



# The concept of the trichotomy of motivating factors in the workplace

Leszek Koziol<sup>1</sup> · Michal Koziol<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

The paper presents key issues related to motivation in the workplace and its methodological aspects, giving special attention to an analysis of the classification of motivation factors. It describes the characteristics of major selected factors. The author proposes a new approach to factors based on the concept of the trichotomy of motivation factors in the workplace (work environment and work situations) which extends Herzberg's two-factor theory. The concept identifies three groups of factors: "motivators" which, when they occur, lead to satisfaction, "hygiene factors" which, when they do not occur, lead to dissatisfaction, and "demotivators" which, when they occur, lead to dissatisfaction. Their vectors of impact are totally different, although they occur simultaneously in the workplace. Therefore, the presented concept constitutes a methodological directive which suggests the extension of the research area by including an analysis of factors which reduce motivation to work.

**Keywords** Trichotomy · Motivation factors · Workplace

## 1 Introduction

The survival and expansion of companies in a dynamic environment and the conditions of increasing competition is determined by such factors as strategic thinking and activities as well as by innovativeness and increased productivity. Dealing with these problems through effective management requires the commitment and cooperation of the organization's entire staff, thus a great significance attributed to employee motivation in the production process. A number of organizations face the challenge of improving their motivation systems in terms of increasing the impact

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✉ Leszek Koziol  
kozioll@interia.pl

<sup>1</sup> Department of Management, Malopolska School of Economics in Tarnow, Warynskiego 14, 33-100 Tarnów, Poland

<sup>2</sup> Department of Informatics and Quantitative Methods, Malopolska School of Economics in Tarnow, Warynskiego 14, 33-100 Tarnów, Poland

of compensation incentives and other motivation factors, adjusting them to the company's financial standing. Making improvements to the motivation system is a complex process which requires a comprehensive and in-depth analysis and assessment of the currently applied solutions. This process aims to develop a new, more effective system which supports the achievement of the company's strategic objectives and ensures its competitiveness through labour cost rationalization, attracting top-notch specialists and shaping appropriate attitudes of executives and employees to the assigned tasks and company goals.

Motivation of employees can be defined as a psychological process that stimulates and maintains human activity in relation to work, task or widely understood project (Hitka et al. 2019). Employee motivation is a major component of the management process, and the relevant knowledge of such issues should be gained by company executives. Motivation is a driving force thanks to which an entity undertakes efforts in the hope of achieving its objectives. The motives for taking action may vary depending on human needs, the workplace and cultural environment, as well as the potential for achieving a given target. In other words, motivation represents the willingness, intention or desire to achieve something. It is a psychological process experienced by all employees in the workplace; it is a major element of their labour potential, while their performance determines the level of their competence. Motivating, on the other hand, aims to enhance the entity's sustained ability to take action. According to some research, employee productivity is related to the level of meeting his/her needs (Cantele and Zardini 2018; Cequea and Nunez Bottini 2011).

In the light of research studies conducted by other authors, a number of assumptions can be made with regard to human behaviour: it is affected by specific factors (it does not occur of its own accord), it is always related to some objectives, and it is subject to external impact.

The motivation is not homogenous. Some research indicates differences in employee motivation. Such differences are regional and cultural (Hitka et al. 2019), depends on age and stage of professional career (Gursoy et al. 2008; Caganova et al. 2017) is associated with belonging to given generation (Collier 2017; Ng and Schweitzer 2010; Curry 2015) or is determined by education level (Schoroder 2008).

The above considerations constitute a foundation for developing human behaviour models based on the assumption that humans are characterised by a number of needs, desires and expectations which have different degrees of intensity. The effectiveness of motivation, in turn, is affected by an appropriate choice of motivation principles, tools and factors (Koziol 2002). In other words, the motivation process combines the organization's requirements and expectations in relation to its employees and employees' own needs, values and expectations, while employees' job satisfaction, achieved through satisfying their needs in the workplace, stimulates them to increase their productivity.

This relatively broad area of research on motivation is confined in this paper to an analysis and classification of motivation factors and their characteristics. The presented new approach—the concept of the trichotomy of motivation factors in the workplace—extends Herzberg's two-factor theory. Special attention is given to the factors referred to as de-motivators, which are not so commonly known and less frequently researched and discussed by scientists. To sum up, the objective of the paper

is to present a new approach to the typology of motivation factors in the workplace (the working environment) and to identify research trends and methods as well as the practical applications of conducted research studies.

