

Two-Factor Theory: Decoding the Psychology of Motivation

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The two-factor theory (also known as Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory) states that there are certain factors in the workplace that cause job satisfaction, while a separate set of factors cause dissatisfaction. It was developed by Frederick Herzberg, a psychologist, who theorized that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction act independently of each other.

Two-factor theory fundamentals

Attitudes and their connection with industrial mental health are related to Maslow's theory of motivation. His findings have had a considerable theoretical, as well as a practical, influence on attitudes toward administration. According to Herzberg, individuals are not content with the satisfaction of lower-order needs at work, for example, those associated with minimum salary levels or safe and pleasant working conditions. Rather, individuals look for the gratification of higher-level psychological needs having to do with achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and the nature of the work itself. So far, this appears to parallel Maslow's theory of a need hierarchy. However, Herzberg added a new dimension to this theory by proposing a two-factor model of motivation, based on the notion that the presence of one set of job characteristics or incentives lead to worker satisfaction at work, while another and separate set of job characteristics lead to dissatisfaction at work. Thus, satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not on a continuum with one increasing as the other diminishes, but are independent phenomena. This theory suggests that to improve job attitudes and productivity, administrators must recognize and attend to both sets of characteristics and not assume that an increase in satisfaction leads to decrease in unpleasurable dissatisfaction.

The two-factor, or motivation-hygiene theory, developed from data collected by Herzberg from interviews with a large number of engineers and accountants in the Pittsburgh area. From analyzing these interviews, he found that job characteristics related to what an individual does -- that is, to the nature of the work he performs -- apparently have the capacity to gratify such needs as achievement, competency, status, personal worth, and self-realization, thus making him happy and satisfied. However, the absence of such gratifying job characteristics does not appear to lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Instead, dissatisfaction results from unfavorable assessments of such job-related factors as company policies, supervision, technical problems, salary, interpersonal relations on the job, and working conditions. Thus, if management wishes to increase satisfaction on the job, it should be concerned with the nature of the work itself -- the opportunities it presents for gaining status, assuming responsibility, and for achieving self-realization. If, on the other hand, management wishes to reduce dissatisfaction, then it must focus on the job environment -- policies, procedures, supervision, and working conditions. If management is equally concerned with both (as is usually the case), then managers must give attention to both sets of job factors.

The theory was based around interviews with 203 American accountants and engineers in

Pittsburgh, chosen because of their professions' growing importance in the business world. The subjects were asked to relate times when they felt exceptionally good or bad about their present job or any previous job, and to provide reasons, and a description of the sequence of events giving rise to that positive or negative feeling.

Here is the description of this interview analysis:

Briefly, we asked our respondents to describe periods in their lives when they were exceedingly happy and unhappy with their jobs. Each respondent gave as many "sequences of events" as he could that met certain criteria--including a marked change in feeling, a beginning and an end, and contained some substantive description other than feelings and interpretations...

The proposed hypothesis appears verified. The factors on the right that led to satisfaction (achievement, intrinsic interest in the work, responsibility, and advancement) are mostly unipolar; that is, they contribute very little to job dissatisfaction. Conversely, the dis-satisfiers (company policy and administrative practices, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, and salary) contribute very little to job satisfaction.

Two-factor theory distinguishes between:

Motivators (e.g., challenging work, recognition, responsibility) that give positive satisfaction, arising from intrinsic conditions of the job itself, such as recognition, achievement, or personal growth, and

Hygiene factors (e.g. status, job security, salary, fringe benefits, work conditions) that do not give positive satisfaction, though dissatisfaction results from their absence. These are extrinsic to the work itself, and include aspects such as company policies, supervisory practices, or wages/salary.

Essentially, hygiene factors are needed to ensure an employee is not dissatisfied. Motivation factors are needed to motivate an employee to higher performance. Herzberg also further classified our actions and how and why we do them, for example, if you perform a work related action because you have to then that is classed as movement, but if you perform a work related action because you want to then that is classed as motivation.

Unlike Maslow, who offered little data to support his ideas, Herzberg and others have presented considerable empirical evidence to confirm the motivation-hygiene theory, although their work has been criticized on methodological grounds.

Validity and criticisms

In 1968 Herzberg stated that his two-factor theory study had already been replicated 16 times in a wide variety of populations including some in Communist countries, and corroborated with studies

using different procedures that agreed with his original findings regarding intrinsic employee motivation making it one of the most widely replicated studies on job attitudes.

While the Motivator-Hygiene concept is still well regarded, satisfaction and dissatisfaction are generally no longer considered to exist on separate scales. The separation of satisfaction and dissatisfaction has been shown to be an artifact of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) used by Herzberg to record events. Furthermore, it has been noted the theory does not allow for individual differences, such as particular personality traits, which would affect individuals' unique responses to motivating or hygiene factors.

