Managerial Motivational Practices and Motivational Differences between Blue- and White-Collar Employees: Application of Maslow's Theory

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Abstract—**This study aims at investigating the motivational practices of management and the differences of motivational factors, based on the applicability of Maslow's theory, between blue- and white- collar employees. Empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews held in Lebanon. The various motivational factors of blue- and white-collar employees were explored. The interpretation of the findings manifests compliance and inconsistency with the theory. Moreover, the originality of the study stems from the application of Maslow's theory on the investigation of potential differences in motivational factors regarding the job status.**

Index Terms—**Blue collar, Maslow, motivation, white collar.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Work motivation is one of the most important researched subjects in organizational behavior and human resource management. Actually, work motivation is a significant component for the institution regarding its managers and its employees. Financial and non-financial job attributes or motivational factors are applied in an organizational context in order to increase employees' motivation. In point of fact, comprehension of employees' needs and motivational factors is crucial in the design and application of an effective and efficient motivational strategy. However, the significance of these factors varies between workers due to numerous variables such as demographic, career-related, cultural and economic variables. In effect, for the purpose of narrowing the study, the research concentrates on a single variable which is the job status (blue and white collar), while other motivational variables will be assumed constant.

Accordingly, this study intends to investigate the motivational factors of blue- and white-collar employees. It also aims at highlighting the applied managerial approaches to motivation and at testing the applicability of Maslow's theory. Another key question relates to the suitability of implementing one or diverse motivational systems in the organizational context.

For attaining the mentioned objectives, this exploratory study adopts a qualitative approach in the collection of primary and secondary data. Peer-reviewed articles are revised to draw the theoretical framework. Empirical data is

collected via semi-structured interviews allowing for unrestrained and subconscious responses. Interviews are held with blue- and white-collar employees. Questions are designed according to the main objectives of the study, the literature review and Maslow's theory. The issues of reliability and internal validity are considered. After completion of the interviews, assembled data is presented and analyzed. A thematic analysis permits to dissect answers and combine them by questions and particular themes relatively to every level of needs in Maslow's theory. Findings exhibit compliance and incongruity with the theoretical data. The interpretation leads to the formulation of relevant conclusions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Motivation in the Workplace

The four early theories developed in the 1950s are hierarchy of needs (Maslow's theory), theory X and theory Y (McGregor), two-factor theory (Herzberg), theory of needs (McClelland) and existence-relatedness-growth theory (Alderfer). Otherwise, some contemporary theories are self-determination theory, cognitive evaluation theory, goal-setting, equity theory, expectancy theory, reinforcement theory [1].

Motivation depends on the systemic implementation and satisfaction of many job characteristics or motivational factors [2]. Thus, work motivation can be induced through two major kinds of job attributes: financial and non-financial [3].

B. Managerial Motivational Practices

In their quest for ultimate job performance and organizational success, employers put effort in providing all necessary tools to motivate their employees [4].

Many studies question the effectiveness of practically applied motivational systems. This effectiveness is affected by workers' judgments on this matter [5]. Many recommendations incite managers to concentrate more on their employees' actual needs rather than the assumed ones [6].

Concluding, it seems that the main managerial motivational challenge is about understanding the diverse needs and motivational factors of employees. Hence, tailoring the motivational practices accordingly is fundamental in order to meet employees' needs and achieve a successful motivational strategy.

C. Blue Collar and White Collar

Blue-collar work is characterized by non-supervisory, non-managerial and often hourly waged jobs. It mostly requires low skills with low educational level that does not exceed the secondary education [7].

Conversely, white-collar work is mainly brain-work. The tasks are based on data like words, numbers, ideas, figures, information… [8].

In his theory, Maslow claimed that people have five sets of needs ordered in a hierarchical way according to their importance from the most basic at the bottom to the more complex and psychological at the top [9]. The needs are classified as physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualization needs in this ascending sequential order [10].

The needs should be satisfied in the ascending order of the hierarchy from the lower needs to the higher ones, where no level can be reached without the fulfillment of the lower one [11].

III. METHODOLOGY

An exploratory research design was implemented. A qualitative methodology allowed the collection of theoretical and empirical data. Secondary data was collected through relevant articles from the existing literature. Only peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals were selected. In addition, some related books were used as significant references. Joined to the collected secondary data, primary information was assembled through semi-structured interviews.

The preparation of the questions was primarily assisted by the study of Rahman & Nurullah [12]. In their article, Rahman & Nurullah underline the compliance between the needs in every level of Maslow's theory and the corresponding attributes in the organizational setting.

Non-standardized one-to-one interviews were conducted with blue- and white- collar employees. Additionally, interviews included directors who are responsible for the motivation of employees.

Employees were divided into two groups based on main criteria found through the literature review: the educational level and the job performed. The thematic analysis is a flexible and exhaustive technique that permits the identification of common topics between interviews [13].

For the purpose of unbiasedness, both employees and managers were separately questioned about their thoughts on the effectiveness of the motivational system employed in the organization.

