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Employee's Motivation and Satisfaction in light of Economic Recession: Evidence of Grevena Prefecture- Greece

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Abstract

The study of motivation and satisfaction in the workplace has become a subject of intense interest amongst numerous fields of studies. However, especially nowadays, as business and organizations experiencing the effects of the worst economic recession in decades, the understanding of the importance of these concepts is essential for its continued survival. The purpose of this paper is a) to study the role of motivation and satisfaction in the workplace, according to the recent literature, especially during recession b) to identify the most important factors of motivation - satisfaction that could lead the employees of Local Authority, to a more efficient behavior, under the conditions of the current economic crisis and c) to find out if these factors are differentiated in relation to their socio-demographic and job related features. The survey took place in April 2014. During this time Greece was experiencing an economic recession. The study was conducted through a structured questionnaire. The sample consisted of (85) employees of Local Authority. The survey revealed that the most important motivating factors for Local Authority (Regional Unity of Grevena) employees, were interesting work, equal and fair treatment, good working relationships with supervisors and colleagues, objective assessment and good salary.

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Key words: motivation, job satisfaction, motive, factors affecting motivation, factors affecting job satisfaction, motivation - satisfaction surveys.

1. Introduction

In today's business environment of globalization and intense competition, companies and organizations have to face among others the challenges of the "Great Recession", the worst global financial crisis in decades. Greece, in particular, have severely impacted experiencing in additional the impact of the worst debt crisis. The Memorandum austerity measures imposed in Greece since May of 2010 (that Greece resorted to the International Monetary Fund) until today had a serious negative impact on labor issues. Specifically, in April of 2014, in the investigation period, the unemployment climbed up to 27.1%. Thousands of people lost their jobs in both the public and private sectors, while at the same time major salary reductions occurred.

The reduction of government revenue, the increasing pressure on government to bring down the national debt, and generally the low profitability of private enterprises are factors pushing and forcing managers of modern enterprises and organizations to do more with less (Austin Spears, 2013). In order to do this, nowadays, both private and public organizations need to maximize the utilization of their employees' skills. It is obviously that, "a motivated employee is a valuable asset which delivers immense value to the organization" (Rajhans, 2012). Generally, it was felt that the primary motivate factor which could make employees to remain effective and feel satisfaction in their work was the money. However, pioneer studies conducted by Elton Mayo from 1924 to 1932 found that employees are not motivated solely by money and employee behavior is linked to their attitudes (Dickson, 1973). Motivation is a multidimensional framework, because people are usually motivated by a combination of different factors (Cinar et al., 2011). Of all the functions a manager performs, motivating employees is arguably the most complex. This is due, in part, to the fact that what motivates employees changes constantly (Bowen & Radhakrishna, 1991).

The aim of this work is twofold: first to review the existing theories and literature about motivation and satisfaction of employees especially during recession, while studies examining the question under investigation are also reviewed and second to investigate motivation and satisfaction using data of 85 employees in a Greek local authority (Local authority of Grevena-Greece).

2. Theories and literature review on motivation and job satisfaction

Motivation is one of the major issues in behavioral sciences and based on the crucial position and important role of human resources in achieving organizational objectives (Barzoki et al., 2008). Highly motivated employees appear to develop positive work-related attitudes and behaviors such as: they exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment (Crewson 1997; Pandey, Wright, and Moynihan 2008), they believe that their jobs are important, and this belief leads them to work harder (Wright 2003), they tend to develop higher job performance (Naff and Crum 1999; Frank and Lewis 2004; Leisink and Steijn, 2009), and organizational performance (Ritz, 2009), they are less likely to leave their jobs and enjoy higher job satisfaction (Naff and Crum, 1999). Additionally, the drive to understand and explain job satisfaction has been motivated by utilitarian reasons as well as humanitarian interests. Satisfied incumbents tend to engage in altruistic behaviors that exceed the formal requirements, such as organizational citizenship behaviors (Smith, Organ, and Near 1983). On the contrary, dissatisfied employees have a high propensity to engage in counterproductive behaviors (Liu and Tang, 2011).

