

Individual vs Group Motivation? : Effect of the Culture

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Abstract

In recent years, according to the changes in business environment, competition became a critical issue for organizations and therefore management strategies gained importance. Especially in highly competitive industries, to be profitable and obtain customer loyalty, motivation of the individuals working in the company became an important factor. The main point here is how to motive them. Individual motivation or group motivation? Which one is more effective than the other on performance? There is a moot point about individual and group motivation effect on performance and there are different views about this issue. Some of the researches show that individual motivation performs better and some others affirm that the group motivation has more impact on performance of individuals in comparison to individual motivation. While there are different perspectives on individual and group motivation according to the studies on motivation, it is generally clear that this social category has different effects on the performance of individuals in parallel with cultural differences. This study focuses on the differences between individual and group motivation effects on performances from individualist and collectivist perspectives with a conceptual analyze. The motivation in both individual and group level and its impact on performance is going to be examined, compared and contrasted to explore attitudes of individual behavior in two different domains, and it is going to be analyzed which of them is more effective on performance considering the cultural differences that direct the individual behaviors. It is hard to define some generally accepted rules or guidelines to evaluate the impact of motivation on performance because every organization should be handled individually but this study aims to create a framework that can be used as a guideline by managers and researchers to realize the importance of the effects of culture on motivation and the difference between the impacts of individual and group motivations on performance that can be used to direct the management strategies.

Keywords: *Motivation, Individual Motivation, Group Motivation, Performance, Culture, Individualism, Collectivism.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, according to the changes in the business environment, competition gained importance. Especially in highly competitive global economy, to have sustainable competitive advantage in the market with satisfying profitability and to obtain customer loyalty, human resources of the company became a crucial factor. Therefore, the performance of the company mostly relies on how well the individuals working in the company perform to achieve the organizational goals. At this point, there is a need to direct the human resources towards the organization goals. Human beings have some needs and wants that should be fulfilled to make

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them perform better in their lives. Especially in business life, individuals need to be motivated to display self sacrificing performance for the company they belong to. One of the most important mission of the human resources management is to motivate individuals in the company to act towards the common goals and expectations from them with a maximum level of performance. Therefore, to obtain continuous improvement in the company, motivation programs are important issues for development of the human resources. The main point here is how to motivate them.

There is a moot point in recent studies on the influence of individual and group motivation on performance. There are different points of views about this case. But in common, it is clear that there is an influence of this social category on motivation and also on performance of individuals.

This paper focuses on the differences between individual and group motivation effects on performances. The motivation in both individual and group level and its impact on performance is going to be examined, compared and contrasted to explore attitudes of individual behavior in two different domains, and it is going to be analyzed which of them is more effective on performance considering the cultural differences that direct the individual behaviors. It is hard to define some generally accepted rules or guidelines to evaluate the impact of motivation on performance because every organization should be handled individually but this study aims to create a framework that can be used as a guideline by managers and researchers to realize the importance of motivation and the difference between the impacts of individual and group motivations on performance.

2. Research Method

There are lots of studies about motivation, group motivation and also individual motivation. But in common, there are two different approaches. One of them is about the individual motivation that suggests that individual motivation performs better on the performance of the individuals. And the other suggests that the group motivation performs better on the performance of the individuals.

To come up with the answer of how to motivate people to improve their performance and to find out which of the motivation programs performs better than the other on performance, a conceptual analyze is going to be done and the decisions from these two different perspectives will be argued.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Motivation

There are many definitions of motivation in the literature. Buchanan and Huczynski described motivation as: “the cognitive decision-making process, through which goal-directed behavior is initiated, energized, directed and maintained” (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2007, p.241).

Also Nevid says “the term motivation refers to factors that activate, direct and sustain goal-directed behavior. Motivates are the whys of behavior - the needs or wants that drive behavior and explain what we do.” (Nevid, 2013).

There are different theories of motivating individuals as; Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory (1943), Alderfer's ERG Theory (1972), Herzberg (1973) and his Two-Factor Theory, McClelland's Theory of Achievement Motivation (2010). All these theories highlight that there are different ways to motivate people. Also it is important to decide whether to motivate individually or within group?

In many researches in organization and management concept, motivation is seen to be an important factor that affects the individual performance at work. Also, researchers have increasingly examined the relations among individual motivation, group motivation and their effects on performance. Although many researchers agree that motivation represents a multidimensional concept and there is no common agreement on the exact number of factors. And also these factors have different effects on individual performance. Individuals perform in different levels when they are motivated individually or they are motivated within groups. Also the performance levels are differentiated when they are working in large or small firms. So we can say that, how to motivate people is important but motivating individually or within group is also as important as how to motivate them.

3.2. Group vs Individual Motivation

There are different perspectives and different ideas about whether to motivate individually or within group. In some of the studies, it is suggested that motivation is a psychological process and people affect each other in socialization and therefore, group motivation performs well (Norbert L. Kerr and R. Scott Tindale (2011); Cecilia L. Ridgeway (1978); Miriam Erez and Anit Somech (1996); Locke & Latham, 1990; Weldon et al., 1991; Weldon & Weinfort, 1993 and others). But in some other studies it is suggested that motivation depends on individual's beliefs, choices and thoughts so motivation begins at the individual level and individual motivation performs better than group motivation (Paul S. Adler and Clara Xiaoling Chen (2011); Reijo Miettinen (2009); Alan J. Malter and Peter R. Dickson).