A number of behavioral scientists have pointed to inadequacies in the need hierarchy and motivation-hygiene theories. The most basic is the criticism that both of these theories contain the relatively explicit assumption that happy and satisfied workers produce more. Another problem is that these and other statistical theories are concerned with explaining "average" behavior and, on the other hand, if playing a better game of golf is the means chosen to satisfy one's need for recognition, then one will find ways to play and think about golf more often, perhaps resulting in an accompanying lower output on the job. Finally, in his pursuit of status a person might take a balanced view and strive to pursue several behavioral paths in an effort to achieve a combination of personal status objectives.

In other words, an individual's expectation or estimated probability that a given behavior will bring a valued outcome determines his choice of means and the effort he will devote to these means. In effect, this diagram of expectancy depicts an employee asking himself the question posed by one investigator, How much payoff is there for me toward attaining a personal goal while expending so much effort toward the achievement of an assigned organizational objective? The Expectancy theory by Victor Vroom also provides a framework for motivation based on expectations.

This approach to the study and understanding of motivation would appear to have certain conceptual advantages over other theories: First, unlike Maslow's and Herzberg's theories, it is capable of handling individual differences. Second, its focus is toward the present and the future, in contrast to drive theory, which emphasizes past learning. Third, it specifically correlates behavior to a goal and thus eliminates the problem of assumed relationships, such as between motivation and performance. Fourth, it relates motivation to ability:

Performance = Motivation*Ability.

That said, a study by the Gallup Organization, as detailed in the book *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, appears to provide strong support for Herzberg's division of satisfaction and dissatisfaction onto two separate scales. In this book, the authors discuss how the study identified twelve questions that provide a framework for determining high-performing individuals and organizations. These twelve questions

align squarely with Herzberg's motivation factors, while hygiene factors were determined to have little effect on motivating high performance.

To better understand employee attitudes and motivation, Frederick Herzberg performed studies to determine which factors in an employee's work environment caused satisfaction or dissatisfaction. He published his findings in the 1959 book *The Motivation to Work*.

The studies included interviews in which employees were asked what pleased and displeased them about their work. Herzberg found that the factors causing job satisfaction (and presumably motivation) were different from those causing job dissatisfaction. He developed the motivation-hygiene theory to explain these results. He called the satisfiers motivators and the dissatisfiers hygiene factors, using the term "hygiene" in the sense that they are considered maintenance factors that are necessary to avoid dissatisfaction but that by themselves do not provide satisfaction.

The following table presents the top seven factors causing dissatisfaction and the top six factors causing satisfaction, listed in the order of higher to lower importance.

Leading to satisfaction

Achievement
Recognition
Work itself
Responsibility
Advancement
Growth

Leading to dissatisfaction

Company policy
Supervision
Relationship with boss
Work conditions
Salary
Relationship with peers
Security

Herzberg reasoned that because the factors causing satisfaction are different from those causing dissatisfaction, the two feelings cannot simply be treated as opposites of one another. The opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction, but rather, no satisfaction. Similarly, the opposite of dissatisfaction is no dissatisfaction.

While at first glance this distinction between the two opposites may sound like a play on words, Herzberg argued that there are two distinct human needs portrayed. First, there are physiological needs that can be fulfilled by money, for example, to purchase food and shelter. Second, there is the psychological need to achieve and grow, and this need is fulfilled by activities that cause one to grow.

From the above table of results, one observes that the factors that determine whether there is dissatisfaction or no dissatisfaction are not part of the work itself, but rather, are external factors. Herzberg often referred to these hygiene factors as "KITA" factors, where KITA is an acronym for Kick In The Ass, the process of providing incentives or a threat of punishment to cause someone to do something. Herzberg argues that these provide only short-run success because the motivator factors that determine whether there is satisfaction or no satisfaction are intrinsic to the job itself, and do not result from carrot and stick incentives.

In a survey of 80 teaching staff at Egyptian private universities, Mohamed Hossam El-Din Khalifa and Quang Truong (2009) found that perception of equity was directly related to job satisfaction when the outcome in the equity comparison was one of Herzberg's motivators. On the contrary, perception of equity and job satisfaction were not related when the outcome in the equity comparison was one of Herzberg's hygiene factors. The findings of this study provide a kind of an indirect support to Herzberg's findings that improving hygiene factors would not lead to improvement in an employee's job satisfaction.

Implications for management

If the motivation-hygiene theory holds, management not only must provide hygiene factors to avoid employee dissatisfaction, but also must provide factors intrinsic to the work itself for employees to be satisfied with their jobs.

Herzberg argued that job enrichment is required for intrinsic motivation, and that it is a continuous management process. According to Herzberg:

"The job should have sufficient challenge to utilize the full ability of the employee."

"Employees who demonstrate increasing levels of ability should be given increasing levels of responsibility."

"If a job cannot be designed to use an employee's full abilities, then the firm should consider automating the task or replacing the employee with one who has a lower level of skill. If a person cannot be fully utilized, then there will be a motivation problem."

Critics of Herzberg's theory argue that the two-factor result is observed because it is natural for people to take credit for satisfaction and to blame dissatisfaction on external factors. Furthermore, job satisfaction does not necessarily imply a high level of motivation or productivity.

Herzberg's theory has been broadly read and despite its weaknesses its enduring value is that it recognizes that true motivation comes from within a person and not from KITA factors.(French, 2008)

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