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Adapting Herzberg's Two Factor Theory to the Cultural Context of Romania

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Abstract

For decades the field of work motivation has been mainly shaped by Western theories, neglecting the cultural factor and its potential impact on work motivation. But one cannot talk about work motivation without calling into question the cultural factor. Cultural values influence how an individual perceives and interprets a situation and, thus, have an influence on behavior and, respectively, on individual motivation. Some endeavors to identify the relationship between culture and motivation have been made, but not enough to clarify this issue. The present paper aims to test the validity of Herzberg's Two Factor Theory for Romania and to adapt it (if necessary) to the Romanian cultural context. The main conclusion of this research is that, as formulated by Herzberg and his colleagues, the Two Factor Theory is not appropriate for the cultural context of Romania. However, the premises of this theory are valid: the sources of work satisfaction are generally different from those generating dissatisfaction and intrinsic work elements are motivators acting within the satisfaction area. However, in order to be considered valid in Romania, the theory should be adapted to the cultural context. Other findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Motivation is a force acting on each individual making him choose an action or another, so it is understandable why culture (taking into account the definitions of the concept) has a significant influence on motivation. The same reward motivates employees in one culture, but not in others; the same aspect of the workplace has a powerful motivational potential in one culture, but not in others (Hofstede et. all, 2010). Cultural values influence how an individual perceives and interprets a situation and, thus, have an influence on behavior and, respectively, on individual motivation. Cultural values serve as criteria in evaluating different motivational factors, factors in workplace. Since people from different cultures use different cultural values to interpret the same situational factors, we should expect that what is perceived as a motivating factor in some cultures may be perceived as a de-motivator in other cultures (Erez, 2008).

Culture influences not only the behavior of individuals, but also the explanations given for that behavior. Thus, an American could explain the extra effort made by the money received, a Frenchman by personal pride, a Chinese by mutual obligations and a Dane by fellowship (Hofstede et. all, 2010). However, motivation is not synonymous with behavior. Motivation is only a determinant of behavior, and behavior can be determined by cultural factors, biological and situational.

Some endeavor to identify the relationship between culture and motivation has been made, but not enough to clarify this issue. Some specialists consider that there is a direct link between cultural dimensions and the key motivational factors (Marinaș, 2010; van Emmerik&Gardner, 2010). As Child's intercultural organizational research show, organizations are increasingly similar, while the behavior of the employees in these organizations keeps its cultural uniqueness (Geren, 2011).

Numerous cultural studies have analyzed and identified different correlations between cultural dimensions and behavior in the workplace, and between culture and work motivation. Some cultures promote individualist behavior, others collectivist behavior, so we can not apply the same motivational model for both cultures (Geren, 2011). For example, in cultures where masculinity prevalent, there is a high need for achievement; fulfillment is defined by recognition and wealth. Masculine cultures focus on material possessions and additional revenues, while feminine cultures place emphasis on working conditions, job satisfaction and employee participation (Greckhamer, 2011). In feminine cultures leisure time is more important than money, so extrinsic rewards may not produce any effect on motivation and, respectively, on work performance. In masculine cultures money are more important than free time; financial rewards are a sign of recognition and success, which are important for individuals in masculine cultures (Hofstede et. all, 2010; Hofstede, 2001). This suggests that motivational practices from feminine culture will be less or not at all effective in a masculine culture (Matei & Abrudan, 2013).

The importance given to different work aspects has great implications for motivational models. This may explain why in many motivational theories (mostly American, so developed in individualistic cultures) freedom and challenge are considered strong intrinsic motivators. However, it must be examined whether the same factors are motivators in collectivistic cultures as well, or development, physical conditions and use of skills are better motivators in these cultures. This brings to mind Herzberg's Two Factor Theory that, although we consider efficient as principle of separation the work factors (in hygiene and motivational), is applicable as is only in individualistic cultures. We believe that within collectivistic cultures some hygiene factors become motivators and vice versa.

