

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Rise and domination of complex organizations in our society, scholars have focused on understanding the conditions that motivate employees to effectively serve the goals of organizations. Many scholars believe that employees can be motivated to serve the goals of organizations with the effective use of monetary incentives. Perhaps one of the early most influential scholars to promote the value of monetary rewards was Fredrick Taylor (1916). His strategy was to fragmenting whole jobs into simple standard elements and paying employees according to their work performance.

There are scholars and practitioners who challenge the assumption that the intrinsic motivation to work should be replaced by monetary rewards to motivate employees. This concept came out of the human relations movement. This movement encouraged organizations to emphasize on the nonmonetary motivation factors that positively influence the satisfaction, commitment, and job performance of employees. This concept was supported by many scholars and practitioners, particularly in the field of public administration, which has shown that public employees are relatively attracted to the intrinsic nonmonetary qualities of their work environment, mainly when compared to private-sector employees. This is very important and pragmatic given the fact that public organizations often lack the financial resources to rely heavily on monetary incentives as a major motivational strategy. However, some public administration scholars often characterize intrinsic motivation in ways that are inherently incompatible with our organizational environment and prevailing human relations principles. Consequently, the purpose of this research-paper is to present a conceptual framework that can be used to explore and understand intrinsic motivation in public organizations.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Intrinsic motivation is the stimulation that drives an individual to adopt or change a behavior for his or her own internal satisfaction or fulfillment. Intrinsic motivation is usually self-applied, and springs from a direct relationship between the individual and the situation. It is very important factor in designing learning or training course. Intrinsic motivation is a subset of employee motivation. Kanfer (1990) defines employee

motivation as the energy within employees that directs and sustains their efforts in organizations. Stated another way, employee motivation is the fuel that energizes individuals to act in certain ways and toward certain goals. This energy is generated from an expectation that internal needs will be satisfied. These internal needs can be physiological (such as the needs for food, shelter, and sleep) or psychological (such as the needs for love, belongingness, and self-esteem). Maslow (1943) categorizes the psychological and physiological needs as higher level and lower level needs, respectively. While the psychological and physiological needs are very important to individuals, there are real differences between these needs. One of the major differences between psychological and physiological needs is their importance to individuals after they are fulfilled. Physiological needs decreases as they are satisfied, while the importance of the psychological needs grows as they are satisfied. Another difference between psychological and physiological needs is their ability to produce intrinsic motivation. It is the belief of many scholars that intrinsic motivation is produced from the satisfaction of the higher level psychological needs of individuals, rather than their lower level physiological needs. In other words, intrinsic motivation is produced from the desire or expectation that one's higher level needs will be satisfied. Many psychological needs can intrinsically energize employees to accomplish the goals of organizations.

THE SOURCES OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Most scholars believe that intrinsic motivation is the energy that is derived from the satisfaction of the psychological needs of employees. Unfortunately, there is disagreement in the literature regarding the workplace conditions that can satisfy these needs. Much of this debate also centers on disagreement regarding which psychological need is the primary source of intrinsic motivation. A review of the literature reveals at least two major perspectives concerning the primary sources of intrinsic motivation: source-based and need-based. The discussion that follows will briefly review and critique these viewpoints.

SOURCE-BASED PERSPECTIVE

The first basis on the conditions that can produce intrinsic motivation is the source-based perspective. The field of public administration largely adopts this perspective. Source-based theorists distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards based on where the reward originates. They propose that incentives generated from outside the recipients are considered extrinsic opportunities (i.e., recognition and monetary rewards), while incentives generated from within recipients are considered intrinsic opportunities (i.e., feelings of appreciation and well-being). This approach is based on the assumption that individuals strive to be their own causal agents. In other words, people would rather attribute their behavior to themselves, rather than to the influences of others. As a result, the need for self-determination is believed to be the primary

source of intrinsic motivation. Prominent source-based scholars note that this need for self-determination is inherently incompatible with extrinsic (externally generated) opportunities. The reason, according to these proponents, is because these opportunities communicate to individuals that they are not in control of their own behaviors.