## 2 The characteristics of selected classifications of motivation factors in the workplace

A diagnosis of motivation factors in the workplace should refer to some of the definitions of motivation which are widely cited in literatures and which are significant in the context of the planned research study. Armstrong (2006), for example, states that motivation deals with the factors that affect people, making them behave in a specific way. A similar definition is proposed by Rheinberg (2006), who defines motivation as “an activating orientation towards a target state”. This brief definition requires further elaboration. The terms “activating orientation” and “target state” can be viewed from different perspectives. For example, motivation can refer to different states and forms of behaviour: wants, efforts and desires, as well as avoidance, hesitation, unwillingness or fear of undesirable events and experiences. Thus, the author claims that motivation to “avoid” differs in a number of ways from motivation to “achieve”. The definition proposed by F. Michoń, which stresses the significance of motivation factors, deserves special attention. The author defines motivation as a set of forces and factors which stimulate and sustain behaviours aimed to achieve specific goals. The above mentioned forces include human needs, drives, instincts, aspirations as well as emotional states referred to as the mechanisms of the human body (Michon 1981). This definition presents the attributes or characteristics of motivation.

Depending on economic and social conditions or individual differences (resulting from personality features and experience), people are driven in their activities by different motivation factors or stimuli.<sup>1</sup>

Literatures offer different classifications of motivation which are confirmed by psychological and other theories. One of them distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The concept of intrinsic motivation, also referred to as autotelic or endogenous motivation, applies to motivation that is driven by an interest in the task itself. Extrinsic motivation (exogenic or instrumental), on the other hand, refers to the performance of an activity in order to attain an outcome or achieve a goal (Powell and Kokkranikal 2015; Gagne and Deci 2005; Graen 1966).

Table 1 presents selected major classifications of motivation factors, which can be extended and adjusted to specific areas and scopes of research.

The area of research focuses on external and instrumental factors, especially those which are part of the organization’s system of employee incentives. A motivation

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<sup>1</sup> Motivations—motivation factors, stimuli, needs and tasks can be defined as any changes in people’s environment (e.g. changes in the employee’s workstation) that lead to or change the motives for taking action.

**Table 1** Classification of motivation factors. *Source:* Author's research

Classification criterion	Classification
1. Type of satisfied needs	Basic stimuli satisfy the needs of human body Superior stimuli relate to social and moral needs as well as more refined forms of satisfying basic needs
2. Direction of impact	Positive (rewards)—sustain accepted behaviours and motivate people to take initiative and make additional efforts Negative (punishment)—motivate people to avoid undesirable behaviours and to perform tasks at a minimum acceptable level; they occur as long as threats remain
3. Scope of impact	Internal—encourage achievement of values inherent in humans; achievement is a value in itself External—focused on instrumental values, they are only a means to achieve other values
4. Manner of impact	Individual Group
5. Form	Financial Non-financial
6. Character	Material Non-material
7. Scope	They constitute working environment and determine employee's position at work They result from organization's environment

system, which is a set of motivation factors selected by a company, is a management tool aimed to increase employee efficiency.

### 3 Three-factor concept of motivation factors

Herzberg's theory has made major contributions to the knowledge of work motivation, especially in the field of researching motivation factors. The theory claims that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are caused by basically different factors that occur in the workplace.<sup>2</sup> These factors, when they occur, cause satisfaction, and they are referred to as motivators, while the factors that cause dissatisfaction when they do not occur are called hygiene factors. Motivators include achievements, recognition, promotion, work content, personal development opportunities and responsibility. Hygiene factors, on the other hands, include company policy and management, technical supervision, interpersonal relations, compensation and industrial safety systems, working conditions, social benefits and occupied positions at work.

<sup>2</sup> Earlier research studies refer to the concept of job satisfaction as part of the one-dimension space model. Job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are treated in these studies as the values that contradict one and the same continuum, assuming that if a given factor represents value added for an employee, then the lack of this factor has a negative value, and vice versa.

