

**Dane do cytowań:** J.M. Moczydłowska, U. Widelska, *Motivating managers – expectations and reality (Polish experiences)*, „Journal Acta Oceanomica Selye” 2014, vol. 3 nr 2, s. 186 – 196

## **MOTIVATING MANAGERS – EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY (POLISH EXPERIENCE)**

*Joanna M. Moczydłowska<sup>1</sup>, Urszula Widelska<sup>2</sup>*

*1. Lazarski University in Warsaw, (Poland)*

*<sup>1</sup>joanna@moczydłowska.pl*

*2. Białystok University of Technology, (Poland)*

*<sup>2</sup>widelskau@wp.pl*

### **Abstract**

Motivating managers is the subject of the analysis undertaken in this article. Presented results of the research are supposed to provide answers to the following question: What motivational incentives do the representatives of top management staff expect from their employers, and what motivators are actually offered them? To answer this question, the authors conducted a survey among 53 managers representing the business sector. From the research emerges a picture of a large variety of incentives offered to managers by their employers, as well as a large variety of ratings of these incentives by those who benefit from them. For example: money is important for this professional group, but more important is the possibility to meet the needs for autonomy and power through higher decisional independence and participation in shaping the organization strategy. The research showed that the strength of the influence of an individual motivator is differently perceived by managers at different age.

**Key words:** *managers, motivating, polish business sector*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

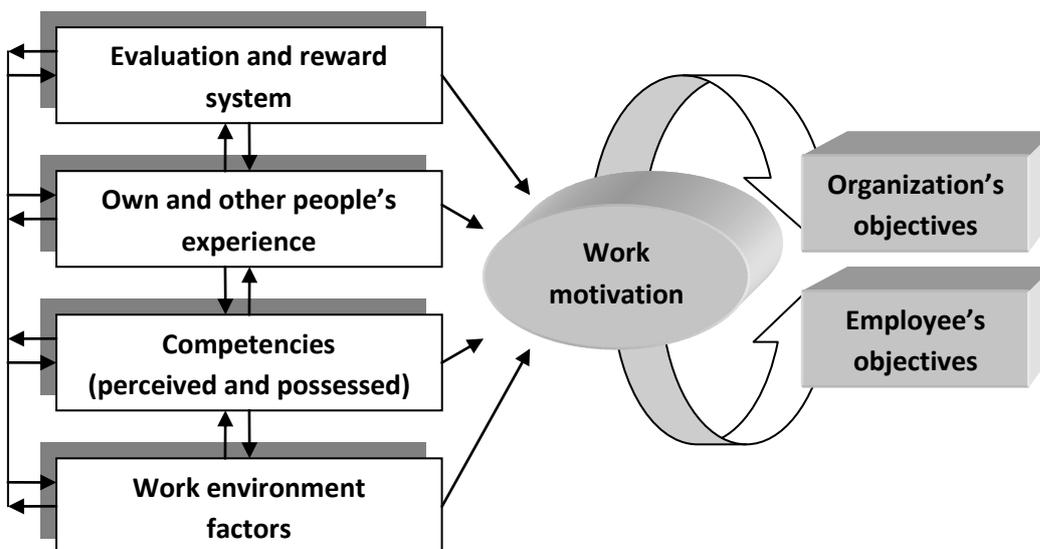
There is very rich scientific literature in the management science that describes motivating employees. It includes a number of practical tips on how management staff can influence subordinates to shape their commitment, loyalty and stimulate development of their professional competencies. Less is known about how to motivate managers, whose employment situation is specific. It can be assumed that while occupying high positions in the organization, managers have satisfied their needs for achievements or needs for power. Their financial situations are also usually better than their subordinates. What, therefore, keeps them motivated at the high level expected by their employers? What motivational incentives do the representatives of top management staff expect from their employers, and what motivators are actually offered them? To answer this question, the authors conducted a survey among 53 managers representing the business sector.

### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

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 [4].

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 [3]. Process theories (for example, concepts of J. S. Adams or V. Vroom [6]) 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 [5] or A. Bandura [1]) 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.



