

Motivational Issues in Knowledge Work

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The paper discusses the place of emotions in modern theories of motivation, and the influence of the knowledge-oriented paradigm on redefining motivation and rethinking ways of rendering work, knowledge work, in particular, more efficient, in a society in which human participation and deployment of intellectual capital become key factors of success, replacing traditional, tangible-focused, factors of production.

Keywords: emotion, motivational strategies, knowledge-worker.

1 The knowledge worker and the management of emotions

The knowledge worker was a term coined by Drucker back in 1959, announcing a shift of paradigm in organization science. Knowledge, residing in people, became more important than things, the inanimate resources. Hence, the need to explore *cet inconnu*, the worker, with all the capabilities he disposes of.

“I had been advised early in life that sound decisions came from a cool head, that emotions and reason did not mix any more than oil and water”, Damasio’s (2005) confession on *Descartes’ error*, expresses the prejudices of classical management, centered on rational decision-making. Emotions, which were, traditionally, thought to hinder the efficiency of management (Putnam and Mumby, 1993) begin to be taken into account, in the form of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995, 1998), as important, if not more important than rational intelligence. This field of study grew into a management of emotions in the workplace (Schaubroeck and Jones, 2000), encompassing the analysis of the way in which emotions influence individual and group performance, and of the consequences a certain emotional experience may entail. For instance, emotions are proved to have a significant role in learning (Weiss, 2000). Still, traditional motivational theories discuss little about emotions, preferring more rudimentary referrals to needs (Alderfer, 1969; Maslow, 1954) and primary goals (Vroom, 1964). Even etymologically, *emovere* and *movere*, the Latin roots of emotion and moti-

vation, are related.

This reluctance to emotion may arise from the difficulty to define it, which is similar to the difficulty to conceptualize knowledge. Indeed, what is emotion? The James-Lange theory of the 19th century (1894) aimed, on the one hand, at identifying the causes of emotions and at discriminating between emotions which are qualitatively different. The James-Lange approach to emotions was a mainly physiological one, relating the quality of a particular emotion to the stimuli which provoke it. Still, further studies continuing this path have proven that measuring blood pressure and heart rate does not tell much about the nature of emotions (Gray, 1994). Not to mention that heart rate may vary in the same way when living emotions similar in intensity, but contrary in valence, that is, a strongly negative and a strongly positive emotion. Another physiological school in understanding emotion was that of the facial expressions. Thus, the six basic emotions were born (Izzard, 1977): happiness, anger, surprise, fear, sadness, disgust. This, however, did not explain how emotions were born, why facial muscles reacted in a certain way to certain stimuli. An in-depth follow-up of the James-Lange theory was the two-factor theory (Schachter and Singer, 1962), which postulated that physiological factors are responsible for the intensity of emotion, while cognitive factors are responsible for the quality of emotion. Further on, cognitive theories of emotions (Lazarus, 1991; Smith, 2001) claim that cognitive factors, on the one hand, generate emotions and, on the other hand,

help in distinguishing between emotions of different qualities. Structural cognition theories evaluate events, splitting them in desirable and undesirable (that is, producing positive or negative emotions), classify their causes in internal and external, and position them on a time scale, to the past, present, or future, distinguishing between events which took or take place and events which are expected, or for which there is an eventuality to take place. What is important, in enumerating these theories, is that they illustrate a path from emotion as physical, uncontrolled reaction of the body, to emotion as reaction to a cognitive event, which can be anticipated, classified, analyzed. Emotions approached cognitively can, then, be a subject to motivational theories and to management.

2. Modern motivational theories

Goal-setting theory (Locke, 1968), to take just one of the classical theories, is based on the notion that individuals have a drive to reach a clearly defined end state. Often, this end state is a reward itself. A goal's efficiency is modeled by three variables: proximity, difficulty and specificity. The ideal goal should present a situation where the time gap between the initiation of behavior and the end state is narrow, in order to create a sense of immediate achievement. A goal should be moderate, neither too difficult or too easy to complete, as people want to feel that there is a substantial probability for them to succeed in meeting their goal. Thus, they can filter activities, by retaining those which are goal-relevant and avoiding those which are goal-irrelevant. Also, goal-setting influences both intensity of work and persistence. This theory is anchored in the individual, which is not inline with the provisions of the relational approach to knowledge (Gitlin, Peck, Aposthian, Hadley, Porter, 2002), which postulates that knowledge should be shared inside and outside the organization, in partnership networks, and people should work together to achieve the outcomes they truly desire (Senge, 1990). Thus, some other motivational theories have to be shaped, and put in place of these individualistic, solitary goal oriented approaches.

The social cognitive theory (Ormrod, 2003), taking the premises of the much older social learning (Bandura, 1962) responds to the requirements of distributed knowledge among knowledge workers who share their both tacit and explicit knowledge in continuous spirals (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Thus, social cognitive theory states that people learn while observing others, that emotions guiding learning are socially induced. People have the inner power to self-direct their behavior, in other words, they are active, not reactive, in relation to the environment. There is, then, for sure, a link between individual behavior and organizational behavior. That set of energetic forces that originate inside, as well as outside the individual and initiate work-related behavior, determining its form, direction, intensity and duration, which Pinder (1998:11) identifies with motivation depends on the interaction between individual and organizational behavior.

The emotional framework of the individual inside the organization is values-driven, more likely than needs-driven, as claimed by the classical theories. Values, as trans-situational goals (Prince-Gibson and Schwartz, 1998), guide behavior in the sense that they stimulate both the individual and the community to reach the place they believe they deserve. Values, in their turn, affect individual choices, which intervene in the selection of a particular behavior (Prejmorean and Vasilache, 2008). In order to reach the goals which are being activated by their particular goals, people acquire information, in other words, they learn. The social cognitive theory of motivation comes, thus, back to its origins, those of a learning theory, in the social context.

The importance of the model for the social cognitive theory is obvious, in the sense that the closer the model to the learner, the easier and the faster the learning process. As in the goal-setting theory, but from a different perspective, the learner feels more motivated to fill in the gap to the model, as the gap is narrower. If the model is imitable, and the learner feels that, by persisting in the learning process, he or she will be able to achieve all

the desirable qualities of the model, then motivation will be a sustainable process. If the model is difficult to imitate, or the learner does not have the traits needed for performing the task, than motivation disappears and the task is abandoned. The self-direction, mediating between what the environment offers and what the individual subjectively appreciates that he or she can do, is outlined in this decision to continue or to abandon.

Workplace values are also moderators of motivation, which are taken into account in modern theories. The cultural self-representation model of Erez and Earley (1993) places both the self and the managerial practices in the cultural context of the country. Understanding your own values, as reflections of the values of a particular culture, is followed by understanding the managerial values in the name of which certain decisions are taken, and negotiating between the two to achieve desirable outcomes, leading to self-fulfillment. If these systems of values differ and, even more, when either managers or employees tend to project their own values onto exponents of different cultures, the motivation process is hindered. The „cultural intelligence” (Earley, 2002) developed by knowledge exchange may prove to be the Esperanto of this managerial Babylon.

3. Conclusions

The specific nature of the knowledge work has determined a shift in motivational theories, which tend to take more into account the immaterial mechanisms of human disposition, leading to a revalorization of emotion, and its role in achieving good quality motivation. We revised the main theories of emotion, and connected them to this motivational shift, in the context of the knowledge work specific, opening a discussion which takes into account the ties between emotional intelligence, organizational intelligence and human capital appraisal, through motivation, as key success factors in the knowledge-based society.

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