The terms of motivation and job satisfaction have been extensively defined by academics and managers. Specifically, Buford et al., (1995) have defined motivation as a predisposition to behave in a purposive manner to achieve specific, unmet needs. According to Luthans (1998), motivation can be defined as the process that arouses, energizes, directs, and sustains behavior and performance. On the other hand, Linder (1998) argues that motivation can be defined as "the inner force that drives individuals to accomplish personal and organizational goals". Job satisfaction is an individual's emotional response to his or her current job condition, while motivation is the driving force to pursue and satisfy one's needs (Wang Xie & Lee Haidung, 2013). According to Locke (1976) job satisfaction is defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences". However, Koustelios and Kousteliou (2001) defined job satisfaction as the positive and negative attitudes that an individual has for their work. In the main, in the fields of human resource management and organizational behaviour, motivation is often described as being "intrinsic" or "extrinsic" in nature (Sansone and Harackiewicz, 2000). Extrinsic motivation occurs "...when employees are able to satisfy their needs indirectly, most importantly through monetary compensation" (Osterloh et al., 2002). In contrast, intrinsic motivation is apparent when individuals' behavior is oriented towards the satisfaction of innate psychological needs rather than to obtain material rewards (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Finally, the connection between motivation and job satisfaction have been confirmed by a series of studies (Perry and Wise 1990, Crewson 1997, Brewer and Selden 1998, Naff and Crum 1999, Bright 2008, Taylor 2008, Wright and Pandey 2008, Liu, Tang and Zhu 2008, Liu 2009, Belias et al. 2014 a).

A review in international literature, demonstrates that many contemporary scholars have tried to give answers to which are the main motives for a satisfied employee. Houston (2000) used data of 101 public sector employees and 1,356 private-sector employees in USA. Research results indicated that meaningful work was the most valued job characteristic for both public and private sector employees. Whereas, the second important job characteristic was income for the private sector and chances for promotion for public employees. Furthermore, public sector employees give emphasis on job security, with high income coming in fourth place. 'Thus there appears to be a difference between public and private employees in terms of characteristics of the job that motivate them, although they agree which

reward motivator is most highly valued”. Moynihan & Pandey (2007), based on responses from a US survey of state government health and human service managers, found out that public service motivation is strongly and positively related to level of education and membership in professional organizations. The results also underline the significant influence of organizational institutions, indicating that red tape and length of organizational membership are negatively related to public service motivation, whereas hierarchical authority and reform efforts have a positive relationship. In a survey of about 3,400 public officers of government ministries in Malta, Camilleri (2007) found that, the employee perceptions of the organization, the employee-leader relations and the job characteristics antecedents are the most dominant predictors of the Public Service Motivation dimensions. Additionally, Milne (2007) finds that reward and recognition programs can positively affect motivation, performance and interest within an organization, while Grant (2008) suggest that connecting public service employees to the prosocial impact of their work can enhance their motivation. Amabile & Kramer (2010) in their survey, discovered that the most motivating factor for employees is progress. The empirical results indicated that “making progress in one’s work – even incremental progress – is more frequently associated with positive emotions and high motivation than any other workday event”. Ghimire’s et al. (2010) in order to find out the factors associated with the motivation of health workforce, conducted a survey, in health institutions in Nepal, on 335 workers, showed that the five most important motivating factors for them are: first (56.4%) working environment, second (54.6%) financial reward, third (48.1%) praise and acknowledgement, fourth (43.0%) opportunity for career development and fifth (27.8%) job security. Taylor & Westover, (2011) tried to examine the effects of a selection of antecedents that are commonly related to job satisfaction in the public service. This research found that highly motivated workers, experienced higher levels of intrinsic workplace attributes, especially an interesting and autonomous job, and extrinsic workplace attributes, such as higher pay, more promotion prospects and better job security, experienced better work relations with their managers and co-workers, and in general were more satisfied with their jobs compared with counterparts with lower levels of PSM, fewer intrinsic and extrinsic workplace attributes and poor work relations with their managers and co-workers. Barzoki et al.(2012) concluded that among hygiene factors, “salary and wages, job security and supervisory practices, and relationship with the authorities” have been the three major factors affecting motivation of staff, with salary to play the most important role. On the other hand "relations with peers, work conditions and personal life" seem to have the least impact on staff’s motivation. Additionally, marital status, educational level, organizational position and the workplace have been effective on their perception of hygiene factors that motivate them. Achim et al.(2013) in order to investigate the importance of employee motivation to increase organizational performance, in early 2013, took into analysis a distribution company cooked product, with over 150 employees. The study findings reveal that most of the employees (72%) consider that money is the best motivational reward. Promotion stimulates only 20% of them, and 8% are stimulated by moral rewards only if they are being accompanied by money. It concluded that best motivation is the financial gain, especially during the economical crisis Romania was going through. Money also seems to play significant role for employees in Pakistan, as the research conducted by Muhammad et al.(2015) on 93 employees of National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) revealed that lower compensations and unsupportive work environment is causing dissatisfaction. O’Shea et al.(2014) based on data of over 200 employees from 45 organizations in Ireland (during this time Ireland was experiencing an economic recession), reported that skill variety was related to higher job satisfaction for those with a strong organizational mobility preference, and skill specialization was related to lower job satisfaction for those with a weak organizational mobility preference. Autonomy and skill specialization were positively related to career satisfaction for those who held a strong self-directed career attitude. Drakopoulos & Grimani, (2015) using data from thirty three European countries and Turkey, revealed that pay cuts have negative effect on the psychological well-being and job satisfaction. Ankudinov et al. (2015), using Russian data revealed that employment functions as well as financial incentives have the strongest influence over job satisfaction and satisfaction with professional advancement prospects, while respondents representing all professions reviewed are generally equally concerned with possible job loss. Furthermore, it revealed a distinct decline in job satisfaction level and in satisfaction with professional advancement opportunities in the crisis years of 2009 and 2010. It is worth to mention that according to the studies based on International program of social monitoring data Russia is at the bottom of the list of European countries by the level of job satisfaction. Among the factors most negatively affecting job satisfaction of Russians, low wage rates are singled out (Temnitski & Bessokirnaya, 1999; Desai & Idson, 2000; Linz, 2003). Earlier studies have also demonstrated that job characteristics such as content of work process and working conditions are among the most powerful factors of job satisfaction (Monusova, 2008; Yang, 2009; Khalid et al., 2011).