NEED-BASED PERSPECTIVE

Another perspective on the conditions that produce intrinsic motivation is the need-based perspective. From the need-based perspective, the most important distinguishing characteristic of intrinsic opportunities is not their source, but the psychological needs of employees that are fulfilled. Workplace opportunities and incentives that fulfill the higher level needs of individuals (i.e., needs for interpersonal interaction, growth, stimulation, and self determination) are considered intrinsically related. On the other hand, opportunities and incentives that fulfill the lower level needs of individuals (i.e., needs for security and safety) are considered extrinsically related. The need-based perspective is not particular about the psychological needs that can produce intrinsic motivation. According to the propounders of this perspective, both internally and externally generated opportunities can produce intrinsic motivation if they satisfy the psychological needs of employees.

THE EFFECTS OF INTRINSIC REWARDS ON EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

A number of scholars have discovered that fulfilling the higher level needs of employees does benefit employees' attitudes. For example, Lewin (French & Bell, 1999; Weisbord, 1987), a world-renowned experimental psychologist, believed that jobs should not only provide individuals with the ability to acquire wealth, but also with a sense of belonging, respect, self-development, and expression. He believed that once the psychological needs of employees are fully accommodated, organizations would reap the benefits of having highly satisfied employees. Similarly, Herzberg (1973) discovered strong connections between the intrinsic conditions of organizations and the job satisfaction of employees. He argued that the degree of employees' job satisfaction is strongly related to work opportunities that give employees a sense of personal achievement, personal recognition, and career advancement.

Scholars have also argued that the intrinsic conditions of organizations are critical to maintaining the psychological health of employees. For example, Argyris (1957) argued that organizations relying on high levels of task specialization, standardization, and close supervision as motivational strategies are in danger of creating dependent, passive, immature, and subordinate personalities in their adult employees. These conditions are unfulfilling to the employees' psychological needs. Consequently, employees with prolonged unfulfilled

psychological needs would become fixated on monetary rewards as a means of counterbalancing their psychological distress. To improve this situation, Argyris recommended that organizations foster intrinsic opportunities that give employees independence from supervisory control, active engagement with other employees, and tasks that fully utilize their abilities in their work.

Similarly, McGregor (1960) believed that intrinsic opportunities were mandatory for the psychological health of employees. He argued that many managers believe that employees are naturally lazy, unmotivated, and hostile to work. This belief justifies authoritarianism, force, and coercive management styles that are psychologically distressing to employees. Instead, McGregor recommended that managers adopt cooperative and participative management styles that rely on intrinsic opportunities to motivate employees to accomplish organizational goals.

INTRINSIC REWARDS AND THE BEHAVIOR OF EMPLOYEES

In addition, many believe that intrinsic opportunities can positively influence the behavior of individuals in organizations, particularly in terms of their cooperation and performance. For example, Barnard (1968) argued that employees willfully join organizations for the opportunity to cooperate toward common goals. He believed that this willful cooperation cannot be generated with the use of material incentives, such as higher salary. Monetary incentives, in his view, were secondary to the more powerful intrinsic opportunities of distinction, prestige, and peer-group participation. One of the first studies to confirm Barnard's hypothesis regarding the influence that intrinsic opportunities have on employee performance was the Hawthorne study.

The Hawthorne study was conducted in the 1920s by a power company that wanted to understand the relationship that factory lighting conditions had on workers' productivity. In this study, researchers discovered that workers' productivity increased regardless of the lighting conditions in the factory. Unable to fully interpret the result, the researchers assumed that the results were found in error. However, many years later the researchers realized that the workers' productivity was affected by the intrinsic aspects of the experiment, such as the special treatment employees received (i.e., private lunch and attentive managers) during the experiment.

Likert (1967), another researcher, also demonstrated the influence that intrinsic opportunities can have on the job performance of public employees. Building on McGregor (1960), Likert explored the impact that several management styles had on employees' productivity. At one end of the continuum were authoritative management styles. Authoritative management styles are based on the premise that employees are to be distrusted, motivated with threats, and given very little discretion over their own work. At the opposite end of the continuum were participative management styles. Participative management styles are based on the premise that employees are trusted partners, primarily motivated with intrinsic opportunities,

and given a high degree of discretion over their own work. Consequently, Likert found that authoritative management styles were associated with greater turnover and conflict. Participative management styles, on the other hand, were associated with greater productivity and cooperation between managers and employees. Similarly, Hackman and Oldham (1975) found strong links among the job performance, the intrinsic quality of work, and the growth needs of employees. These scholars argued that employees with salient growth needs desire jobs with high levels of intrinsic qualities such as task variety and social significance.