*Figure 1.* An integrated model of motivation

Regardless of factors related to characteristics of the external environment, the most important determinants of motivational processes highlighted in the integrated models of motivation concern the organization and its employees. Figure 1 shows the basic variables affecting the level of employee's motivation, which enables the simultaneous achievement of his or her personal objectives and organizational goals as well. They are all closely related and have an influence on each other.

A multitude of arrows and lines connecting various factors determining the course of the motivation process is supposed to illustrate the need for a comprehensive perception of motivational factors, without attempts to rank them according to the criterion of value or importance. It is difficult to classify them as completely dependent on the organization or completely dependent on the employee. However, motivation is a function of management and a task of the organization. Therefore, in analysis of each motivational variable it is necessary to underline opportunities and obligations that rest upon the enterprise in the respect of each of these variables. At the bottom of the figure **work environment** factors are placed, which should be understood as:

- adjustment of tasks assigned to employees to their possessed technical and organizational capabilities;
- flexible, adequate to the needs, usage of a management style, such as the participatory management style;
- providing employees with access to the information important in the work process.

The factor "**Competencies**" should be understood here as competencies objectively possessed by an employee, as ones actually used by him or her in the work process, but also as competencies assessed subjectively. Creating the motivation system it is necessary to:

- diagnose objectively existing competencies of employees (those understood as opportunities, dispositions and the ones displayed during activity as well);
- recognize subjective beliefs of employees regarding their possessed competencies;
- conduct employee selection processes according to the criterion of initial essential competencies for a given position and enterprise;
- adjust tasks to possessed by an employee competencies;
- conduct actions towards objective improvement of required competencies, acquisition of new competencies important for a given position and the whole organization (objective increase of competencies to the optimal state);
- provide feedback for an employee (by a system of ongoing evaluation and daily contacts) to enable him or her to raise self-esteem in the area of competencies, improve subjective sense of self-confidence and his or her professional opportunities.

The next element "**Own and other people's experience**" constitute factors highlighted, for example, in J. S. Adams' theory of justice, B. F. Skinner's theory of reinforcement and A. Bandura's theory of social learning. An employee analyses his/her work experience from the nearer and more distant past, observes and analyses experience of other people, makes comparisons, assesses and adapts behaviours of other people as his/her own. Continuity of work processes, placing them at a certain time continuum requires appreciating the importance of employee's past and conclusions drawn by the employee on the basis of its analysis. In turn, the social context of professional activity indicates the need for a serious treatment of mechanisms for comparing own work to work of others – in terms of investment, efficiency and benefits as well.

Important factors affecting the level of motivation to work are the **evaluation system** and **reward system** existing in an organization – existing objectively and their subjective perception made by employees. Methods of performance measurement and benefits that arise from the evaluation should be seen by an employee as objective, clear, understandable and fair. Almost all authors, especially J. S. Adams, emphasise it in their theories. Fulfilment by an employee required and clear criteria should activate the reward system strengthening (according to the theory of B. F. Skinner) desired behaviours of the employee and eliminating unwanted behaviours. The quality and quantity of prizes will be one of the key elements of each motivation system. Prizes should enable to satisfy individual needs, their role has been highlighted in theories of motivation, and also enable to achieve individual goals, their motivating power has been characterised in E. A. Locke's theory [6]. Hence, the perception of opportunities to achieve own goals in the course of and as a result of professional activity is particularly important.

In evaluation and award systems appear processes on which the organization has a decisive influence by establishing formal procedures, rules and regulations. There are also such processes on which the organization has a limited influence as it is difficult to impose top-down benchmarks by which an employee is guided while assessing (through comparing) justice of received benefits.

Summarising the integrated model of motivation it is worth to emphasise two fundamental regularities:

1. Effectiveness of a motivational process is determined by employee's traits and organization's features, and both these subjects closely interact with each other;
2. A measure of quality of a motivation system is the possibility to achieve changing objectives of an organization and changing objectives of an employee [4].