When it comes to Greece, studies have also confirmed the complexity of motivation and job satisfaction phenomena and its interaction with many factors. Dimitriadis et al. (2003) found that the

motivation techniques which are used by HR managers are differentiated according to the employees' hierarchy level. Especially, according to the results, managers consider that the prospect of promotion after employees' assessment (79.2%) is the best way to motivate the business executives and then responsibility (75%), job security (70.8%) and financial reward (58.3%). On the contrary, the most popular technique for workers motivation is the good salary (87.5%). Job security is second in ranking (66.7%) and follows the safe and pleasant working conditions (58.3%) and responsibility (54.2%). Manolopoulos (2008), in order to examine the issue of work motivation in the extended public sector in Greece, took into analysis three large state-owned corporations located in Greece, namely Public Power Corporation (PPC), Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company (Eydap) and Hellenic Aerospace Industry (HAI). The final sample consisted of 454 employees and its data collection was held in the beginning of 2005. The research findings indicated that in the extended public sector of Greece public administrators attempt to motivate their employees and improve productivity by emphasizing on extrinsic rewards and more specifically by the provision of fair wages and increased job security. Additionally, according to findings both individuals' ability and demographic characteristics are core determinants of employees' motivational preferences. Whereas, Akrivos & Koutras (2009) research emphasizes the implication of leadership on employees motivation, satisfaction and performance. Their research conducted at Municipality of Athens in September of 2008 and its results revealed that the team building, the positive discipline, the commitment to vision, the change agent, the trust and justice are the factors that leaders must provide to their employees in order to inspire and motivate them in a bureaucratic (working) environment. Finally, in this way leadership will increase the effectiveness and public servants performance. A study among mental health professionals conducted by Grammatikopoulos et al. (2013), in order to find out the dominant factors that affect their motivation. This study indicated that perceptions of meaningful work, respect and good interpersonal relations are the major concerns related to employees motivation. Finally, variations observed in results according to professional sector and educational level of employees. Stefanidis D. (2012) conducted a research in order to identify the incentives that motivate Air Force's officers and ensure their job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The research findings show that four motivators are effective in officer's satisfaction and commitment. These factors consist of supervisors' managerial skills, job enrichment, role clarity, work conditions and merit-based promotion opportunities. A study among employees of Greek banks and credit institutions Belias et al. (2014a, b, c) conducted in order to evaluate the levels of their job satisfaction, role conflict and autonomy. According to the research results, the most satisfying factors were the organization as a whole, the promotion opportunities and work itself, while immediate superior, working conditions and salary were less satisfying. This finding confirms previous studies that have been conducted among bank employees in Greece, the majority of which shows that the levels of employees' job satisfaction are rather high nowadays. Specifically, the results show that among intrinsic factors, the job content seems to be in the highest level and has the greatest affection on motivation and employees satisfaction. On the other hand, employees tend also to place high importance on the extrinsic incentive of money (good salary/wage/payment).

