

## Towards Understanding Controversy on Herzberg Theory of Motivation

<sup>1</sup>Muhammad Ehsan Malik and <sup>2</sup>Basharat Naeem

<sup>1</sup>Dean, Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences. Director,  
Institute of Business Administration (IBA)/Director General,  
Gujranwala Campus, University of the Punjab, Lahore (Pakistan)

<sup>2</sup>COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT) Lahore Campus, Pakistan

**Submitted:** Jul 15, 2013; **Accepted:** Aug 31, 2013; **Published:** Sep 4, 2013

**Abstract:** Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory provided great stimulus to the investigators for advancing research on job satisfaction. In 1959, Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman dropped a bombshell on the traditional view of job satisfaction by introducing motivator-hygiene theory and challenged to the established model of job satisfaction. Herzberg theorized that provision of motivators such as recognition, work itself, advancement, responsibility and achievement generates job satisfaction while their absence leads to no job satisfaction but has nothing to do with job dissatisfaction. On the other hand, lack of hygiene factors such as working conditions, pay, interpersonal relations, job security, company policies and administration produces job dissatisfaction and has nothing to do with job satisfaction. *Since* the inception of theory, it has been tested across divergent cultures, samples, occupations and methods but to date there is still no consensus to what extent Herzberg's theoretical predictions are valid. This prompted the researchers to undertake this qualitative review of empirical studies to improving the understanding about mounting controversies surrounding such influential theory. Based on qualitative analysis, it can be concluded that possibility of empirical substantiation of theory would be higher provided replication of Herzberg's original methodology is undertaken. Since Herzberg's theory is still valid (Jones and Lloyd 2005) even though half a century is gone since it was first proposed, so organization leadership is urged to first identify what satisfies or dissatisfies their workforce and initiate change programs to nurturing their job satisfaction and elevating job dissatisfaction which may motivate them for higher productivity and retention besides reducing their exit turnover or its intentions. Further, researchers may conduct meta-analytical study or systematic qualitative review rather than non systematic review as undertaken in this particular study.

**Key words:** Herzberg Theory • Motivation • Review

### INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is extensively reported to exert enormous influence on performance, retention and turnover rates of the employees [1, 2]. For example, salespersons' quittal due to dissatisfaction not only incurs huge cost to the organizations in hiring and retraining but creates plethora of difficulties for the management to rebuilding new sales teams, reestablishing relationship with the key customers and regaining market share snatched by the competitors. One more practical argument can be advanced for the growing concern of the practitioners on salespersons' job satisfaction, that a significant proportion of the marketing budgets is spent

on salesforce for the achievement of the assigned targets. For the reason, sales and marketing management of companies consider salespersons' job satisfaction as of paramount importance in developing and sustaining long-term profitable relationships with valued customers for the accomplishment of the organizational goals.

Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory provided great stimulus to the investigators for advancing research on job satisfaction [3]. Herzberg and his associates dropped a bombshell on the traditional view of job satisfaction by introducing motivator-hygiene theory and challenged to the established model of job satisfaction [4]. Herzberg theorized that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction move on two distinct and independent

continuums. Job satisfaction operates on a scale which ranges from no job satisfaction to high degree of job satisfaction while job dissatisfaction operates on a different and distinct scale which ranges from high degree of job dissatisfaction to no job dissatisfaction [5]. Accordingly, the provision of motivators such as recognition, work itself, advancement, responsibility and achievement generates job satisfaction and higher productivity while their absence leads to no job satisfaction rather than job dissatisfaction. On the other hand, lack of hygiene factors such as working conditions, pay, interpersonal relations, job security, company policies and administration produces job dissatisfaction while their presence generates no job dissatisfaction rather than job satisfaction. In latter studies, many researchers [6,7] termed hygiene factors as job context factors and motivator factors as job content factors. During the last more than 53 years, Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory was tested across divergent cultures, samples, occupations and methods but to date there is still no consensus to what extent Herzberg's predictions are valid. This prompted the researchers to undertake this qualitative review of empirical studies, which were testing Herzberg's theoretical predictions, to improving the understanding about mounting controversies surrounding such influential theory.

**Attacks on Herzberg's Theory:** Research [8] criticized the following propositions of motivator-hygiene theory:

- There are different sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction;
- Motivator-hygiene theory is parallel to dual theory of man's needs according to which physical needs work along with hygiene factors and psychological needs work with motivators.