Concerning the internal validity, the results were cautiously and objectively analyzed in the aim of preserving the exact meaning intended by the respondent. Furthermore, data about the same subjects was gathered from multiple interviewees. This enables the interviewer to cross-check and to compare results offering a broader comprehension.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The collected primary data aimed at examining the motivational factors of employees based on the job status while other motivational variables are assumed constant. Job status is treated as a dichotomous parameter involving two major groups: blue- and white collar- employees. The managerial motivational approaches and the effectiveness of the motivational system applied were also examined.

Fourteen semi-structured interviews were accomplished. Participants were classified according to their educational level and their performed duties.

The analysis of the interviews and the comparison between the two major groups of employees demonstrate resemblances in some facets and variations in others.

Physiological needs: Regarding the physiological needs, both blue and white collars mostly think their salaries are fairly adequate with a preference for a higher salary. Most of them positively perceived some work attributes such as merit increase, benefits, breaks, working hours, supervision, facilities and tools.

Safety needs: Moreover, safety needs are paramount for blue- and white- collar employees. They also prefer long-term contracts for the same reasons.

As noticed, the results of physiological and safety needs are not complied with the theory. Theoretically, blue collars are primarily concerned with job attributes that fulfill their basic or physiological needs. These job characteristics might include adequate salary, fringe benefits, breaks and working conditions. Moreover, job security is also significant for blue collars. However, white-collar employees are supposed to accord more importance for high-level needs. This might be explained by the faltering economic conditions. In effect, the influence of economic or other changes on the prioritization of job attributes should be recognized [14].

Social needs: Concerning social needs, both blue and white collars perceive friendly environment as one of the work's favored advantages. It is observed that blue and white collars generally accord similar weight to social needs. The existing literature reveals that social needs have similar significance for both blue and white collars where both groups value good relations with work colleagues with some suggestions that blue collars favor social connections more than white collars.

Esteem needs: The majority of blue-collar thinks that rewards should exist based on a fair system (fair evaluation, performance-based rewards). For them, prizes express appreciation and increase work effort and enjoyment. Additionally, blue-collar employees do not see a need for training because of the nature of the job itself. Blue collars only attribute importance to rewards and advancement chances whilst white collars attach prominence to job titles, satisfaction with the job itself, social status, independence, and involvement in decision making, rewards, training and chance for progress. Thus, esteem needs are generally of great value to white collars in contrast to blue collars.

Self-actualization needs: With regard to the self-actualization needs, blue collars admit preference for a job where they have complete control over. Most white-collar respondents believe in continuous growth and achievement. Some of them would like to add more challenge and creativity to work; others have a more routine job. As a result, control over one's job is the only significant feature for blue collars whereas almost all features are substantial for white collars.

Thus, self-actualization needs are paramount only for white-collar employees. This outcome adheres with the theoretical suggestions that personal development, progress and continuous learning are mostly significant for white collars.

In general, most blue collars are happy with their current jobs. The financial benefits, insurance and security are the key reasons for keeping their jobs. This result complies with the notion that blue-collar employees grant more value for the financial attributes that fulfill the lower-level needs (physiological and safety). Otherwise, most white collar participants are happy with their jobs. Some of them refer staying in their contemporary jobs to the financial benefits, environment and security. Others remain for the job itself and the personal growth it offers. While most may leave their jobs for better financial features, some may be attracted to better personal growth opportunities. Indeed, social and economic factors play a major role in employees' preferences for particular job features. Non-financial attributes are significant motivators for employees in developed countries where basic essential needs are taken for granted. Nonetheless, financial job characteristics are more valuable for employees in developing or poor nations because the basic needs are usually unsatisfied and consequently remain dominant [10]. Consequently, the Lebanese economy is unstable and insecure which increases the anxiety among Lebanese citizens about the provision of basic expenses (home and family expenses, mortgage, tuition…).

Furthermore, it is to be noticed that blue-collar workers insist on the value of the non-discriminatory, respectful and appreciative treatment which they receive in their working environment. For example, blue collars meet with the CEO over an annual informal dinner and get assurance from him concerning their rights preservation. Although appreciation and respect fall into the level of self-esteem needs, many other esteem needs are insignificant for blue collars. Accordingly, such a result might not be enough to conclude the presence of discrepancy with literature.

Effectiveness of the Applied Motivational System

Part of blue collars judges the system as successful and encouraging. Further, most white collars deem the motivational system to be unsuccessful. According to the literature, the effectiveness of the motivational system is majorly influence by employees' opinions on this issue.

Nevertheless, the viewpoint of the director on the matter of the motivational system was requested. When interviewed, the director stated that motivation is extremely important to the growth of the organization. It is accomplished through two means. The short-term method encompasses attributes such as pay raise, bonuses, appreciation and recognition. Whereas the long-term manner includes growth opportunities with its core value founded on sustainable professional development. The main reasons for the difference between blue- and white-collar employees are referred to the distinction in roles and responsibilities, scope and nature of work.

