MOTIVATING PERFORMANCE THROUGH JOB DESIGN AND GOAL SETTING: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract

What is the difference between a garbage collector and waste management agent? Isn't it all about collecting rubbish? Yet, most people would agree that there are more motivational qualities attached to being a waste management agent! Yes, even in the disposal of waste, perceptions, goals, expectations and frames of reference differ across different designs (or packaging) of essentially the same job. Can the design of a job and the setting of goals really motivate performance? We are convinced they can and the aim of this paper is to show you how.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF JOB DESIGN AND GOAL SETTING

A.   Job Design

McShane and Von Glinow (2003) conceptualised job design as "the process of assigning tasks to a job, including the interdependency of those tasks with other jobs". Job design has also been perceived as "the process of defining the way work will be perform and the tasks that will be required in a given job" (Noe, Hollenbeck, Geshart and Wright, 2000). Based on the above premises, job design entails having to do with task diversity and work procedures, implying that job design is a configuration of the inter-task chemistry, a blueprint of procedures and processes that set different tasks into a single structure of fluid affiliation.

Essentially, job design can better be appreciated through five fundamental approaches and they include:

Job Engineering Approach: This approach borrows most of its theoretical base from the field of human factors psychology (or human factors engineering). Unlike personnel psychology that seeks to fit the man to the job, the job engineering approach looks at fitting the job to the man. This approach is concerned with product, process and tool design, plant layout, standard operation procedures ... and human-machine interactions, (Luthans, 1998).
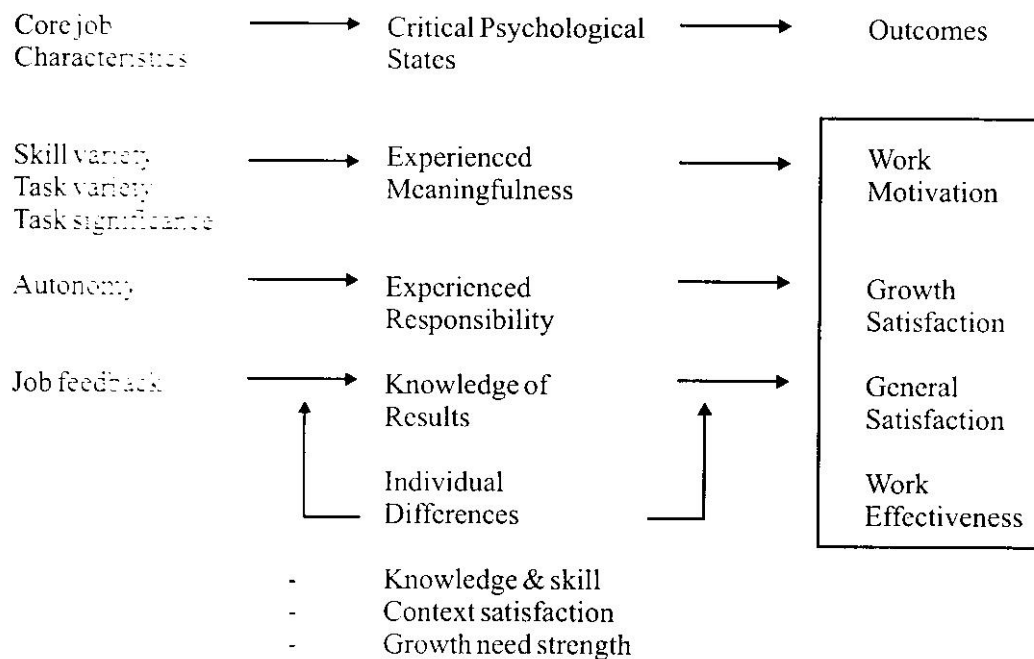
Job Enrichment Approach: Taking a cursory look at the abstract, we see that the job of a waste management agent looks richer than that of a garbage collector. Let us consider the possible reason for this. Noe et al (2002) perceive job enrichment to entail the following:

- Re-arranging the task chemistry to make for greater variety and interest; Increasing job responsibility by vertical job expansion;
- Decentralizing authority to the employees;
- Giving workers greater decision autonomy; and
- Demystifying the job to give it more meaning.

Job Characteristics Approach: Hackman and Oldham (1980) designed a job characteristics model (see figure 1) that relates the characteristics of a job and its attendant psychological states to the consequent performance outcomes.