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study comprised managers studying the Executive MBA at Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. The selection of respondents resulted from the fact that the Executive MBA studies are chosen by people with significant professional experience as well as experience at managerial positions. An average length of respondents' job seniority on managerial positions was 8.5 years. They represented companies of various sizes with a clear predominance of large and medium companies (81 % of the group) and a variety of activities. Two questionnaires were used in the research. They included a list of various motivational incentives, which was established on the basis of analysis of literature of this problem. Accuracy of the selection of motivators has been confirmed by results of the research: a very small number of indications to motivational incentives with no importance included in the questionnaires. For the total number of 636 possible indications, only 12 times (1.88 percent of the overall number of responses) respondents indicated no importance to a given motivator (that is, it does not have any motivational significance for the respondents).

The first questionnaire provided information about motivational incentives preferred by respondents. The second (given only after completing the first questionnaire) enabled to examine what motivators employers offer their managers. To avoid automatic repetition of responses, motivational incentives, whose motivational power has been assessed by surveyed managers, were listed in a different order in the questionnaire concerning motivators preferred by managers, and in a different order in the questionnaire concerning incentives offered by employers. In both cases it was a random order. The respondents were also given open questions about the most important assets, the most important

shortcomings and the most urgent changes in the area of motivating managerial staff in their workplaces. The research was conducted in November, 2013.

Questionnaire surveys of which results are comprised in this publication are based on the mechanism of introspection. \* The authors are aware that this method is seen as one that not allows for gaining knowledge which is inter-subjectively verifiable and does not give access to the factual causes of behaviours. In spite of the criticisms raised by methodologists of social sciences, introspective studies are essentially the basis for all questionnaire studies, and the use of their results in the diagnosis of psychological determinants of managers' work is based on the statement, well-documented in the literature, that the employee is the best source of information about the specificity of his/her position or the fulfilled organizational role.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents were asked to assign importance to the listed in the questionnaire motivational incentives in order from those that motivate them most (score 1) to those incentives that motivate them least (sequential scores: 2, 3, 4, etc.). In the case of elements which, in the opinion of the respondents, do not have any motivational power, respondents were asked to assign zero value to them. In this way emerged a set of the most valuable elements of the motivation system from the perspective of managerial staff (cf. Table 1).

*Table 1.* Motivational incentives preferred by managers

<b>Motivational incentives</b>	<b>Result (an average)</b>
Responsibility for creating the organization strategy	4.77
The earnings level	4.94
Possibility of further promotion (a clear career path)	5.49
Long-term motivational incentives (stocks, stock options, profit sharing)	5.49
Recognition from other team members and supervisors	6.02
The role of a leader in the team	6.05
Prestige of working for this company	6.21
Sense of belonging to the team	6.43
Influence on development of other team members (subordinates)	6.43
Raising leaders (successors)	6.83
Helping other people	7.13
Fear of job loss	8.45
Additional benefits (e.g. prizes, trips, etc.)	8.89

Source: self-elaboration based on the results of the research

---

\* Introspection – from Latin *introspicere*, literally it means „looking inside,” observing and analyzing one's own mental states, thoughts, feelings, and motives. It deals with the conscious contents and processes.

Among 12 motivational incentives, out of which respondents had to indicate the ones preferred by them, the most essential turned out to be:

- responsibility for creating the organization strategy,
- the earnings level,
- possibility of further promotion (a clear career path).

In the case of the first two motivators, none of the respondents assigned zero value to them, which means that for all respondents they have motivating importance. In turn, 51 out of 53 respondents assigned other than zero value to the motivator “Possibility of further promotion (a clear career path).”.

“Responsibility for creating the organization strategy” was the motivator most often indicated as the most important (score 1 ascribed to it 13 out of 53 respondents). The number of indications on a given motivator as the most important contains Table 2.

**Table 2.** Motivators most often indicated by respondents as the most important motivational incentives for them (1).

<b>Motivator</b>	<b>The number of indications as the most important motivator (1)</b>
Responsibility for creating the organization strategy	13
The earnings level	7
The role of a leader in the team	7
Possibility of further promotion (a clear career path)	5
Sense of belonging to the team	3
Prestige of working for this company	3
Recognition from other team members and supervisors	3
Other (single indications)	11

