Leading, managing and motivating staff towards achieving school goals

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Motivation

Unlike industry and business, education has ‘traditionally paid very little attention to motivation’. The concept of motivation is contested, with no agreed, single definition. Over the past fifty years, research on motivation has adopted either ‘static’ or ‘dynamic’ approach. These two approaches are generally referred to as ‘content theories’ or ‘process theories’.

Content theories are primarily concerned with ‘what is within an individual or their environment that energizes and sustains the person’s behaviour’. These theories consist with this approach include Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Alderfer’s ERG theory, McClelland’s acquired needs theory, McGregor’s X and Y theory, and Herzberg’s two-factor theory. Maslow’s hierarchy, for example, has long been used as a means for better understanding and tapping sources of motivation for people in a wide variety of contexts.

Process theories strive to provide an understanding of ‘the cognitive processes that act to influence behaviour’. Process theories include the Equity theory and the Expectancy theory. Whereas content theories are related to job satisfaction, process theories recognize the ‘complexity of work motivation and consider in detail the relationship between motivation, satisfaction and performance’.

Job satisfaction, which is a consistent thread in motivation, stems from various components of the job, such as pay, promotional opportunities, supervisors, co-workers and environmental factors like ‘supervisor’s style, policies and procedures, work group affiliation, working conditions and fringe benefits’. Interestingly, job satisfaction is consistently low on rungs of the hierarchical ladder.

Leading and Managing Motivation

From a motivational point of view, the principal is the key player in ensuring that staff members are involved in working towards the achievement of school goals. It is the role of the school leader to create conditions that will energize, direct and sustain the performances of individuals and groups towards the achievement of such goals. Essentially, leaders must pay attention to the ‘relationship between staff and the nature and content of their jobs’. Such thoughtful leadership behaviour is likely to generate higher levels of worker satisfaction.

Managerial effectiveness depends on the extent to which managers delegate effectively and motivate and co-ordinate others. However, House & Aditya state that there is ‘no pattern of leader behaviour which was found to be consistently associated with subordinate satisfaction’.

Law & Glover write about the dangers of sticking to ‘one motivational style with all staff’, preferring to diagnose individual growth and social needs when devising a motivational strategy. Gamage & Pang believe that a combination of leadership styles could produce better results, where the leaders task is to develop an ‘environment conducive to higher motivational behaviour’.

Motivating towards Organisational Goals

Selecting an effective approach for the motivation of staff towards the achievement of organisational goals is more complex than selecting a style off the shelf and implementing it. While not exclusive, the following list highlights some significant leadership and management factors in motivating staff:

- an understanding of motivation;
- effective communication;
- an appropriate leadership style;
- advancing the professional development and growth of staff;
- effective supervision;
- work conditions.

Flanagan & Finger explore the importance of an educational leader understanding motivation from the practical standpoint. Holmes & Wynne argue, ‘effective schools have a leader trained in management’. In most American systems, principals are expected to hold master’s degrees or doctorates. University offered courses are a real learning opportunity for educational leaders and a meaningful way to improve their understanding of all leadership issues, including the motivation of staff.

Motivating staff begins with effective communication. To achieve this, the educational leader can apply the following strategies:

- express ideas logically and fluently;
- use active listening and questioning skills to ensure understanding and to clarify issues with staff;
- maintain high visibility and devote considerable time to interacting with staff;
- provide personal and public recognition and praise for staff and school achievements.

Communication assists staff members to achieve both organisational and individual goals. Effective communication ensures that everybody understands why things are happening, how things will happen and where the organisation is going.

An appropriate leadership style to motivate staff towards the achievement of school goals would encourage meaningful participation by building a cohesive collaborative teams approach within a climate of mutual respect and support. Strategies include:

- fostering an innovative, future-focused culture based on a commitment to continuous improvement;
- supporting others towards forward thinking, innovation and responsive, flexible solutions.

When staff members don't feel they are part of the planning, the results usually will be ‘ignored or thwarted’. The meaningful participation of professionals is positively correlated to job satisfaction, morale and building trust and confidence in leadership. Participation in important school decisions, establishing organisational goals and looking at problems as opportunities are major requirements to improving staff motivation. Participation encourages a sense of ownership, leading to greater commitment to organisational goals.

While it is important to remember that not all staff members are necessarily seeking an enriched, more demanding or more challenging job, the recognition and promotion of leadership capacity amongst staff can be a motivating force. To achieve this the principal can:

“Essentially, leaders must pay attention to the ‘relationship between staff and the nature and content of their jobs’.”

(Mullings, 1999)
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MOTIVATING TOWARDS ORGANISATIONAL GOALS

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By adopting an appropriate leadership and management style and applying strategies that meet the individual needs of staff, an educational leader can effectively motivate their staff towards the achievement of organisational goals.

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3. Ibid. p. 135.


8. Wood et al. op. cit.


11. Law & Glover, op. cit., p. 65.


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• create a culture that recognises the value of significant leadership density;
• implement a variety of leadership development strategies such as delegation of authority and responsibility, coaching and mentoring;
• establish and maintain processes to ensure the emergence and support of teacher leadership.

House & Aditya describe the motivated promotion seeking staff member as one who “sets challenging goals for themselves, assumes personal responsibility for accomplishment, are highly persistent in the pursuit of goals, take calculated risks to achieve goals and actively collect and use information for feedback purposes”. It is important as a leader to cater for these staff members whilst also being mindful of others who are happy where they currently are in the organisation.

Effective supervisors provide a climate in which people have a sense of working for themselves and in the day-to-day operations of the job stay out of the way. The educational leader should attempt to develop relationships with staff members and relinquish close control in favour of the greater empowerment of employees. Strategies include:

• negotiate and implement processes and programs to develop the professional skills and capacities of staff;
• develop and implement initiatives to facilitate and enhance staff well-being;
• maintain effective processes to ensure staff meet accountability requirements (eg. Teacher Annual Review Schedule TARS);
• understand industrial relations issues and process.

Mintzberg describes this style as “mutual adjustment”. A process where staff members and supervisors co-ordinate their efforts through informal/formal discussions and make necessary adjustments.

Applying the abovementioned leadership strategies will assist in the creation of a motivating environment in the workplace. To further enhance this however, the educational manager needs to:

• design, implement and evaluate plans, policies and procedures to ensure alignment of school priorities and expectations;
• report regularly on school performance in relation to goals;
• develop and implement an effective management cycle to facilitate data analysis, planning, budget allocation and accountability;
• effectively utilise this process in the management of curriculum organisation, educational programs, general resource management and school finance.

The effective management of these systems and processes help to alleviate some of the major causes of workplace stress. Mullings describes the major sources of stress as poor internal communications, time pressures and deadlines, unrealistic objectives and securing access to the right information.

CONCLUSION

The strategies outlined in this paper seek to establish an environment focused on creating a satisfying and rewarding organisational climate that fosters intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic rewards. Intrinsic motivation is required for sustained motivation.

The deep understanding of motivation by the leader, the effective communication and the participative leadership style encourages staff to commit and feel a sense of achievement for school goals. The recognition of achievement and performance combined with the advancement of professional growth for staff promotes a climate that maintains the enthusiasm and positive attitudes towards the achievement of school goals.