The two-factor theory was the subject of many further scientific studies. Some of them confirmed this theory (Taber 1991; Pinnings 1970; Semerek and Peterson 2007), others showed doubts (Even et al. 1966; Graen 1966; House and Wigdor 1976). It has also been shown that this theory concerns too complex matter to be unambiguously evaluated (Wood and Lebold 1970). However, it is a good starting point for managerial solutions (Shipley and Kiely 1986).

According to this theory, it is possible to increase job satisfaction even if dissatisfaction is not reduced, and vice versa. Apart from a number of objections raised against Herzberg's theory,<sup>3</sup> experts in the field admit that the theory offers valuable insights into research methods related to employee motivation (there are two mutually independent continua: job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction); moreover, the theory provides additional arguments related to the relations between job satisfaction and employee efficiency. The results of the most recent research indicate that there are other motivation factors in the workplace (apart from motivators and hygienes)—de-motivators, and their vectors of impact are considerably different than in the case of the other factors. Research studies in the field of de-motivators are not numerous. An attempt to take a systematic approach to this issue has been made by Stelmach (2005), who defines de-motivation as an overall impact of factors that lead to unwillingness or increased unwillingness to perform work.

Different authors identify a number of de-motivating factors. On the basis of empirical research, W. Stelmach identifies the following de-motivating factors: unclear regulations, pressure exerted on employees to perform tasks which do not fully comply with regulations and professional ethical standards, overwork, pretended work, unfair division of labour, lack of training courses, lack of recognition of senior workers who have many years' experience and fear of losing a job. The above areas—because of the occurrence of similar problems—can be classified as four distinct groups (Kozioł 2018; Stelmach 2005):

1. Psychic-related situations—lack of the possibility for self-realization, lack of information on the employee's development prospects in a given company, failure to keep the promises made at a job interview, unfair punishments, rewards or promotions. The impact of executives' personal characteristics on de-motivation and stressful situations—the effect of superiors' inappropriate and amoral attitude to their subordinates.
2. Situations related to work organization—inappropriate management methods, lack of employee empowerment, unfavourable working conditions, undesired effects of work, failure to comply with Labour Code regulations, unfriendly relationships with employees and clients, lack of responsibility and scarce material resources.
3. Economics-related situations resulting from inefficient compensation systems—inappropriate rewarding for dedicated time and effort and an inequitable system for setting the level of compensation and bonuses.

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<sup>3</sup> Two sets of motivation factors introduced by Herzberg are viewed in different ways by various categories of employees. Some of hygiene factors can be treated as motivators, but contrary views are also held.

**Table 2** Impact of motivation factors on job satisfaction. *Source:* Author's research

Factors	When they occur, they lead to:	When they do not occur, they lead to:
Motivators	Satisfaction	Lack of satisfaction
Hygiene factors	Lack of satisfaction	Dissatisfaction
De-motivators	Dissatisfaction	Lack of dissatisfaction

4. External situations—inappropriate government and company policies, the organization's long-term objectives are not compatible with employees' expectations, unfavourable government and administrative management regulations related to problem solving, local government activities—external factors which, in the author's opinion, cannot be affected by the interested parties/respondents.

It can be concluded that the identified motivation factors (de-motivators) give specific direction to human activity, strongly affecting the satisfaction of viscerogenic needs as well as safety and recognition needs. According to Maslow's widely known and recognized hierarchy of needs, most of such needs are classified as low-level needs which dominate over other needs and determine individual/employee behaviour when not satisfied. The significance of these factors deserves special attention.

However, the above presented classification of de-motivators is not precisely construed. It is composed of four measurements which are too general in terms of their aggregation, including both de-motivators and hygiene factors—e.g. working conditions and interpersonal relationships. These factors are presented in a similar manner by other authors, including F. Herzberg. These descriptions lack the identification and clear and disjunctive classification of motivation factors in the workplace.

Overall, the presented theoretical considerations indicate that most of the discussed factors are significant and they should be included in the research studies of motivation in the workplace. The impact of motivation factors on job satisfaction is presented in Table 2. The directions (vectors) of impact are basically different, although they can occur simultaneously in a given working environment.