A single motivational strategy is applied for all employees. Motivational variables (like job status) as well as dissimilarities of motivational factors are not considered in the design and application of the motivational system. In contrast with employees' judgments, the director regards the motivational system as sufficient and satisfactory. This triggers some doubts about the effectiveness of applying one single motivational strategy without consideration of the diversity of motivational factors and the effect of variables such as job status. Indeed, work motivation cannot depend on one strategy presumed to suit all workers [15].

Further, most white collars deem the motivational system to be unsuccessful. Although the system listens and understands to a certain extent, yet some changes are required. Examples of proposed alterations are: enhancement of motivational efforts, more listening and taking their demands into consideration. This result is not surprising since many studies in the literature shed the light on employees' perceptions about the insufficient or unsatisfactory motivational system applied in the organization. According to the literature, the effectiveness of the motivational system is majorly influence by employees' opinions on this issue.

Most employees expressed their dissatisfaction with the motivational system considering it as ineffective and unresponsive to their needs. In fact, some authors affirm that a successful motivational system is essentially grounded on the comprehension of employees' needs and motivational factors. Additionally, the empirical part of this research proved, to a certain extent, the differences of motivational factors between blue and white collars. This triggers some doubts about the effectiveness of applying one single motivational strategy without consideration of the diversity of motivational factors and the effect of variables such as job status.

Furthermore, all the previously discussed results underline the possibility of applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a way to enhance employees' motivation. According to the literature, Maslow's theory is quite helpful in the design and implementation of a successful motivational system. Based on Maslow's model, the empirical investigation displays resemblances and dissimilarities between blue- and white collar- employees. Higher-level needs (esteem-building and self-actualization) are valuable only for white collars even though lower-order needs are significant for both groups. The latter is justified by the influence of some motivational variables. Since dissimilarities exist between the motivational factors of blue- and white-collar employees, a single motivational system is doubtful to achieve effective motivation. Hence, tailoring the job attributes to fit employees' needs is crucial for the success of the motivational approach. Actually, the literature proclaims that motivating an employee requires comprehending and fulfilling the needs at or beyond his presently held hierarchical level. In sum, employees' preferences for various job attributes could be explained through the concept of needs, motivational factors and variables within the specified theoretical framework (Maslow's hierarchy of needs). In fact, based on Maslow's theory, an important need constitutes a motivational factor as long as this need is unsatisfied. Work motivation is the force that drives the employee to balance this need. Appropriate job attributes are essential in the fulfillment of a worker's need. Once satisfied, this need loses its motivational power. Then, the next level of needs becomes dominant. Observed shifts are explained by the presence of some motivational variables in the studied context. However, for the research purposes, these

variables are assumed constant as a starting condition. Hence, after considering the job status as a single variable and discounting the effect of other influential variables (assumed constant), it can be stated that the empirical data validates, to a certain limit, Maslow's sequential hierarchy.

Therefore, Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be applied, within its acknowledged limitations, as an assisting, unfixed and unlimited, tool in the design and implementation of an effective motivational system. A one that responds to employees' needs and successfully motivates them.

V. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the motivational factors of blue- and white-collar employees, highlight the applied managerial approaches to motivation and test the applicability of Maslow's theory. However, higher-level needs (esteem and self-actualization) were mainly significant for white collars. Although outcomes relative to higher-level needs were consistent with theory, the results related to lower-level needs manifested a discrepancy with the literature. In effect, for narrowing the study, the research concentrated on a single variable which is the job status (blue and white collar) with other motivational variables presumed as constant. The observed inconsistency with the theory was justified by the social, personal and economic factors. Indeed, the unstable economic conditions increase worry about the ability of satisfying basic needs. For this, preference for financial job attributes to the detriment of non-financial ones.

Moreover, managerial motivational practices were investigated in the specified context. This examination demonstrated the importance of motivation to the organization and the application of a single motivational approach for all employees regardless of variables and motivational factors.

This inconsistency generated doubts about the effectiveness of applying one single motivational strategy without consideration of the diversity of motivational factors and the effect of variables such as job status (blue/white collar).

It can be derived that the study attained its desired goals. However, the study was not accomplished without different limitations that will be further elaborated in the following section next to the implications and further research propositions.

VI. Limitations, Implications and Further Research

In spite of the limitations which are time constraint, responsiveness delay, and the number of interviews; this study contributes to the existing knowledge by providing new insights and possibilities for further research. It can also constitute a general guide for managers and practitioners in understanding the motivational patterns of blue and white collars and applying an adequate successful motivational system.

On the practical side, this study might be useful for managers and practitioners. In effect, the study can be regarded as a general guide for the applicability of Maslow's theory on employees' motivation based on the job status.

Since most organizations encompass the two major groups of blue- and white-collar employees, this study can be a tool assisting in the comprehension of the motivational factors of blue and white collars. It can also provide guidance for the design and application of an effective motivational system.

The same study might be repeated with a larger number of interviews. Likewise, an increased number of interviews with directors will permit to investigate the gap between managers and employees regarding the motivational approaches.

Finally, the applicability of another motivational theory on the motivational patterns of employees might be tested in future research. Possibilities involve early and contemporary motivational theories.

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