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH ON THE INTRINSIC PREFERENCES OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

The general literature on intrinsic motivation establishes that intrinsic incentives are not only important to the psychological needs of employees, but also to their attitudes and behaviors in organizations. This section will review the research on intrinsic opportunities from the perspective of public administration. As can be expected, the field of public administration confirms the importance that intrinsic opportunities have to public employees. Consequently, there are three major conclusions that can be drawn from this research. The first conclusion is that public-administration research centers on the importance of monetary opportunities to public and private-sector employees. While monetary opportunities can be intrinsically rewarding if they satisfy individuals' higher level needs, the research has shown that public- and private-sector employees value these opportunities differently. For example, Kilpatrick, Cummings, and Jennings (1964) found that public-sector managers, more often than private-sector manager, ranked gaining more money lower than performing work that is helpful to society. Similarly, Rainey (1982) found that private-sector managers ranked higher pay and making a good deal of money significantly more important than did public-sector managers. Public-sector managers, on the other hand, ranked having opportunities for public service and helping others significantly more important than did private-sector managers. In a more recent study, Houston (2000) investigated the importance that private- and public-sector managers assigned to five work opportunities, such as high income, job security, short working hours, chances for promotion, and meaningful work. In support of existing research, he found that private-sector managers ranked high income as the second most important opportunity, while public employees ranked it as the fourth most important opportunity.

The second conclusion that can be drawn from the public-administration research centers on the importance that public employees assign to intrinsic opportunities. Research has demonstrated that public employees highly desire many kinds of intrinsic opportunities, such as opportunities for career advancement, public service, and meaningful work. It was found that the two most important opportunities to managers were developing their abilities and doing work that is helpful to others. Houston (2000) found that when asked to rank opportunities for higher

salary, shorter working hours, chances for promotion, and meaningful work, public employees ranked meaningful work as the most important.

A third major conclusion that can be drawn from the public-administration research centers on the relationship that intrinsic nonmonetary opportunities have to the job satisfaction of public employees. Researchers found that the salary of public employees is not related to their satisfaction with their work. On the other hand, the salary level of private-sector employees did significantly impact their job satisfaction. Confirming previous studies, it was founded that monetary incentives were not highly related to these employees' job satisfaction. Instead, these scholars discovered that the two most reliable predictors of public employees' job satisfaction were opportunities to form social relationships and professional growth.

POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS FOR WORK PREFERENCES

Research on the intrinsic preferences of public employees offers important insights. Much of the research suggests that public employees place great emphasis on the intrinsic conditions of their work. These conditions appear to be more important to public employees than monetary opportunities. Hence, even though monetary opportunities can be intrinsically rewarding for many employees, public-administration research findings suggest that the psychological needs of most public employees are best fulfilled with intrinsic nonmonetary opportunities. This finding, however, raises an important question. That is, why are public employees attracted to intrinsic nonmonetary opportunities? The discussion that follows will provide eight potential answers to this question.

Age

The first factor that may affect the work preferences of public employees is age. Statistics indicate that the public-sector workforce is generally older than most private-sector workforces. Age may affect the work preferences of public employees, because it is related to the major defining events that individuals experience in their lives. Consequently, empirical research offers some support regarding the influences of generational personalities on the work preferences of public employees

Gender

The second factor that may affect the work preferences of public employees is gender. Statistics show that although women are more likely to enter the public-sector workforce, more men work in government than women, particularly in the federal government. Gender is important given the role expectations society assigns to us based on gender. Even though gender-role expectations have changed, a few traditional expectations remain.

Education Level

Educational attainment is the third factor that may affect public employees' work preferences. Statistics indicate that public employees are generally more educated than their private-sector counterparts. There are at least two reasons why education level may affect the work preferences of public employees. For one, education builds an expectation in employees that their work will be intrinsically rewarding. As employees' education levels increase, these employees expect to have access to career-advancement opportunities and meaningful job tasks. Second, the type of education that public employees receive may also impact their work preferences. Many public affairs degree programs actively seek to socialize students toward an ethic for public service and altruistic endeavors.