Source: self-elaboration based on the results of the research

The authors perceive some differences in responses resulting from the age of the respondents. Among the respondents belonging to the age group of 25-34 year-olds “Responsibility for creating the organization strategy” is among the three most powerful incentives – similarly as in the general result. However, while in the whole group of the respondents this incentive was in the first place, in this age group it was clearly overtaken by the “Earnings level” (an average score 3.9) and “Possibility of promotion (a clear career path)” (an average score 4.63). In turn, “Prestige of working for this company” has a greater significance for the respondents of the age group of 25-34 year-olds than for the whole research group (an average in this subgroup is 5.72 compared to 6.07). “The role of a leader in the team” is far less important motivator in this age group than in the whole group of the respondents (an average score 7.81 compared to 5.92). In contrast, in the age group of 45-54 year-olds the most important incentives are: “Influence on development of other team members (subordinates),” “Prestige of working for this company” and ‘Recognition from other team members and superiors.’ “The earnings level” is a motivational incentive that among middle-aged managers is in a relatively distant eighth place (an average 6.89, in the whole group 4.94). The relatively small size of the sample group does not allow for an assessment of the statistical significance of differences, thus

we treat them only as a certain trend worthy of confirmation in the course of broader research.

In Table 3 we present the average scores of motivational incentives indicated by respondents as offered them by employers. Among the most emphasized and used by employers motivators (in the opinion of the participants of the research) are: the level of earnings (an average 5.36), prestige of working for this company (an average 5.66) and sense of belonging to the team (5.68). In the second part of the research respondents more often pointed out that the given incentive is not applicable in any way in the motivation system used towards them by employers (a total of 82 indications, that is 12.89%). Motivational incentives used towards managers in the motivation systems and listed in the survey are, therefore, of lower importance than expected by managers. Hence, employers use included in the research incentives to a lesser extent than it results from the preferences of managers employed by them.

**Table 3.** Motivational incentives used by employers towards managers

<b>Motivational incentives</b>	<b>Result (an average)</b>
The earnings level	5.36
Prestige of working for this company	5.66
Sense of belonging to the team	5.68
Recognition from other team members and supervisors	6.09
Responsibility for creating the organization strategy	6.09
The role of a leader in the team	6.32
Influence on development of other team members (subordinates)	6.66
Helping other people	7.53
The possibility of promotion (a clear career path)	7.83
Additional benefits (e.g. prizes, trips, etc.)	8.09
Raising leaders (successors)	9.32
Long-term motivational incentives (stocks, stock options, profit sharing)	9.32

Source: self-elaboration based on the results of the research

One of the aims of the research was to examine to what extent motivational incentives preferred by managers are reflected in the motivation systems used towards them by their employers. Table 4 summarizes the comparison. In the table, those motivational incentives have been highlighted in case of which there is the biggest difference between the preferences of managers and the role of the given motivator in the motivation systems used towards respondents by their employers. The biggest difference concerns the long-term motivational incentives (stocks, stock options, profit sharing), whose motivational power was assessed by managers as relatively high, and are used by employers minimally. At the same time, it is worth noting that in the case of several important for the respondents motivators, the practice of employers coincides with the expectations of managers motivated by them.

**Table 4.** The comparison: preferences of managers and motivating practice used by employers

<b>Motivational incentives</b>	<b>Result (an average) preferences of the responders</b>	<b>Result (an average) the practice of employers</b>
Responsibility for creating the organization strategy	4.77	6.09
The earnings level	4.94	5.36
The possibility of promotion (a clear career path)	5.49	7.83
Long-term motivational incentives (stocks, stock options, profit sharing)	5.49	9.32
Recognition from other team members and supervisors	6.02	6.09
The role of a leader in the team	6.05	6.32
Prestige of working for this company	6.21	5.66
Sense of belonging to the team	6.43	5.68
Influence on development of other team members (subordinates)	6.43	6.66
Raising leaders (successors)	6.83	9.32
Helping other people	7.13	7.53

Source: self-elaboration based on the results of the research

The respondents were asked to indicate the biggest, in their opinions, assets of the existing motivation systems in their workplaces and addressed to managers. It is distinctive that as many as 13 respondents (24.5%) did not indicate such a feature. Other responses are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Assets of the motivation system in the assessment of the managers