Figure 1: Job Characteristics Model

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Core job Characteristics		Critical Psychological States		Outcomes
Skill variety Task variety Task significance	→	Experienced Meaningfulness	→	Work Motivation
Autonomy	→	Experienced Responsibility	→	Growth Satisfaction
Job feedback	→	Knowledge of Results	→	General Satisfaction
		Individual Differences		Work Effectiveness

- Knowledge & skill
- Context satisfaction
- Growth need strength

From the above diagram, we see the effect of core job characteristics, critical psychological states and individual differences on outcome. Let us look at each of these outcome determinants:

Core Job Characteristics: Robins (200 I) defines each of the characteristics as follows:

Skill Variety: "The degree to which the job requires a variety of different activities".

Task identity: "The degree to which the job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work".

Task significance: "The degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people".

Autonomy: "The degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying out the job".

Feedback: "The degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance".

These five core characteristics are the input variables of the job. They bring about critical psychological states that determine outcome.

Critical Psychological State: The five core job characteristics co-operate to produce an experience of meaningfulness, an experience of responsibility and the knowledge of results as shown in figure 1 above.

Individual Differences: Employees differ along three dimensions: Knowledge and skill, context satisfaction and growth need strength. Variances in the knowledge/skill of an employee, his need for growth and his satisfaction with the work environment will cloud his experiences and feedback benefits (psychological states) as well as his output (outcome).

Quality of Work Life (QWL): What is the perceived QWL of a garbage collector in contrast to a waste management agent? Who do you think would feel better about his job? QWL unlike job engineering, job enrichment and job characteristics approaches is more concerned with the overall climate or work. QWL underscores the socio-technical psychology of the work environment. According to Luthans (1998), QWL is not based on a particular theory, nor does it advocate a particular technique" for motivating performance. Thus, it is the contention of the author to change the climate at work condition so that the human-technological-organisational interface leads to a better quality of work life.

Social Information Processing Approach (SIPA): What do you think would be the social perceptions of a garbage collector towards his job? Do you think society would esteem his job? What would be his personal evaluation of his daily tasks as compared to the waste management agent?

These questions are quite insightful and one who asks them is approaching the designing of a job from the social information processing angle. The Social Information Processing Approach (SIPA) highlights three major causes of a jobholder's perceptions, attitudes and actual behaviour which include:
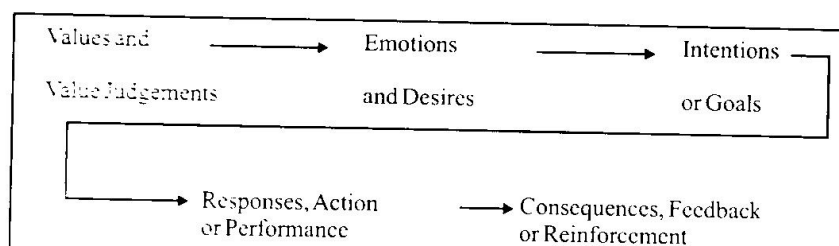
    i.   his cognitive evaluation of the real task environment;
    ii.   his past actions, learning and reinforcement theory; and
    iii.   the social contextual information provided by the environment.

B.   Goal Setting

What goals do you think a garbage collector would have? How would they differ from that of a waste management expert? Are there really "underlying motivation" in goal setting?

In industrial/organizational psychology, when we talk of goal setting, we usually recall the research of Ed Locke a pioneer researcher on goal-setting theory. According to contemporary management authors (Jones, George, and Hill, 2000), the goal-setting theory focuses on "motivating workers to contribute their inputs to their jobs and organisations ... [and] by considering ... how well managers can ensure that organisational members focus their inputs in the direction of high performance and the achievement of organisational goals".

Figure 2: Locke's Goal-setting Theory of Work Motivation

Source: Luthans (1998)

The major drive of this theory is that there is a causal relationship among elements of the diagram shown in figure 2. The values and value judgements (which are enshrined in one's attitudes) influence and mould one's emotions and desires. These, in turn would determine the intentions, motives and/or goals of the person. The person then "acts out" his/her intentions and finally meets with the consequences of his/her performance: the feedback, the reinforcement, the outcome, etc.

Goal-Setting and Motivation: Santrock (2003), quoting various researchers noted that "individual achievement improves when they set goals that are specific, short term, and challenging". In other words, goals-setting serves as a form of motivation.

Coleman (2003) defines motivation as "a driving force or forces responsible for the initiation, persistence, direction and vigour of goal-directed behaviour". To Colman, (2003) motivation implies "to move" + - action which indicates a process or condition.