2. Herzberg's Two Factor Theory and the Romanian culture

In terms of culture, Herzberg's Two Factor Theory corresponds to an environment where power distance is small, and uncertainty avoidance is weak (as is the cultural context in which the theory was developed). In countries with large power distance, "supervision" should not be seen as a hygiene factor, because in these cultures the dependence on stronger individuals is a fundamental need which can be a significant motivator. In countries with intense uncertainty avoidance aspects related to the "policy and administration of the organization" should not be viewed merely as hygiene factors, because of the motivating potential this aspects may have in those cultures (Hofstede et. all, 2010).

In order to be applied in a culture different from that in which they were conceived, motivational theories should be adapted and their validity should be tested. An example of testing the validity of a motivational theory is given by

Deci, who, in 2001 conducted a research to verify the possibility to generalize and apply the self-determination theory to other cultures. The analysis provided evidence that the theory may also be valid in other cultures. Yet, Deci concluded that there are differences in the intensity of relations between needs and motivation, so the cultural factor should not be excluded (Deci et. al, 2001).

In this paper, we intend to verify the validity of Herzberg's Two Factor Theory for Romania and, if necessary, to adapt it to the Romanian cultural context. To this end, it is required to describe the culture in Romania. For this purpose we have at our disposal a variety of cultural studies, of which, some of the most frequent cited in the field of social science are the studies of: Hofstede, Schwartz, Inglehart etc. For this scientific endeavor, we will use Hofstede's cultural dimensions. We will not make at this point an exhaustive description of the Romanian culture, because one may find many scientific references that treat this subject. From Hofstede's point of view, Romania is characterized by: collectivism, great power distance, a relative femininity, intense uncertainty avoidance, intermediate score for long term orientation, restraint.

3. Research methodology

This scientific approach is part of a wider research. To test the validity of Herzberg's Theory or to adapt it to the cultural context of Romania we have used quantitative and qualitative researches as follows: analysis of secondary data: literature review and longitudinal study on data from the European Values Survey (EVS, 2010); survey-based quantitative research; focus group-based qualitative research. The research has been conducted between September 2014 and March 2015. The relevant findings of these researches are synthesized in the Appendix, which is why we shall present here only a brief description of these researches.

- *Analysis of secondary data from scientific literature*

There have been analyzed the relevant scientific articles and publications in the field of intercultural research on work motivation and attitude towards work.

- *Longitudinal study - trends studies*

The trends study is based on data collected by European Values Survey in 1999 and 2008. One of the reasons we used a longitudinal research was to identify the changes that occurred in people's perceptions in regards to the attitude towards work. In this regard, we intended to find out whether the values related to the perception of work are stable over time. After analyzing the data from EVS 1999 and 2008, we believe that EVS 2008 data are valid as today (differences from one period to another were less than +/- 3%) Of all the topics covered in the EVS, we addressed two themes: Perception of life and Work.

- *Students survey research*

To understand the expectations of future employees and whether these expectations are influenced by the cultural factor we conducted a quantitative research. The research method used was the survey and the research tool was the questionnaire. The studied population includes students with work experience. The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions (closed questions, open questions, projective technique based questions, questions of classification) who examined several aspects related to the attitude towards work and work motivation. The way the questionnaire was applied was the self-administration method, information filtering being eliminated by the operator of the investigation. A total of 196 questionnaires were completed, of which 192 were considered valid.

- *Focus group research*

Perhaps the most important research through the similarity with Herzberg's original research is research conducted through focus group technique. In it were organized two focus groups. Group 1 consisted of 10 master students as participants, aged 23 or 24 years of which 4 are men and 6 women. The 10 students maximum work experience was of 2.5 years. Group 2 consisted of 10 employees with work experience, aged between 40 and 50 years. Of these, four are women and 6 men. These participants have between 15 and 31 years of work experience. Three of them are working in the public sector.

The topics addressed in the two focus groups were inspired by the topics discussed by Herzberg and his colleagues in the interviews that formed the basis for substantiating the two factor theory. These themes are:

- Theme no. 1. What are the most frequent satisfaction sources in your workplace?
- Theme no. 2. What are the most frequent dissatisfaction sources in your workplace?
- Theme no. 3. What conditions should be met for you to work to your full potential?
- Theme no. 4.

Think of a time when you had positive feelings about your work. Please tell me about it. Why did you feel so at that time?

The way you felt at that moment somehow influenced the way you did your work? How? For how long?

What happened influenced your career in any way?

- Theme no. 5.

