus command and control type of management he considers ineffective as it can satisfy lower (satisfied) needs only. Positive Manipulation Theory argues that not all low level needs are satisfied within modern societies.

Discussion of Existing Theories with Reflection on Positive Manipulation Theory

Motivational theories fail to take characteristics of political and economic environments and their constant change into consideration. They also fail to acknowledge huge cultural differences between the employees around the globe as well as in various countries. It is difficult to comprehend that the same theory would apply to people in different cultural, political and economic environments. Thus, one might perceive that motivational theories target specific population during specific economic situations only.

As an example, Herzberg's Two Factor Theory outlines individual's self esteem and self-actualization as motivational factors. It is questionable whether manager can use this type of motivation on an employee who is in a mortgage crunch situation on a brink of a losing a house in an economic recession period when unemployment is high. One might relate ownership of the house to motivation, as it increases self-respect and improves self-confidence, thus is related to self-esteem (Branden, 2011), but the connection is vague. Positive Manipulation Theory considers that possibility of losing a house, an object fulfilling lower level needs like Physiological (shelter) and Security and Belongings (losing a house can destroy a family), is much more powerful as a handle for motivation.

Positive Manipulation Theory says that this situation can be used for ensuring a good work performance (organisational benefit) and a job security (employee's benefit).

Practically, this would mean that an employee in this situation would be more motivated to produce good work results if perceive a job loss as a likely consequence of non-productivity than if motivated by being given options for fulfilling self-esteem and self-actualization needs. Considering the number of families under mortgages in western countries today and taking into equation current rough economic situation, fear of losing material factors fulfilling lower level needs should be considered as one of the significant motivation factors.

Another problem managers are facing today is inability to keep motivation constant (Chakraborty, 2006). Gupta (2007) states that human needs are unlimited whereas the means for satisfying them are limited. This implies that continuous motivation based on satisfaction of human needs has its limits. This is particularly visible when financial motivators are used, as there are usually clear limits on funds available for motivating employees. Positive Manipulation solves this problem by raising awareness of potential punishment reinforcement, termination of employment, presented as a result of decreased performance. Potential punishment needs presenting as a result of a situation, not as a direct threat and communication channel used is best to be Grapevine.

McGregor's theories are based on assumption that basic needs are satisfied within the modern societies (Lauby, 2005). Positive Manipulation Theory challenges that on a base that the nature and the type of things fulfilling basic needs at present are more complex than in the time theory was made. It adds that more financial power is required for maintenance of already existing things fulfilling basic needs. As a result, a job loss, combined with the difficulties of finding a new one can jeopardise currently satisfied basic needs.

Drawing from both, TX and TY and including job security as a powerful motivator, Positive Manipulation Theory views manager developing following believes:

- Employee views work as a beneficial necessity.
- Employee sees responsibilities at the workplace as the ultimate priorities.
- Employee understands that organisational struggle is the result of inefficiency at the workplace.
- Employee understands that the organisational struggle will very likely result in termination of employment of the inefficient employees.
- Employee understands that potential punishment reinforcement is not a threat, but a measure established for the benefit of both, the organisation and the employee.
- Employee understands that organisation offers all standard options for fulfilling employees upper level needs (Esteem and Self-Actualization), including participation in decision making, challenging tasks, job flexibility and autonomy (as defined by Schermerhorn, 2010).

Above points are not just beliefs managers should have about their employees, but the general guidelines for developing employees' understanding of a work environment. Positive Manipulation Theory predicts that if above concepts are accepted by employees, high job performance follows.

Conclusion

Positive Manipulation is to be used in combination with the existing motivation techniques. By including low level needs in motivation paradigm, it enables manager to effectively react on perceived attitudes and protect performance benefiting both, the organisation and the employee. Positive Manipulation does not allow unethical or illegal application and directs manager to stay within legal and organisational policy guidelines.

Appendix

- 1) Natural unemployment rate refers to unemployment rate when the economy is not in a recession and as the important factor is considered the percentage of unemployable members of the population (Taylor, 2006).
- 2) Grapevine – informal communication network in the organization (Robbins, 2009, p.273)

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