**He Criticized the Following Arguments of the Theorists:**

- Dichotomy of human body and mind;
- Man's needs operate only in single direction;
- Classification system of incident;
- Defensiveness;
- Frequency data utilization;
- Individual differences were not considered.

Locke censured Herzberg's implied point of view that biological and psychological processes of human beings are distinct and operating without any interaction with each other. In contract of Herzberg, he proposed that

it is the mind which regulates by identifying man's bodily needs and how to gratify them. He criticized Herzberg's inference that since motivators and hygiene factors is unidirectional, so is the case with physical and psychological need as well. He commented that eating not only terminates hunger but also provides bodily pleasures. He commented that there is overlapping relationship in number of occasions between the two groups of human needs and factors contrary to Herzberg implied view point of absence of parallel relationship between them. For example a company formulates a new policy (context factor) which may promote the interest of the worker in the work itself (content factor) or improve his likelihood of successful performance.

Another criticism was on Herzberg's classification system in which he was inconsistent in categorizing the factors. For instance, when a worker is given a new task, it is regarded as responsibility but if supervisor does not delegate the task, then it is taken as supervision-technical. Locke criticized that such split of a factor in two different types of factors results from the confusion between the agent and the event. He further criticized on 'think of a time when' which led to likelihood of respondents' defensiveness and they credited themselves for the events of job satisfaction and alleged others like company policies, rules, procedures, supervisors and coworkers for their dissatisfaction with job. Locke suggested that measurement of intensity rather than frequency should be used because a dissatisfying factor recorded a number of times does not necessarily mean that the factor is an important problem as much as an infrequent event having high level of dissatisfaction. Moreover, the scope of just 203 engineers and accountants was very narrow having likelihood that many workers experienced similar problems. Locke commented that there is distinction between individual's needs and values. Needs being same, every individual places different importance on different factors. This unique feature of the individuals was disregarded by Herzberg and his associates.

A study was conducted to investigate the reasons of employee turnover of middle managers including senior and junior workers performing sales, research and computer related activities [9]. Results made the contention that intrinsic job factors were both important contributors of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction which was partly in sharp contrast to Herzberg's proposition that intrinsic job factors contribute only to job satisfaction and has nothing to do with job dissatisfaction.

Another researcher [10] investigated the effect of intrinsic rewards (social) and extrinsic organizational rewards on job satisfaction of 1385 employees working in diverse industries like hospital, university, order-processing firm, law-enforcement agency and a plastic factory. Study concluded that intrinsic task rewards such as autonomy, meaningfulness of the work and challenging task followed by extrinsic rewards such as supervisor and colleagues' assistance were potent predictors of job satisfaction in all occupational groups. But extrinsic organizational rewards such as adequate pay equity, working conditions, fringe benefits and promotional opportunity were found to be powerful determinants of job satisfaction only in lower-level occupations which refuted Herzberg thesis that hygiene factors do not produce job satisfaction.

The study also revealed that the importance placed to intrinsic rewards for higher-level occupations increased with increase in their professional experience. In addition, it suggested that organizational rewards had the ceiling effect and the workers of all sections desperately need the job enrichment factors along with pay and fringe benefits, attractive work environment and opportunities of promotion.

A research study of [6] attempted to determine the relevance of motivator-hygiene theory of job satisfaction in a sample of industrial salespeople of 82 British firms. The results of the investigation reflected that applicability of Herzberg's model of job satisfaction is not perfectly applicable to industrial salespersons in Britain. Many study variables like "improve quality of life", "meet family responsibilities", both being money related, "acknowledgement", "promotion opportunities" and "job security" were found to be determinants of both motivation and dissatisfaction. This led the researchers to express their concern on the existence of the dichotomous nature of the aforementioned job facets. Herzberg treated "work itself" as a motivator, but study respondents rated "tasks performed in the job itself" and "job responsibilities" as dissatisfiers. However few study variables including "job status" and "company policy" were in line with Herzberg's findings. Many other empirical investigations, presented underneath, revealed mixed findings suggesting Herzberg's theoretical predictions as highly controversial.