Think of a time when you had positive feelings about your work. Please tell me about it. Why did you feel so at that time?

The way you felt at that moment somehow influenced the way you did your work? How? For how long?

What happened affected your personal life in any way?

What happened influenced your career in any way?

The responses of the participants in both focus-groups were coded according to certain categories of variables. These categories were also considered by Herzberg and his colleagues in their original research (Herzberg et. all, 2010; Herzberg, 2010). Because the results of the focus-group research are synthesized in Appendix, we will not dwell on them at this moment.

The **objectives** set for the researches previously described are:

- To identify possible correlations between the attitude towards work and the cultural factor.
- To identify those work related aspects with influence on work performance.
- To identify the sources of work satisfaction and dissatisfaction

However, the present paper aims to test the validity of Herzberg's Two Factor Theory for Romania and to adapt it (if necessary) to the Romanian cultural context. Like most research, this scientific approach is subject to limitations as well, which is why it is necessary to point out the **limits** of the research conducted:

- Because in the case of student survey research, the respondents are young students aged up to 34 years with higher education, we do not claim that the results of this research should be valid for individuals without higher education or belonging to another age bracket;
- Because the participants in the two focus-groups all have higher education and were selected from urban areas, we cannot categorically extrapolate these results and on people in rural areas or without higher education.

4. Research findings: analysis and interpretation

Based on the findings of the research previously described (which are synthesized in Appendix A), the following observations can be drawn:

Table 1. Synthesis of observations

Workplace related aspect	The aspect was mentioned as:	The research in which the aspect was mentioned
	important aspect of a job	European Values Survey 1999, 2008 students survey research
	aspect with an important positive influence on work performance	students survey research
Salary	a necessary condition for employees to work at their full potential	focus group research
	work satisfaction source	focus group research

Insufficient salary	aspect with a negative influence on performance	students survey research
	work dissatisfaction source	focus group research
	reason to leave a job	students survey research
	important aspect of a job	European Values Survey 1999, 2008 students survey research
Relations with peers	aspect with an important positive influence on work performance	students survey research
	a necessary condition for employees to work at their full potential	focus group research
	work satisfaction source	focus group research
	important aspect of a job	European Values Survey 1999, 2008 students survey research
Job security	aspect with an important positive influence on work performance	students survey research
Recognition	aspect with an important positive influence on work performance	students survey research
	work satisfaction source	focus group research
	important aspect of a job	European Values Survey 1999, 2008 students survey research
Intrinsic elements of work	aspect with an important positive influence on work performance	students survey research
	aspect with an important influence on work motivation	focus group research
	the aspect with the most significant positive influence on work performance	students survey research
Working conditions	important aspect of a job	students survey research
	a necessary condition for employees to work at their full potential	focus group research
Poor working conditions	aspect with a negative influence on performance	students survey research
	work dissatisfaction source	focus group research
	reason to leave a job	students survey research
	important aspect of a job	students survey research
Policy and administration of the organization	work satisfaction source: working hours, leaves and holiday policies	focus group research
	work dissatisfaction source: inefficient organization of work, work overload, wrongful distribution of tasks, overtime	focus group research

From a cultural point of view, the importance of different workplace aspects can be substantiated as follows:

- The intense uncertainty avoidance explains the importance of the financial aspect and the importance of job security.
- The high power distance that characterises Romania explains the importance of the superior.
- The femininity accounts for the importance of relations with peers, the importance of free time and for the importance of quality of life.
- The well-marked collectivism (together with the femininity) explains the importance of the relations with peers.

Based on these observations, we considered that:

- Salary can be taken into account as a hygiene factor with influence in the dissatisfaction area, but it has also a significant motivating potential in the case of Romania, and can also be considered a motivational factor.
- Relations with peers and job security represent motivational factors in the case of Romania, not hygiene factors as is the case for the original theory of Herzberg.
- Recognition is a motivational factor, particularly the recognition from superiors (especially for the young generation – see Appendix).
- Intrinsic work elements (variety of work, challenge, opportunity to learn something new, development opportunities, responsibility and, to some extent, autonomy) are important (but not the most important) for Romanian employees.
- Working conditions, a hygiene factor in Herzberg's view, have, in the case of Romania, a significant motivating potential. We considered working conditions as hygiene factor (poor working conditions generate work dissatisfaction), and also as motivational factor (with influence on work satisfaction and performance).
- Policy and administration of the organization represent a hygiene factor (as in the case of Herzberg's original theory). Still, given the importance of the work program (especially for the younger generation), we believe that certain aspects of the organization's policy and administration have a motivating potential,
- Achievements, although Herzberg considers them as the most important motivational factor, in the case of Romania, achievements have a low motivating potential.
- Intrinsic work elements represent motivational factors.

