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CULTURAL CONTEXT OF MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES

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Abstract
Culture context of motivating employees is the subject of the analysis undertaken in this article. The authors based on the assumption that the knowledge of what values culturally conditioned guide nationalities or ethnic groups constitutes the foundation of people management in transnational organizations. The research shows that the societies differ in terms of importance they assign to work and in terms of expectations that the job should fulfil. Employees oriented towards the internal values of work are ready for changes, autonomy, development and undertaking initiatives. The influence of culture and social institutions on the process of motivation is visible at the stage of experiencing by employees the strength of particular psychological needs.

Key words: motivation, motivating, culture context, national context

1. Introduction – relevance of the topic

Contemporary enterprises more and more often have a transnational character, which means that every day they contact with employees, customers and business partners from different cultures. Therefore, widely accepted is the thesis that one of the factors determining the success of enterprises is the ability to integrate geographically dispersed operations, including those addressed to own employees. This means, however, a need to deal with many dilemmas associated with reconciling the diversity of members of organisations and their national cultures with the preferred model of organisational culture of the entire enterprise as well as the choice of an efficient management model. Understanding the influence of cultural differences on management is a sine qua non of the effective human resource management in transnational organisations, in which usage of universal in assumption methods of management such as “management by objectives” in practice often does not produce the expected results.

The authors base on the assumption that motivating employees is a key element of management. In this article, they focus on those aspects of the practice of motivation management that are specific to multinational and multicultural organisations. The research problem undertaken in the article is: how does the cultural and national context influence the process of motivation?

2. The essence of motivating employees

The motivation process, based on the theory and practice of management, is examined and described in the context of effective stimulating employees to make a greater and more effective effort, which gives benefits to the organization and, at the same time, enables employees to meet their needs. Motivating is accurately ranked among the most important and difficult functions of management. The need for an individual approach to an employee, penetration into his or her system of needs and expectations, creation of appropriate working conditions and selection of the best management style are particularly emphasized. Motivating employees is defined as the interaction of various forms and means on employees so that their behaviours are consistent with the will of the supervisor, in order to achieve the tasks set before them. The aim of motivating is to shape pro-effective attitudes, yet effective motivating must take into account not only objectives of the company and their hierarchy, but also needs and expectations of employees. Excessive, one-sided orientation – mostly only towards needs of the company – may be the cause of a failure of the entire incentive system implemented in the organization. Conducting a conscious policy of motivating requires clear and precise answers to the question: what behaviours and what methods motivate employees? It is necessary, however, to take into consideration the regularity that a set of factors shaping human motivation is complex. The factors can be of a psychological, economic, cultural and intra-organizational nature [Moczydłowska 2008].

Numerous, assessed today as classic motivational theories emphasize various aspects of motivating. Work content theories emphasize the motivating importance of meeting needs of employees - for example, A. Maslow, D. McClelland, F. Herzberg [see Kinicki, Wiliams 2010]. Process theories (for example, concepts of J. S. Adams or V. Vroom [Woźniak 2013, p. 28-40] emphasize the significance of elements such as employee's expectations, a sense of justice and injustice. In turn, reinforcement theories (as the theory of F. Skinner [see Toates 2009] or A. Bandura [1977]) emphasize the role of learning certain behaviours on the basis of positive and negative reinforcements. Today, researchers of the problem move towards creating models of motivation integrating the most valuable cognitive and utilitarian achievements of earlier concepts. An abundance

and diversity of factors influencing motivational processes are seen in them. The mentioned factors constitute attributes of both an employee and an organization itself, but also characteristics of the external environment of an enterprise. Examples of the latter include: the political system, tax system, social security system, the level of economic development, features of the labour market, the role of trade unions and the degree of integrity with the global economy.