In this connection, [11] used survey questionnaire to replicate the findings of motivator-hygiene theory of job satisfaction. Independent samples t test was employed to determine statistically significant differences between

the means for motivators and hygiene factors among satisfied and dissatisfied engineers and accountants working the private and public sector in Florida. It was found that accountants and engineers of local government agency were more satisfied in comparison to private company because of difference in their work settings. They valued hygiene factors significantly more than motivators. Interestingly, both motivators and hygiene factors were found to be satisfiers for employees in public and private sectors. This was in sharp contrast to Herzberg's findings that hygiene factors are sources of job dissatisfaction. However, study findings partially supported Herzberg' findings that motivators are potent source of job satisfaction. Findings of a survey [12] conducted in a sample of 83 public hospital pharmacists, reflected that enrichment of motivators like interesting and challenging job, sense of achievement and recognition of the performance in the job were positively associated with job satisfaction and substantial reduction of job dissatisfaction.

Another criticism on Herzberg's two-factor theory is that it disregards the individual differences. The model is claimed to be applicable regardless of gender, age, occupational level and so on. The results of a survey [13] of 460 persons (326 fulltime and 133 part-time), serving in services, insurance, manufacturing, utilities, government agencies retailing and health care reflected that pay and job security were top rated motivators. This was found to be the most striking difference with motivator-hygiene theory. Further, the study concluded that motivational factors change over time and motivational preferences of the employees differ among the respondents having different demographic backgrounds. Job-related factors like good working conditions, personal loyalty to employees and interesting work were valued significantly different by full time and part time employees. Part-timers rated interesting work and good working conditions among the top motivational factors whereas full-timers valued personal loyalty to employees as an important motivator. Women placed greater importance on appreciation and good working conditions contrary to males who were motivated by interesting work. All five age groups, except participants above 55 years, rated good wages the as the most important motivator. Pay was found to be a top listed motivator regardless of age in contrast with Herzberg's finding that pay is hygiene factor. Lower income groups of the workers placed more value on understanding of personal problems than did those in the middle income group.

Analysis of the six occupational groups showed that interesting work was strong motivator for professional workers than clerical workers. The plant employees placed significantly more motivational value on help with personal problems than did the professionals and managers.

In another survey [5] of Hong Kong hotel workforce from 9 different functional departments (sales and marketing, front office, food and beverage, human resource, financial control, engineering, housekeeping, security and public relations) was investigated the relationship of demographic characteristics of the employees with different job factors. A total of 1,245 useful questionnaires completed by the employees of 64 hotels in Hong Kong were analyzed. Employees among different demographic variables differed in ten job motivators. Unmarried employees placed more importance on interesting work, feeling of being involved, opportunities for advancement and development and appreciation and praise for work done.

In an important empirical investigation [14] on 125 Bangkok construction engineers and foremen, it was concluded that applicability of Herzberg's theory is not perfectly possible to motivate construction industry workforce. Although researchers replicated critical incident technique, yet recognition, work itself, interpersonal relations, personal life and status proved to be both determinants of satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction. Achievement was found to be a motivator for engineers but a bi-polar factor for foremen. Few factors like responsibility, advancement and growth possibilities were found consistent with Herzberg's findings but that was not the case with supervision.

[15] investigated the contribution of demographic variables to variation in preference with different job related factors in a sample of 516 Estonian higher officials from 11 different ministries. Results showed that dissatisfaction aspects of job like material factors motivate people more and satisfaction factors like responsibility and interpersonal relationship with supervisor are continual source of persistent motivation. Respondents' preference of hygiene factors outweighed the motivators. Preferences for motivation and dissatisfaction facets of the job were found inconsistent with each demographic variable like, age, gender and level of occupation. Labour workforce and female higher officials were strongly motivated by recognition and interpersonal relations with managers but male higher official preferred responsibility as motivator. Women

placed more value on emotional dimensions of job relations and men prioritized efficiency areas. Material factors, career, recognition acted as strong motivators for average economically worker than Estonian male higher official.

[16] interviewed scientists of a government research institute in UK to determine how to motivate them to enhance their productivity. Analysis of the respondents' perceptions provided valuable information that good science, self curiosity and making a difference served them as intrinsic motivation for the job but inadequate recognition of their accomplishments and feedback proved to be de-motivators.