Overall, the work satisfaction generating factors are different from those that generate dissatisfaction in the case of Romania, as in the original investigation of Herzberg (Herzberg, 2008 & 2010). However, although the premises of Herzberg's theory are valid in the cultural context of Romania, there are significant differences in terms of motivating potential of certain factors. Other factors fall into a totally different category compared to the original theory. Figure 1 summarizes the findings of the research findings.

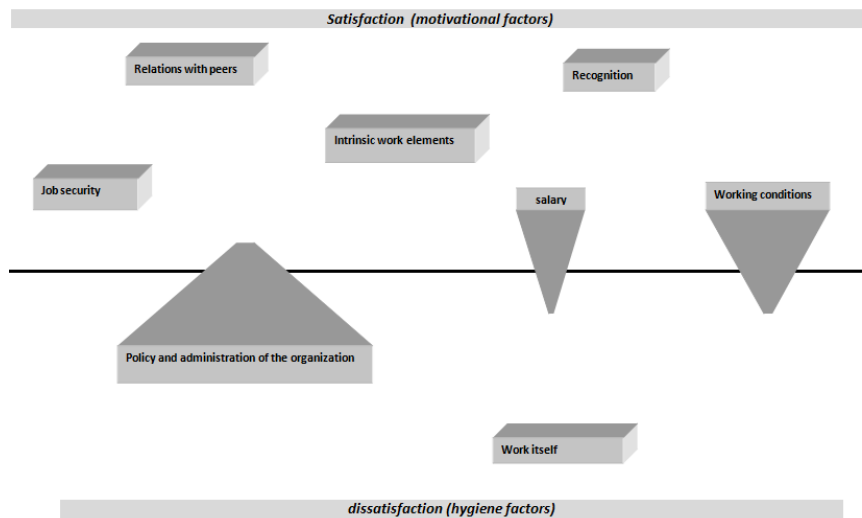


Fig. 1. Adapting Herzberg's two factor theory to the cultural context of Romania

5. Conclusions

As stated, the aim of this paper was to verify the validity of Herzberg's Two Factor Theory for Romania and, if necessary, to adapt it to the Romanian cultural context. For this purpose we made use of findings of quantitative and qualitative research. After analyzing the results of the research conducted we can draw the following main conclusion: as formulated by Herzberg and his colleagues, the Two Factor Theory is not appropriate for the cultural

context of Romania. However, the premises of this theory are valid: the sources of work satisfaction are generally different from those generating dissatisfaction and intrinsic work elements are motivators acting within the satisfaction area. However, in order to be considered valid in Romania, the theory should be adapted to the cultural context.

Because the observations from one culture are not necessarily applicable to other cultures, we recommend that motivational theories are presumed to be valid only in the cultural environment in which they were conceived. Theories are subject to cultural constraints and reflect the culture in which the author / authors were formed and have carried out their research (Hofstede et. all, 2010, Hofstede, 1980). Theories, models and practices in the field of work motivation are, in essence, specific to each culture; they can be applied beyond national borders, but this requires caution. Some experts believe that assumptions on human behavior must be made only by psychologists, not by economists, because individuals are irrational beings and any attempt to treat human behavior as rational is destined to fail (Kets de Vries & Engell, 2008).