Also, there is a conflict between social loafing and social facilitation. In social loafing, people may believe that other members of the group exert enough effort to achieve the goals, thereby make their own efforts dispensable. Depending on this inequity, to avoid becoming a sucker, others who perform well may attenuate their efforts and this causes overall loss in performance. On the other hand, in social facilitation, people act to maintain a positive self-image in the presence of others, particularly when they perceive the others as potential evaluators. In social loafing, individual motivation is seemed to perform well but in social facilitation perspective, group motivation is seemed perform well. As we know, many organizations shift from individual work to teamwork depending on this perspective.

As seen above, there are two different approaches to the effect of motivation on performance. In order to analyze the effects of both individual and group motivation effect on performance, there is a requirement to analyze the cultural factors. The main distinction here is the effect of the group on the individuals (group members). Group motivation may perform well if there is common shared culture within group and if they have team spirit. But if there is no impact of the group on individuals, individual may act to fulfill his/her needs and wants. In this situation, motivating individually by addressing the individual expectations may be more effective to motivate people in the organization.

So, the shared culture should be analyzed at first to come up with the answer of the question of motivating individually or within group?

3.3. Collectivism vs Individualism

Whether to decide to motivate people individually or within group, the power of the groups on individuals should be analyzed. There are power differences of groups and individuals in collectivist and individualist cultures. And also the expectations of individuals are different in two conditions. It is also a conflict today as it has been for a century, does the individual's life belong to him or belong to a group, community, state or a society? There is a need for clarity on this issue.

In collectivist cultures, the fundamental unit of the political, social and economic concern is the group, rather than individual. There is a super-organism existing over and above its individual members and group subjugates the individuals to be self-sacrifice to serve for the group and for the moral values of the group. Individual's moral worth is judged by how much he sacrifices himself to the group. At this point of view, society has unlimited power that forces its rights upon anyone in any manner. Therefore, individuals may be chained to collective action and collective thought for the sake of what is called the common good. The expectations of individuals is to be appreciated by the group and have an esteemed role in the group. To motivate people in collectivist cultures, the effect of the group on individuals should be considered because the group directs their behavior and also their expectations.

But in individualist cultures, individuals have more power than groups. This approach holds that a human being should think and judge independently and there is a supremacy of individual rights. Individual's moral rights are to pursue their own happiness. This pursuit requires a large amount of independence, initiative and self-responsibility. Individuals here are seen to be an independent, sovereign entity who processes individually for his/her own life. From this individualist perspective, individual expectations depend on their own needs and wants. Therefore these individual expectations should be fulfilled to make them motivated.

Comparing these two different approaches, it can be said that the cultural conditions of the society and also the company may direct the expectations and also the behaviors of the individuals. To have higher levels of performance and choosing the best alternative way to motivate people in the organization, the cultural conditions of the company should be analyzed. If the company is more close to the collectivist culture, there may be a team spirit across the individuals. And Group motivation may perform better than individual motivation. By group motivation applications it is possible to create teamworks and apply group motivation games with group. By the help of the effect of group on individuals, group motivation may direct the group behaviors and this will direct the behaviors of the individuals. But if the culture is closed to the individualist culture, the individuals working in the company may have individual expectations independent from the group norms. To motivate people, it is necessary to fulfill the personal wants and needs of individuals. The work conditions may be more important and individual motivation may perform better than the group motivation to direct the individual behaviors.

4. Conclusion

As a result, it can be said that in collectivist cultures; there is a super-organism existing over and above its individual members that have a single identity similar to a person. Groups have unlimited power on individuals so individual behaviors are directed by the group norms and laws. In this condition, group motivation may be more effective than individual motivation on performance. Because, individuals may be chained to collective action and collective thought. There won't be any social loafing because individuals may be judged by their subjugation and self-sacrifice for the group. Individuals may perform better towards the common goals to have a positive self-image in the presence of others in the group.

But in individualist cultures, individuals have more power than groups. Individuals are independent and have their own expectations that they seek to fulfill them. Their own needs and wants will direct their behaviors and their performance depend on how much they reach their own goals. In this condition, individual motivation may perform better than group motivation on performance. Because, individuals may care about their personal expectations and in group motivation applications social loafing may occur. Analyzing and determining the individuals' needs and wants is important here. And those needs and wants differ from person to person in individualist cultures. To motivate them, these expectations should be considered at the individual level.

At the end, it can be said that culture has an important effect on individual behavior and choice. As to decide how to motivate people, motivating individually or within group is an important issue that they have different effects on performance. To motivate individuals and understand the expectations, cultural conditions should be considered and motivation programs should be determined according to these factors. This study may highlight the importance of the culture in motivation and the differences of the effects of individual and group motivation programs on performance. The results can be used in common by the managers in different industries. The results can be used to direct the human resource activities like planning the training program and motivation programs and can be a guideline for managers to understand the requirements to increase performance especially in highly competitive and dynamic sectors.

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