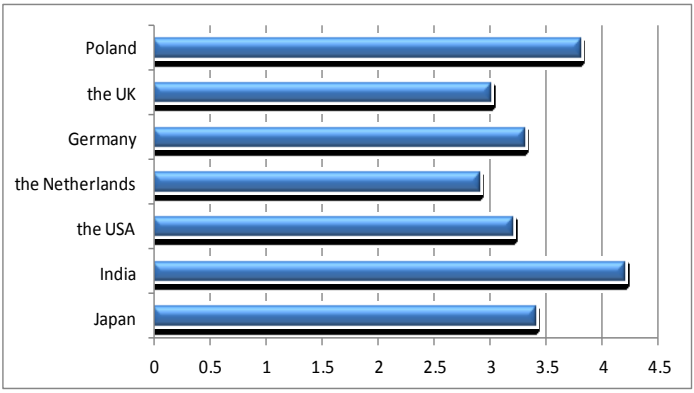
3. Work as a value culturally conditioned

In order to fully understand the influence of culture on the usage of motivational theories in management practice, it is necessary to put two key questions:

- How important is the work and what is its position in the lives of members of a given society compared to other aspects of their lives, such as family, leisure, hobbies, and the local community?
- What do they value most at work?

Getting answers to these questions will help to determine the preferences of a given society in relation to work and non-work activities and consequently the appropriate selection and choice of instruments of motivation.

Figure 1. Importance assigned to work in selected countries



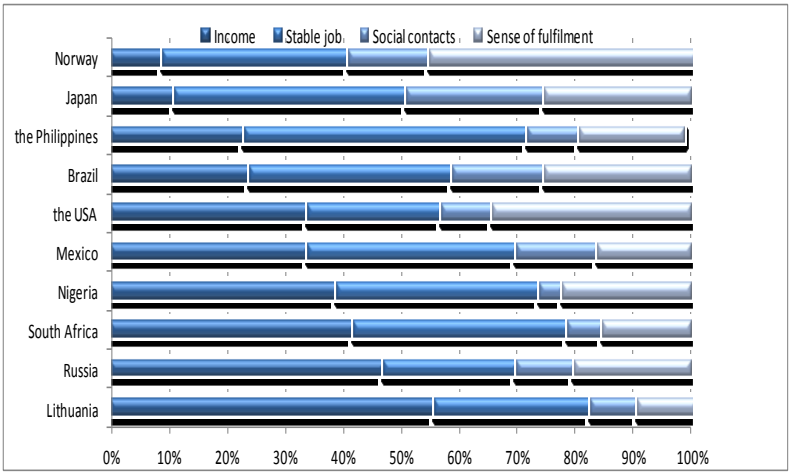
Source: self-elaboration based on World Values Study Group. 2009. World Values Surveys and European Values Surveys, 1981-1984, 1990-1993 and 1995-1997. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

Societies differ in terms of importance they assign to work and in terms of expectations that the job should fulfil. According to researches, conducted in more than 50 countries by the World Values Study Group [Cullen, Parboteeach 2014, p. 604], in the highly developed countries such

as the USA, Sweden or England, the traditional and typical attachment to a job of highly industrialized societies changes. Values associated with work, individualism, achievements of post-industrial societies give way to values associated with quality of life, family, and self-realization (see Figure 1). However, in developing countries such as India, Turkey, Poland or Bulgaria, work and the associated with it sense of duty occupies the central position in lives of the majority of society. The national cultures, in which work occupies the central position in human life, generally devote more time to it. Managers of such countries can therefore use measures of motivation, which are directly related to work. In post-industrial countries, in which work is relatively less important, motivators that directly influence the quality of life and self-realisation will be more effective.