Race/Ethnicity

The fourth factor that may affect the work preferences of public employees is race/ethnicity. Statistics indicate that the public-sector workforce contains a large percentage of employees of color. Yet, many studies that have been conducted on the work preferences of public employees appear to have included mostly White participants. If this is the case, the results of these studies may not be representative of the entire public-sector workforce. This is an important issue because evidence shows some differences between the work preferences of employees of color and their White counterparts.

Public-Sector Work Experience

Public-sector work experience is the fifth factor that may affect the work preferences of public employees, because it is related to the work opportunities that employees have access to. The longer employees work in the public sector, the clearer their understanding is of the opportunities available to them. This is important given the fact that public- and private-sector organizations differ in terms of the kinds of opportunities they can provide to their employees. Many business organizations are better equipped monetarily and thus can rely on monetary incentives as a motivational strategy. Public organizations, on the other hand, are believed to be better equipped to rely on intrinsic nonmonetary opportunities as a motivational strategy. Given these differences, one would expect employees with many years of experience in public organization to recognize that monetary opportunities are not readily available to them, and thus public employees may adjust their preferences to match the opportunities most often available. As a result, public employees may desire the intrinsic nonmonetary opportunities highly, because they know that these opportunities are more realistically available to them than monetary opportunities.

Socialization Experiences

A sixth factor that may affect the work preferences of public employees is the socialization experiences in public organizations. Organizational socialization is a process of “breaking in” new employees into an organization’s culture. This process creates employees who internalize the goals of organizations and embrace available work opportunities. Employees who are fully socialized will desire certain opportunities because they fully believe these opportunities are valuable, regardless of the availability of other opportunities. Using this line of reasoning, public employees desire intrinsic nonmonetary opportunities because they have been convinced that these opportunities are most desirable, even if other opportunities, such as monetary opportunities are abundantly available.

Public-Service Motivation

Public-service motivation is the seventh factor that may affect the work preferences of public employees. Public service motivation has been characterized in many different ways, such as a service ethic, calling, or altruistic aims that motivate individuals to serve the public interest, help others, and be useful to society. Many argue that employees with high levels of public-service motivation are attracted to nonmonetary opportunities, because they have innate altruistic needs that cannot be fulfilled by monetary opportunities and higher salary. Recent research suggests that public-service motivation is a strong predictor of the intrinsic preferences of public employees.

Management Level

The eighth factor that may affect the work preferences of public employees, management level, is important because many studies regarding the work preferences of public employees focus primarily on managers. Yet, managers have distinguishing work characteristics that affect their work preferences. For example, managers occupy job positions that are higher in the hierarchy of organizations. They also generally receive greater levels of salary and monetary benefits than their non managerial coworkers. Some have even argued that the most powerful motivational forces for employees who are lower in the organizational hierarchy may be the desire to have their lower level needs satisfied, which may lead them to desire extrinsic opportunities, such as monetary incentives, job security, and good fringe benefits much more than managers.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Based on the existing research on intrinsic motivation in public organizations, there are a number of areas of research that can be conducted in the future. One area of future research can center on the impact that intrinsic opportunities have on the psychological needs of employees.

More information is needed regarding the relationship between externally generated intrinsic opportunities and the need for self-determination. While monetary opportunities can be considered an intrinsic opportunity from a need-based perspective, empirical research is needed on this issue. Many believe that the intrinsic aspects of the workplace have positive influences on the job performance of employees. However, more empirical research is needed on this issue. A study of this type could investigate the relationship between the performance of employees and the kinds of work opportunities they receive. For example, such a study could comparatively explore whether public employees who are primarily motivated by nonmonetary opportunities perform higher than private-sector employees who are primarily motivated with monetary incentives.

A third area of future research can center on the relationship between culture and the intrinsic preferences of public employees. Many people suggest that the race/ethnicity of employees is related to their work preferences. Public employees of color have been found to desire certain work opportunities, such as career advancement, significantly more than their White counterparts. Some have interpreted this finding to be an indication of discrimination practices in organizations that restrict the access that non-White employees have to certain kinds of work preferences, such as monetary incentives and career advancement. However, this interpretation may be wrong. Individuals of different racial groups may have different work preferences because they have different needs that are important to them. The importance of these needs may be influenced by their different cultural experience. A future study on this issue could investigate the importance that public employees of different cultural and racial groups assign to different psychological needs. A fourth area of future research can center on the relationship between the socialization experiences of employees and their work preferences. One of the explanations for why public employees are attracted to intrinsic nonmonetary work preferences highlights their socialization experiences in public organizations. More information is needed regarding the extent to which socialization affects the work preferences of public employees. A future study could test this theory using longitudinal research. A longitudinal study is a study conducted over time. A study of this type could comparatively investigate the work preferences of a group of newly hired public- and private-sector employees over the course of 3 years. This study would help scholars and practitioners track and understand how the work preferences of employees change during the course of their employment.