From the above definition, it is evident that motivation is directly tied to goal-setting. According to Luthans (1998) there are four practical guidelines for improving performance through goal settings and these are:

Setting specific goals: Specific goals are better than vague or general goals. Goals such as setting out to "do your best" are an example of a vague goal. But reading two books a month, for example is specific.

Difficult, challenging goals are better than relatively easy goals: Though goals should be challenging, Santrock (2003) calls for caution arguing that under-challenge goals can lead to loss of interest while over-challenge goals can frustrate the goal.
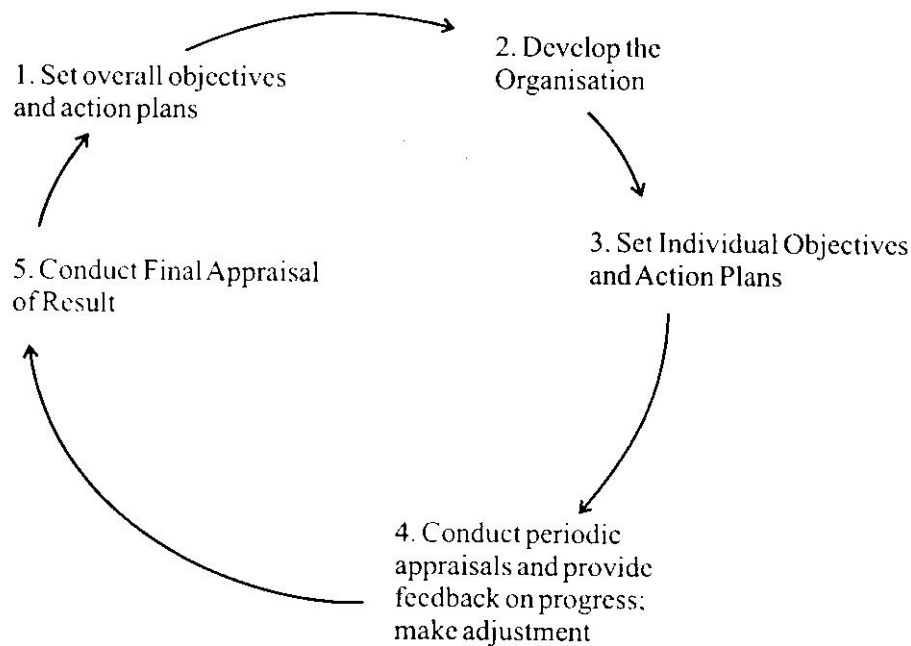
"Owned goals" better than "assigned goals": There is evidence that people who set their goals through a participative process perform better than those who are told what their goals are going to be (Luthans, 1998). Who among the garbage collector and waste management agent will have an edge with respect to goal ownership rights? A hired garbage collector would most likely be told what to do, when and how to do it.

Goal accomplishment feedback: Although research results are inconclusive, Luthans (1998) believes it is fair to suggest that feedback is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the successful application of goal-setting.

Goal setting and organisational performance (drawing a balance): Having x-rayed the important role that motivated goal-setting plays in boosting organisational performance, there is a need to understand where to draw the line. Luthans (1998) continues to suggest that much of the research on goal setting is controversial.

It would also be important to note that goal setting and organisational performance may have a correlational rather than a causal relationship. Luthans (1998), citing various research findings, points out that management styles, risk levels, teamwork versus individual work structures, etc. are moderating variables which also affect organisational performance.

The Application of Goal Setting to Organisational System Performance Figure 3: The Application of Goal-Setting to System Performance

Sources: Adapted from Luthans (1998)

The diagram, figure 3, shows how goal-setting can be weaved into fabric of the organisation system. The theoretical thrust of this diagram derives from the management legend Prof. Peter Drucker to whom the term management-by-objectives (MBO) is attributed. MBO prescribes a systematic approach to the setting of objectives and appraising by results in order to enhance performance and employee satisfaction. Although the term MBO is obsolete today, most paradigms that claim to integrate goal setting into the machinery of management to foster improved organisational performance are but modified and re-engineered systems of an MBO parentage.

CONCLUSION

Research is never-ending. The author is convinced that the raisond' etre for any research is to make life easier in the future. With the advent of modern Information Communication Technology (ICT) like World Wide Web, Internet, and Intranet services in Nigeria as well as other jet age gadgets, how do you think the collecting of rubbish will be designed and executed by the year 2020 - our year of miracle? What do you think will be the motivating determinants for such work in time to come? What impact will job designs and set goals have on the employment situation in Nigeria? These are pertinent questions we must begin to ask ourselves with a hope that collecting rubbish to eke out a living shall not be the life stay of the average Nigerian in the future.

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