

Less pieces for the Motivation puzzle

ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION ARE PUZZLING ENOUGH WHEN IT'S ALL NICE AND SHINY IN THE BALANCE SHEET...BUT WHAT ABOUT WHEN FIGURES GO DOWNHILL?!



Not too long ago I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Leslie Szamosi, Academic Director of EMBA Programme at Sheffield University. He was holding a seminar called „Where did all the money go? Motivating a workforce during a crisis”. Now, I think I cannot be blamed for my curiosity about this subject...I mean who wouldn't want to know how to engage employees when one has limited financial resources or when the company is not in such a good shape. So, who could answer best than the man that started the debate?!

Regarding the title of the seminar, „Where did all the money go?”, what is your answer to this question?

Basically the money flew out the door and it is not coming back!!! Organizations, for the longest time, have used more of what we call a „carrot and stick” approach to motivation which was known as „do this and you will get that”. The reward part was an integral part of this system. With the crisis and the changes in what people are looking for from their organizations the money all but dried up! Basically, with the changes that are happening, organizations have to rethink how they motivate and retain the workers they want to keep and this is especially important in the IT field where money is the only one component of what workers are seeking from their company.

Why did motivation became such a hot subject nowadays? What happened that shook up the motivation approach, it is not like employees in the 90's didn't need motivation?

It is close to a certainty that the economic crisis has triggered a lot of rethinking about motivation and the tools we used to motivate. But, just as critical and linked to this, especially in the IT sector, there

has been a massive brain-drain that has occurred with experienced professionals, as well as new graduates, leaving the country for better opportunities but also better organizational systems and processes. Added to this, we have the integration of the so-called „millennials” into our organizations which again is shaking the foundations of how we are doing things.

The financial part will always be important for employees, there is a lot of research on this matter, and money is still number one. What tools can HR Managers use to buffer the effect of less financial resources available?

All of the data and all of the practice we see coming from leading companies, leads us towards some specific tools. Pay employees an honest wage for the work they do and then focus in on the soft-side of management and what REALLY motivates them. In the IT sector it is a challenge, doing something new and feeling appreciated for the work that one does. Managers have to understand that is their responsibility to successfully motivate their workers utilizing the soft-side of motivation and to energize their people. Too much of the time we think about a manager's role as that of a bureaucrat and a „problem” to our ability to get work done. We need to train, educate and, most importantly, review the performance of managers based on these soft side approaches to motivation. This requires a cultural and structural shift in what we expect from these people.

How are things going on in North America or Western Europe when it comes to motivating employees? Are there any differences from the Southern Europe approach?

In Southern Europe we tend to be very strong in undertaking the hard or technical side of management

and motivation. We are slowly, and I emphasize slowly, recognizing this and doing something about it - moving to the soft side. In North America and Western Europe the notion of the soft side manager is well engrained in organizational systems and managers are evaluated and promoted on their ability to undertake these activities at the highest levels possible.

Motivation is different from employee to employee, is there any universal approach? The „One size fits all” is not the key, but also we can't make everybody happy....or can we?

In my opinion there is no such thing as a best universal approach to HR, because there are just so many societal and cultural variances that impact this. You can make all workers happy, at least some of the time. But happiness is not the key!!! It is when they feel satisfied, when they are seen as individuals inside the system and when they believe the organization understands them, their needs, their desires, where they see themselves going. This is what makes a productive, motivated worker – a happy worker is not necessarily a productive, motivated worker!

How can managers, middle-managers, control the main environmental factors necessary to motivate their team members?

Middle managers need to feel empowered and control those factors face to face or virtually; without this measure of flexibility and autonomy their hands are tied and it is difficult / impossible to motivate. There are many times when managers must take „orders” from head office (whether here in Romania or elsewhere) but they are still what we call the „king makers”. When you ask people why they leave an organization, many times the answer will be „I cannot work

with management” translating to „I cannot work with my immediate manager”. We are moving in HR towards what we call „line HR”, this movement symbolizing just how important middle managers are in controlling the key environmental factors that motivate workers.

Is there a „MUST” in motivation?

I have never believed in „musts” because someone will always try to come up with a scenario that „kills the must”! But when it comes to motivation I believe that

«I TALK TO A LOT OF WORKERS AND ASK THEM DIRECTLY ABOUT THEIR IMPRESSIONS OF THEIR HR DEPARTMENT AND IT IS ASTOUNDINGLY NEGATIVE. »

one’s immediate manager MUST understand the needs, wants and desires of the person he/she is entrusted to manage. Without this key information the chances of being able to motivate and inspire the worker, short or long term, go down dramatically. This relationship and level of trust is key to creating a motivating and stimulating work environment.

This question might sound weird, but I got to ask: how can we motivate employees when our company is number 1 or when we are on schedule with the target?

The assumption is that when we are number one, everyone wants to work with us or if we are on a specific schedule, everyone knows where to target. This is one of the biggest „follies” of motivation. I

always advice companies to never assume people are motivated for any reason – when you assume you make an ASS out of U and ME (ASS/U/ME)!!!! Workers who do not feel motivated may simply take their experience and walk away to the number 2 or the number 102 company! We must (and I know I am using „must”) keep the workers that are key to us and this involves motivation at all times.

You said during your speech at the CIO Conference event that HR tends to standardize things: same evaluations, same metrics, but different departments, different management approaches...this was when you were talking about drivers and motivation. It rang a bell to me because HR thinks it is doing a great job...really! Could you please walk us through your insight on this matter?

The traditional view of HR was that it needed to create a standardized platform across the organization in relation to what it would do and how it would approach things. For example, pay scales and job grades were a classic form of standardization which allowed everyone to be evaluated similarly and create consistency. The issue with standardization was that it was easy to monitor once in place. In today’s workplace we talk about knowledge workers and blue collar versus white collar professionals – each has different needs, wants, desires; in some job categories it is difficult to find the correct expertise and in others there are many workers available. If we continue to keep to a standardized approach we will end up losing good workers to competitors, other countries or to self-employment. I am not saying that we do not seek fairness, this is critical, but we need to drive towards semi-customized HR solutions for today workers. This is what we identify as „value-added”.

And another thing you said was about virtualizing the HR...what about that?

Some HR professionals are really concerned about their future role... we are more and more into Shared Services now and they seem to reorganize the HR function.

Those working in HR today need to be worried; let me be more clear – everybody working in a company today should be worried about their position! There are few, if any, departments or positions inside a modern company that can’t be outsourced. The key towards maintaining a department or set of jobs inside an organization is „added value”: when companies are looking for their competitive edge they are looking to maintain those which add value to the system. If one looks very critically and in an unbiased way at HR today, in a lot of companies it very much looks like an expense and not an investment, like a cost and not a revenue generator. I talk to a lot of workers and ask them directly about their impressions of their HR department and it is astoundingly negative.

There are many companies in the marketplace today „feeding” off the outsourcing of HR activities and „adding value” when called upon. I think HR has a role to play but it needs to „prove” that it can play that role and add more value than if it was outsourced; HR needs to better understand balance sheets and financial control in order to truly feel whether it adds or „costs” the organization. There are examples of big companies that have outsourced most, if not all, of their HR activities. Personally, I am a firm believer in HR and the profession, but we have a lot of catching-up to do in relation to the way we are perceived and what value we add to our organizations.

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