The classification of motivation factors for the purpose of this paper is based on the method of linear ordering of objects in a multidimensional feature space, referred to as a comparative analysis. The application of the method is based on dividing a given set of variables into the following elements: stimulants—variables whose increase in value indicates a higher level of the analysed phenomenon, dominants—variables whose high values of a given phenomenon range within specific limits, and distimulants—variables whose decreased values indicate a higher level of the analyzed phenomenon. Assuming that employee motivation factors represent a diagnosing variable, motivation factors/motivators perform the function of stimulants. Hygiene factors are nominants, while obstacles in the process of work, i.e. de-motivators, represent denominants. In the light of the above considerations, the improvements in and rationalization of a motivation system should be based not only on the identification of specific factors but, in the first place, on the activities aimed

to eliminate de-motivators (denominants), optimise hygiene factors (nominants) and maximise motivators (stimulants), depending on the company's financial potential, legal and organizational environment and strategies.

The discussed issues can be referred to M. Haire's concept, which stresses the significance of both motivators and de-motivators. This concept is based on the assumption according to which the employee effectiveness curve for a team of workers tends to reach the state of relative equilibrium. Higher effectiveness can be achieved by company executives through strengthening the forces placed below the effectiveness curve—negative forces—leading to a negative response of employees. A similar effect, i.e. higher effectiveness, can be achieved through appropriate activities aimed to reduce the impact of hindering forces. The difference between the two solutions is that the application of the latter method leads to the same result with a lower level of tension among company staff (Michon 1981). Haire's concept leads to the conclusion that an analysis aimed to identify effectiveness factors should attribute equal significance to stimulating and hindering factors. Therefore, the concept constitutes a methodological directive suggesting the broadening of the scope of research by including a study of work effectiveness hindering factors.

A review of the factors which affect job satisfaction, being a subject of a number of studies of employee motivation, leads to the identification of the factors that occur most frequently. A list of nearly 50 factors has been drawn up which seem to be common if not universal. The research study was based on the expert method. The function of experts was performed by the supervisors of line organizational units and HR management specialists. Table 3 presents selected results.

The classification of motivation factors in the workplace is not an easy task. An analysis of the research studies conducted by other authors indicates that a number of issues require clarification with regard to classifying such factors as hygienes and motivators. A number of studies classify the same factors in different ways, attributing to them different scopes and directions of impact. Moreover, de-motivators, which represent a relatively new and controversial research area, are not satisfactorily defined and classified in terms of their impact and vector of influence. Therefore, developing appropriate and practical solutions for diagnosing motivation factors in the workplace seems to be an even more complex and difficult task.

#### 4 Concluding remarks

The presentation of the concept of the trichotomy of motivation factors in the work place leads to the conclusion that the identification and measurement of selected factors which are significant from the point of view of the motivation theory should be replaced, in a practical approach, by an analysis and reconstruction of the entire motivation process. Moreover, if motivation concepts are to be analysed not only for theoretical but also practical purposes, a diagnosis system should be developed to identify significant components (factors) of the motivation process. Such a system should be transparent and easy to understand.

The above statements lead to the conclusion that it is possible and also indispensable to develop a method for diagnosing an employee motivation system whose

**Table 3** Examples of factors affecting job satisfaction. *Source:* Author's research

Motivators	Hygiene factors	De-motivators
Bonuses	Compensation	Mobbing by superiors/co-workers
Promotion opportunities	Working hours	Stress at work resulting from amoral behaviours of superiors/co-workers
Personal development opportunities	Workload	Work exceeding employee's psychophysical potential and qualifications
Flexitime	Interpersonal relations, friendly atmosphere at work	Sort-term contracts
Cafeteria benefits	Industrial safety	Employer's continuous and close supervision
Recognizing merit	Work content	Lack of possibility of changing status quo/making improvements
Trainings paid by employer	Company policy	
	Responsibility	
	Social scheme activities	

scope of research would include motivators, hygiene factors and de-motivators. The practical results of such research should lead to improving motivation systems and constitute a basis for business practice. The identified motivators can be useful in developing a motivation system within the framework of employee collective agreements; hygiene factors can be used as a basis for labour code regulations, while de-motivators can contribute to developing codes of ethics. It should be noted that the results of such research studies can contribute to the development of motivation theories and, more importantly, they can be used in the business practice of companies and organizations to improve their motivation if not entire labour systems.

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