A fifth area of future research can center on the relationship between public-affairs education and the work preferences of public employees. One of the explanations for why public employees desire intrinsic nonmonetary opportunities is because of their educational experiences. More information is needed regarding how an individual's education impacts his or her work preferences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the first recommendations for organizations can center on routinely assessing the intrinsic preferences of their employees. Routinely assessing the preferences of employees provides organizations with current information regarding the types of intrinsic opportunities their employees find desirable. The value that employees place on intrinsic opportunities can change over time because of organizational and environmental shifts. Because of possible changes, it is imperative that organizations have current information regarding the types of intrinsic rewards employees find desirable. Additionally, assessing the intrinsic preferences of employees will also increase the understanding of how these preferences may change over employees' career spans. This information could be used to help managers make adjustments in the types of intrinsic reward opportunities they foster in their organization according to employees' work experience. This trend data would be valuable to researchers who are interested in understanding the intrinsic reward preferences of employees from a longitudinal perspective.

A second recommendation to organizations seeking to capitalize on the value of intrinsic motivation can center on increasing their capacity to foster various kinds of intrinsic reward opportunities. Organizations can build their capacity to foster intrinsic opportunities in two stages. In the first stage, organizations must determine which intrinsic opportunities are congruent with their goals and structure. Although public employees may desire a full range of intrinsic opportunities, it is important that each organization develop intrinsic opportunities that are compatible with its structure, goals, and processes. Intrinsic opportunities that are incompatible with the structure of organizations will be short lived. For example, it may not be effective for many public organizations to rely on monetary incentives as a motivational strategy, particularly since most public organizations are not fiscally equipped to rely on this strategy. In the second stage, once organizations have highlighted the intrinsic opportunities that are compatible, managers should be given the information and resources needed to implement these opportunities their organization.

A third recommendation to organizations seeking to capitalize on the value of intrinsic motivation centers on continually educating managers about the importance that intrinsic rewards have on employees' attitudes and behaviors. This information should be formally integrated into current management training programs. These training programs could provide aspiring managers with a broad overview of intrinsic motivation and explain why it is important.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research-paper was to review intrinsic motivation from the perspective of public administration. Intrinsic motivation was defined as the energy that is produced from the satisfaction of individuals' psychological needs. A few examples of

psychological needs that can produce intrinsic motivation are the needs for growth, interpersonal interaction, and self-determination. While there is much debate on this issue, it is the author's belief that employees' psychological needs can be satisfied with incentives such as professional development, money, career advancement, and personal recognition. Fostering these opportunities in organizations will not only satisfy the higher level needs of employees, but will also positively enhance the attitudes and behaviors of employees in organizations.

Furthermore, the research in public administration confirms the importance of intrinsic opportunities in public organizations. Even though monetary opportunities can be intrinsically rewarding, research has found that public-sector employees place less emphasis on these opportunities than do private-sector employees. In most cases, private-sector employees desired monetary opportunities significantly more than public-sector employees. Public-administration scholars have also shown that public employees highly desire many kinds of intrinsic nonmonetary opportunities, such as meaningful work, personal recognition, and professional development. Additionally, research has established that although public employees are generally less satisfied with their monetary opportunities, these attitudes are not related to their job satisfaction. Public employees' job satisfaction was mostly related to the intrinsic opportunities they receive from their organizations. Consequently, there are a number of potential explanations for the motivational characteristics of public employees, such as their age, gender, education level, race/ethnicity, public-sector work experience, socialization experience, public-service motivation, and management level.

In addition, organizations seeking to capitalize on the value of intrinsic motivation should routinely assess the work preferences of employees, foster those opportunities that are compatible with the structure of their organization, and provide managers with the tools needed to implement these opportunities.

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