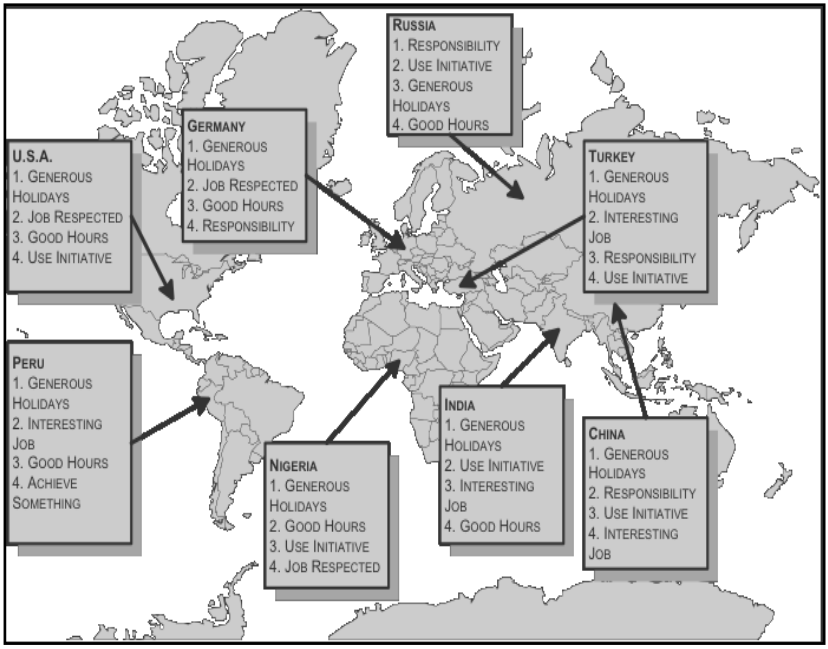
Equally important is to determine what expectations for work have the society of a given country. Both external and internal values associated with work should be taken into consideration. People who prefer the external values of work are looking for a job security, stable income and less demanding activities. Employees oriented towards the internal values of work are ready for changes, autonomy, development and undertaking initiatives. As shown in the graph below, for the majority of "emerging" economies such as Turkey, Hungary, India, for which a stable job is a guarantee of survival, the most important are the external values of work. On the other hand, developed countries (e.g. the Netherlands, France or the USA) assess these values of work much lower.

Figure 2. Importance assigned to particular values arising from work by societies of selected countries.



Source: self-elaboration based on World Values Study Group. 2009. World Values Surveys and European Values Surveys, 1981-1984, 1990-1993 and 1995-1997. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

The proper selection of means of motivation also determines the preferences of workers in relation to such aspects of work as the number of days off, possibility to show initiative, convenient working hours, respect associated with the performed activity or a sense of responsibility and importance of performed work. The research conducted by the cited above research team – Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, shows that different countries give particular elements of work different priority.



Source: J.B. Cullen, K. P. Parboteeah, *Multinational Management. A Strategic Approach, 6th Edition,* South-Western Cengage Learning, 2014, s. 608.

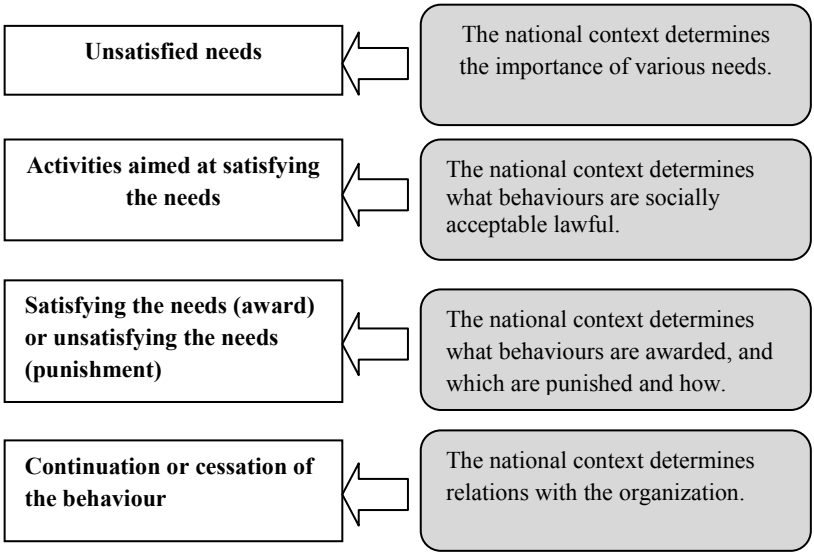
It is a well-known fact that all people have certain expectations for a job. The quoted intercultural studies allow for the conclusion that, regardless of nationality, the most important is remuneration; however, also regardless of nationality, alone remuneration is not enough. Different benefits, emotional as well as utilitarian, obtained in relation to work, people give different, usually culturally conditioned priority. Particular countries differ in terms of degree of perception of work as their duty to

society. Societies with a high sense of duty to work usually work harder and spend more time at work. Employees of companies operating in developing countries highly assessing the external values of work such as income and employment stability, value the internal values of work equally high. Thus, transnational organisations must not only offer their employees in various countries adequate remuneration, but also ensure the appropriate level of job satisfaction taking into account the specific nature of their needs arising from cultural differences (see the map).