Appendix A. Synthesis of research findings

Table 1. The most important aspect of a job
(students survey research)

No.	Aspect	No. of appearances	Percentage of respondents
1	Financial aspect (sufficient salary, financial rewards)	108	56,25
2	Good relations with peers	92	47,92
3	Intrinsic motivation	80	41,67
4	Opportunities for promotion	64	33,33
5	Good working conditions	36	18,75
6	Job security	36	18,75
7	Flexible working hours/more free time	32	16,67
8	Respect from superiors	32	16,67
9	Recognition from superiors	24	12,5
10	Professional development	16	8,33
11	Team work	16	8,33
13	Employer reliability	16	8,33
12	A job in the field of graduation	8	4,17
14	Efficient organization of work	8	4,17

Table 2. The most important aspects of a job - European Values Survey (EVS)

No.	Aspect	EVS
1.	good pay	92,5
2.	job security	81,5
3.	pleasant people	73,5
4.	people treated equally	73,1
5.	meeting abilities	71,8
6.	good working hours	68,6
7.	family friendly	65,7
8.	achieving something	63,7
9.	an interesting job	62
10.	learning new skills	60,5
11.	use initiative	53,1
12.	have a say	52
13.	meeting people	50,5
14.	useful for society	50,2

No.	Aspect	EVS
15.	responsible job	49,8
16.	generous holidays	45,9
17.	not too much pressure	41,4

Table no. 3. List of aspects with positive influence on performance
(students survey research, based on Herzberg's list of aspects considered)

No.	Aspect	Percentage of respondents (no=192)
1.	Good working conditions	95,83
2.	Sufficient amount of salary	91,67
3.	Efficient organization of work	83,33
4.	Job security	83,33
5.	Being a part of a cohesive group	79,17
6.	Good relations with peers	79,17
7.	Workplace cooperation	75,00
8.	Learning new skills	70,83
9.	Work recognition (praised or noticed)	66,67
10.	Varied work	58,33
11.	Challenging, creative work	58,33
12.	Use of initiative	50,00
13.	Seeing the results of work	47,92
14.	Participation in decision making	45,83
15.	Agreement with organization's objectives	41,67
16.	Status	33,33
17.	Workplace competition	29,17
18.	Easy job	12,50

Table no. 4. The first five aspects with significant negative influence on performance
(students survey research, based on Herzberg's list of aspects considered)

Rank	Aspect	Percentage of respondents (no=192)
1.	Insufficient amount of salary	83,33
2.	Lack of opportunities for growth (promotion, personal development)	79,17
3.	Unfriendly/dishonest superior	75,00
4.	Poor working conditions	70,83
5.	Inefficient organization of work	68,75

Table no. 5. The most frequent reasons for leaving a job
(students survey research)

Rank	Aspect	Percentage of respondents (no=192)
1.	Insufficient amount of salary	68,75
2.	Unethical/unfair behaviour of superior	29,17
3.	Poor working conditions	27,08

4.	Lack of promotion opportunities	27,08
5.	Poor relations with peers	22,92

Table no. 6. Workplace satisfaction sources: comparison
(focus-group research, based on Herzberg's list of aspects considered)

Category	Group 1 – 20-25 years old (percentage of occurrences)	Group 2 – 40-50 years old (percentage of occurrences)
interpersonal relations-peers	21	20
work itself	15	16
recognition - superior	15	8
interpersonal relations -superior	12	4
salary	12	20
recognition -clients	9	12
opportunities for growth	6	0
job security	6	0
achievements	3	12
responsibility	3	0
working conditions	3	0
policy and administration of the organization	0	16

Table no. 7. Workplace dissatisfaction sources: comparison
(focus-group research, based on Herzberg's list of aspects considered)

Category	Group 1 – 20-25 years old (percentage of occurrences*)	Group 2 – 40-50 years old (percentage of occurrences*)
salary	50	12,5
policy and administration of the organization	34,62	50
opportunities for growth	15,38	0
working conditions	11,54	0
work itself	0	12,5
interpersonal relations -superior	0	12,5
interpersonal relations -peers	0	6,25

* the percentages exceed 100% because four sources were placed in more than one category

Table no. 8. Conditions needed to work at full potential: comparison (focus-group research)

Category	Group 1 – 20-25 years old (percentage of occurrences*)	Group 2 – 40-50 years old (percentage of occurrences*)
financial aspects	29,63	25,00
correlation between effort and remuneration	14,81	12,50
organization of work	14,81	43,75
work itself	11,11	-
working hours	11,11	12,50
working conditions	7,41	-

professional development	7,41	-
interpersonal relations	3,70	6,25

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