From the mid of 20th century that Maslow first published the hierarchy of needs theory until today, a lot scientific writings and studies on motivation and employee satisfaction have emerged. But not many have investigated these occupational phenomena during recession or in times of economic crisis. Much more if we focus in Greece and particularly in the sector of Local Authority and the employees of Regional Units, easily one would found that the evidence provided on related issues after the onset of the recession and the Greek debt crisis is limited. The purpose of this paper is first to study these phenomena during the recession in Greece and then draw conclusions about the impact of this recession in public administration, and particularly in human resource management. Finally, we hope our research findings to provide insights upon the above-identified gaps of the literature with the overall objective to assist to inform HRM practices that are most relevant for employees' satisfaction and motivation during recession.

3. Empirical research, data, methodology and results

For conducting this research, after extensive bibliographical investigation, a structured questionnaire was developed. It is divided into three parts and includes a total of thirty nine (39) questions. The first part refers to the socio-demographic characteristics, as well as labor data such as position in the hierarchy, years of service experience in the private sector. The second part consists of two subsections. The first aims to measure the general level of employee satisfaction and includes four questions. The second sub-section entitled "What motivates me" describes nineteen motivational factors could push employees into a more effective behavior. Eventually, the third part of the questionnaire includes questions related to individual motivation and the effects of the economic downturn in the areas of labor relations (Calligas: 2011). The set of questions in the questionnaire are closed type, the majority

relies on a five-point Likert scale with the anchors 1 = "not at all", 2 = 'little', 3 = 'moderate', 4 = "very" and 5 = "absolute".

We conducted this research at the Regional Unity of Grevena (Local Authority in West Macedonia – Greece). The survey took place in April 2014. During this time Greece was experiencing an economic recession. The study was conducted through a structured questionnaire. The sample consisted of (85) employees of Local Authority. The questionnaire was completed and answered by all 85 employees, of whom 43 are male and 42 are women. The age of respondents ranged from 25-55 or more years. Their position in the organization hierarchy varies by Officer, Head of the department to Director. The educational level of employees allocated to 4 categories: primary and high school, technological, university. Also variation observed in their marital status (single, married - number of children).

Table 1. Mean scores of job satisfaction variables by gender and age (n=85)

Job satisfaction Variables	Male (N=43)	Female (N=42)	Age 25-35 (N= 9)	Age 35-45 (N= 28)	Age 45-55 (N= 28)	Age 55> (N= 20)
1. Work Conditions	3,50	3,54	3,48	3,47	3,52	3,49
2. Nature of Work	3,67	3,69	3,71	3,73	3,69	3,67
3. Management style	3,27	3,26	3,31	3,33	3,25	3,27
4. Earnings	2,52	2,56	2,56	2,57	2,54	2,53
Average total	3,24	3,26	3,27	3,28	3,25	3,24

Table 2 Mean scores of job satisfaction variables by educational level and hierarchy (N=85)

Job satisfaction Variables	Primary and High school graduates (N=22)	Technological graduates (N=18)	University graduates (N=45)	Officers (N=57)	Heads (N=21)	Direct ors (N=7)
1. Work Conditions	3,75	3,49	3,49	3,54	3,47	3,49
2. Nature of Work	3,63	3,74	3,67	3,69	3,75	3,67
3. Management style	3,32	3,34	3,27	3,26	3,33	3,27
4. Earnings	2,51	2,60	2,53	2,56	2,62	2,53
Average total	3,30	3,24	3,24	3,27	3,30	3,24

According to Tables 1 and 2, for both men and women, the most satisfying factors are the nature of work and then work conditions, while earnings seems to be the less satisfying, irrespective of gender, age, educational level and hierarchy. In terms of educational level of employees, our results prove that work conditions is first in ranking for primary and high school graduates, while in case of technological and university graduates, nature of work is first satisfying factor in ranking. We asked employees to evaluate the most motivating factors out of 21 factors that are drawn from the literature.