<b>Category of the answer</b>	<b>Number (N=53)</b>	<b>%</b>
High earnings	20	37.7
Attractive bonus system and financial rewards for performance	9	16.9
Timeliness of benefit payments	4	7.5
Transparency and clarity of the rewarding rules	4	7.5
Possibility of professional development (e.g. participation in trainings financed by the employer)	3	5.7
Stability and predictability of the reward system	3	5.7
Ambitious character of the entrusted tasks	3	5.7
High prestige (good brand) of the employer	3	5.7
Cooperation in atmosphere of trust	3	5.7
The motivation system does not have distinguishing, positive characteristics	13	24.5

\*responses do not sum up to 100% because respondents were allowed to give any number of answers; source: self-elaboration based on the results of the research

Analysis of responses concerning positive features of the system motivating managers indicates regularity that respondents appreciate motivators of a financial nature, but as the advantage of the motivation system approximately 50% of respondents indicates them. It is hard to precisely assess whether it is a high or low indicator. The responses in Table 4 show that incentives of an intangible nature (atmosphere of trust, challenging tasks, possibility of professional development) are used by employers less frequently than it is expected by the surveyed managers.

Confirmation of this regularity is also found in the responses to a question about the disadvantages of the motivation system. In the opinion of respondents these are mainly very small influence on the most important, strategic decisions about the future of the enterprise, too small independence and difficulties in communicating with managers at the highest level of the organizational structure. With reference to financial matters, respondents criticized far-reaching discretion in awarding and too small connection of awards with measurable results of the work.

## 5. CONCLUSION

From the research emerges a picture of a large variety of incentives offered to managers by their employers, as well as a large variety of ratings of these incentives by those who benefit from them. On the basis of the obtained results it can be carefully concluded that the specific dissemination of motivating principles in the organization is not the right move. The design of efficient motivation systems should be based on the identification of particular, individual needs and expectations of managerial staff.

The research has confirmed the thesis, for years highlighted in the literature, that the level of earnings is important, but it is one of a few motivational incentives of high importance (and not always the most important). We should not, however, on this basis draw radical conclusions leading to neglecting material matters in motivating managers. Presented in this article research results have proven that money is important for this professional group, but more important is the possibility to meet the needs for autonomy and power through higher decisional independence and participation in shaping the organization strategy.

It is worrying that 24.5% of the respondents working in Polish enterprises did not indicate any assets of the reward systems used in their organizations. This means that  $\frac{1}{4}$  of managers critically assess motivating actions of their employers. We believe this number is significant.

The research shows that Polish companies negligibly use long-term motivational incentives (stocks, stock options, profit sharing) towards managers, which are very popular in the world, especially in the U.S. Meanwhile, this type of remuneration is considered to be an effective tool to motivate and maintain in the enterprise the most talented managers [2].

The presented analysis had a cognitive character – enabled to identify motivators that influence the level of managers' involvement in their work. The results illustrated the multidimensional character of the undertaken problem. Its complexity depends not only on a variety of motivational factors that determine the quality of the manager's work, but also on the strength of their interaction. The research showed that the strength of the influence of an individual motivator is differently perceived by managers at different age, but it is

certainly not the only relation worthy of attention and further research. From analysis of the literature, we conclude that the specific managerial functions implemented in the organization, quality of relations with subordinates and the type of the organization determine motivating managers. The list of determinants is long and shows that motivating managerial staff from the point of view of not only needs of science, but especially, of practice is a phenomenon that requires further research.

## REFERENCES

1. A. Bandura, Social learning theory, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, New York 1977.
2. J.S. Hyman, Long-term incentives, [in] The Compensation Handbook, McGraw Hill, New York 2008, p. 324 -326.
3. A. Kinicki, B. Williams, Management: A Practical Introduction, McGraw-Hill, New York 2010.
4. J.M. Moczyłowska, Managing professional competence but motivating employees (in polish: Zarządzanie kompetencjami zawodowymi a motywowanie pracowników), DIFIN, Warszawa, 2008, p. 27-33.
5. F. Toates, Burrhus F. Skinner: The shaping of behavior, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009.
6. J. Woźniak, Contemporary motivation systems. The theory and the practice (in polish: Współczesne systemy motywacyjne. Teoria i praktyka), PWN, Warszawa 2013, p. 28-40.