4. The national context and the course of the motivation process

In spite of the fact that some essential needs are universal for all people (e.g. needs of food or shelter), the national context (culture and social institutions) considerably influences every stage of the motivation process (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. The cultural context of particular steps in the process of motivation.



Source: self-elaboration based on J.B. Cullen, K. P. Parboteeah, *Multinational Management. A Strategic Approach, 6th Edition,* South-Western Cengage Learning, 2014, s. 612.

The influence of culture and social institutions on the process of motivation is already visible at the stage of experiencing by employees the strength of particular psychological needs. For example, in societies in which a collectivist culture dominates, the possibility to meet the need of acceptance

by the group in the working environment may be for employees more important than satisfying the needs of individual achievements. The national context also determines behaviours undertaken to meet the needs. In some countries work after hours is something acceptable, or even obvious, in others it is treated almost as unlawful. The cultural context and associated with it legal context also determine the perception of behaviours of the employer as rewards or punishments. For example, in some cultures the law protects the worker from dismissal; in others it gives employers greater freedom of action. The cultural factors also affect whether the employee feels obliged to loyalty and long-term of work for one employer, or he or she rather often and freely changes jobs.

5. Effectiveness of means of motivation in the light of chosen cultural dimensions

Both theorists and practitioners of management for decades raise the question: what incentive stimuli should the organisation use to build a competent, engaged and loyal team. Today, we know that the correct answer requires, first of all, getting to know the co-workers, especially their personalities and life situations, but also a research of the cultural conditions in which these employees live.

Table 1. National culture and preferred incentives.

Cultural dimension	Effective incentives	Exemplary country
Power distance	• Adherence to the principles and standards • Fulfilling the moral obligation towards superiors	Mexico
Individualism	• Autonomy, independence • Professional tasks having features of a challenge • Personal development, promotion	the USA
Uncertainty avoidance	• Stable and secure conditions of employment • Clear hierarchy and organizational structure	Belgium
Masculinity	• Salaries • Trainings • Experiencing achievements	Japan

Source: self-elaboration based on G. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind,* McGraw-Hill, London 1991.

G. Hofstede [1991] proves that recognition of cultural conditions of motivation requires taking into account the following dimensions: power

distance, individualism, risk avoidance and "masculinity" (see Table 1). In the assessment of the author, it is the cultural context that determines whether and how it is possible to use the concept of needs to motivate employees. For example, enabling the employees to meet at work the needs of a higher rank gives better results in highly individualistic cultures. However, applying the theory of needs in motivating may not be effective in cultures characterized by a high index of the "power distance" dimension. These needs are strongly dominated by standards of the service for the elites at the expense of meeting own needs.

6. Conslusion

The knowledge of what values culturally conditioned guide nationalities or ethnic groups constitutes the foundation of people management in transnational organizations. This principle, in a special way, applies to motivation. The attractiveness of incentives in the perception of employees, their force of influencing the attitudes and behaviours of employees, can vary depending in which cultural circle the given person grew up and lives. This fact is not changed by the process of globalization, diffusion of cultures, phenomenon of cultural unification and other phenomena and processes observed in the contemporary world.

From the perspective of management, cultural diversity of employees constitutes an ambivalent feature, that is, the one that can contribute to the success of an organization, but it can also turn out to be a factor leading to many failures. The option which will dominate is to a large extent conditioned by skills in the area of motivating human resources. The basic problem is: how to reconcile the need of elaborating a common system of corporate values for the entire organization (including principles relating to motivation) with diversity of expectations resulting from cultural premises. In the assessment of the authors, despite a relatively rich literary output of management sciences in a sub-discipline of "management of cultural diversity," there is still a lack of a satisfactory answer to this question.

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