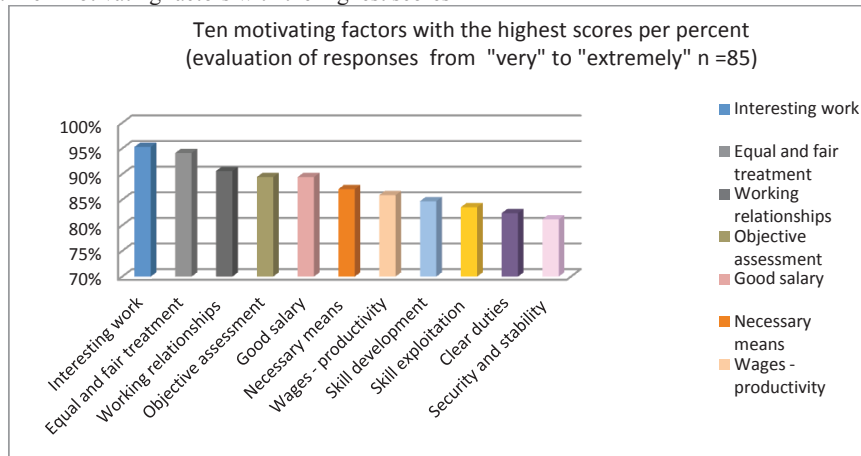
Table 3. Motivating factor means for the entire sample (N=85)

Motivating factors	
1 Equal and fair treatment.	4,47
2 Good salary	4,46
3 Interesting work	4,44
4 Objective assessment	4,41
5 Good working relationships with supervisors and colleagues	4,40
6 Wages according to productivity	4,34
7 Provision of necessary means for duties performance	4,26
8 Skill and knowledge development	4,21
9 Security and stability of employment	4,20
10 Clear duties	4,18
11 Skill exploitation	4,18
12 Safe & Healthy work environment	4,06
13 Take initiatives	4,06
14 Decision making	4,05
15 Guidance and support from their supervisors	4,04
16 Feedback performance	3,98
17 Ethical η moral reward	3,95
18 Opportunity for hierarchical advancement η Promotion opportunities	3,75
19 Flexible working time	3,54

20	Teamwork	3,44
21	Opportunity to develop friendly and social relations	3,15

Table 3 presents the mean scores. According to our results the four most motivating factors for the entire sample are: equal and fair treatment, good salary, interesting work and objective assessment. It is interesting to note that flexible working time, team work and opportunity to develop friendly and social relations do not seem to motivate the employees of the sample. However when we combine the responses of factors that are very and extremely motivating, the scores are a little bit changed, since interesting work is first in ranking, with equal and fair treatment second and good salary fifth in ranking.

Figure 1. Ten motivating factors with the highest scores



We applied the test Kolmogorov Smirnov for normality test. It proves that the data is not a good fit with the normal distribution. Then we applied Kruskal Wallis test to investigate the possible correlation between the dependent satisfaction variables: work nature, work conditions, earning, and dependent motivation factors: promotion opportunities and security and stability of employment, with independent variables: age, gender, education level and hierarchy level. According to our results there is a correlation between education level and satisfaction of the work nature, and between hierarchy level and job earnings, while for all the other satisfaction variables we can not reject the null hypothesis. Also, there is correlation between the gender, level of education and hierarchy level and promotion opportunities and between job security and gender.

Our results prove that even in case of economic recession interesting work and equal and fair treatment, objective assessment and satisfied salary are the motivating factors with the highest scores. The results are similar to other studies that examine satisfaction and motivation in case of Greek public sectors and local authorities.

4. Conclusions

In this paper we presented an overview of the theories and evidence on motivation and satisfaction in the workplace especially during economic crisis. We also conducted a survey using data of a local authority of Grevena Prefecture-Greece in order to identify the most important factors of motivation -satisfaction that could lead the employees of Local Authority, to a more efficient behavior, under the conditions of the current economic crisis and we tested if these factors are differentiated in relation to their socio-demographic and job related features. The survey took place in April 2014. During this time Greece was experiencing an economic recession. The study was conducted through a structured questionnaire. The sample consisted of (85) employees of Local Authority. The survey revealed that for both men and women, the most satisfying factors are the nature of work and then work conditions, while earnings seems to be the less satisfying, irrespective of gender, age, educational level and hierarchy. In terms of educational level of employees, our results prove that work conditions is first in ranking for primary and high school graduates, while in case of technological and university graduates, nature of work is first satisfying factor in ranking. Our results also prove that even in case of economic

recession interesting work and equal and fair treatment, objective assessment and satisfied salary are the motivating factors with the highest scores.

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