**Support for Herzberg's Theory:** In 1973, French and associates conducted a study in a sample of 25 male system analysts out of the population of 212 to find out whether the results obtained from Herzberg type written questionnaire differ significantly from those got by employing oral interview procedure. Investigators replicated Herzberg's subject utilization process, data reduction, data analysis and its interpretation. Herzberg's patterned oral interview technique (1959) was used and all interviews were tape recorded for later detailed analyses. A written version of the patterned interview [17] was also used to collect desired subject response data and was administered to all subjects one month after they had completed the oral portion. The data were analyzed in the typical Herzberg manner. Hygiene and motivator factors were ascertained by testing for significant differences in frequency between percentages of high and low reports with the Z-statistic. Differences between the oral and written factor patterns of frequency were analyzed by the binominal test and the Spearman rank order correlation. Significance level of .05 was selected for rejection or support of hypotheses. The Z test analysis of the oral interview data reflected that achievement, work itself and responsibility were motivators while company policy and administration was a hygiene factor. Whilst the findings through written interview technique identified achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, interpersonal relations-peers and interpersonal relations-superior as the sources of motivation. In both oral and written interviews, the only significant hygiene factor was company policy and administration. So, the researchers believed that the real standard to criticize Herzberg's Motivator-hygiene theory was that the only studies which are reasonably close to Herzberg on the subject utilization, data reduction, data analysis and its

interpretation can be considered relevant in criticizing the theory. Inconsistency among study results are expected because multiple and different approaches are used to test the validity of the two-factor theory. This study reported that only seven of the 12 factors were in agreement with the results obtained by Herzberg using the oral interview technique with accountants and engineers in USA. The replication of Herzberg's original findings is strongly possible provided essential areas in the experimental process are controlled well. Otherwise the comparison becomes worthless.

In a literature review of controversy regarding Herzberg's theory, [18] provided few important supportive studies. In another study, [19] interviewed research personnel at a large diversified industrial company in Illinois. Study concluded that achievement and recognition acted as motivational factors for technical workers but growth was not the potent source of satisfaction. Motivation factors were found positive association with job performance and materializing technical objectives. Study supported motivator-hygiene theory of motivation in some respects having contradictions in uni-dimensionality of the factors. [20] aggregate analysis confirmed Herzberg's two-factor theory by interviewing 104 male London bus drivers and conductors asking their present feelings instead of past events. Of the 82 percent responses pertaining to motivators confirmed the hypothesis that all combined motivators contribute to job satisfaction more than job dissatisfaction and 52 percent responses related to combined hygienes proved that they are potent source of job dissatisfaction than job satisfaction. So, validity tests based on aggregate rather than individual analysis are likely to support Herzberg's theory.

[4] examined the current validity of Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory presented about half a century ago in 32 member companies of UK association of suggestion schemes. Study findings endorsed non-bipolarity proposed by Herzberg et al. Analysis of 3209 responses of survey questionnaires from the employees serving in services, government, utilities, retail, manufacturing, police and financial services sectors revealed that motivator-hygiene theory is effective even after about 50 years despite heavy weight criticism on it. Study concluded that motivators such as overcoming frustration at work, saving company money and improving organization success were more important than movers (associated with extrinsic aspects) such as winning money or other financial benefits, seeing

colleagues receiving award and trusting company for fair evaluation of ideas.

[21] studied the relationship of motivation with organization performance in 454 employees serving in three corporations of Greece. Results stressed leadership to recognize the importance of intrinsic job rewards such as creative work, recognition for achievements and more autonomy within the workplace for motivating employees effectively. Synergy of extrinsic and intrinsic incentives was considered the most effective remedy for promoting motivating employees. However intrinsic rewards rather than financial incentives were found to be potent predictors of organization performance. Study concluded that satisfaction determinants, being multifaceted in nature, are different for different demographic variables and ability.

A study [22] investigated the impact of intrinsic rewards such as coaching is fun, interesting, challenging) and/or extrinsic rewards such as coaching pay, benefits, prestige and their relationship with professional coach and adult athlete satisfaction. Multiple regression analyses indicated that coaches' both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation positively affected coaches' satisfaction with their relationship developed with athlete. Coaches' intrinsic motivation affected coaches' satisfaction with performance and instruction. Extrinsic sources of motivation lead to neither coach nor athlete satisfaction with performance and instruction. The findings were concurrent with Herzberg's theory that extrinsic sources of motivation do not lead to satisfaction. Findings showed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations interact and when intrinsic motivation is low, extrinsic motivation negatively affects coaches' satisfaction with instruction. Besides, in the instance of high intrinsic motivation, more extrinsically motivated coaches experienced higher level of satisfaction with instruction while suggesting synergistic effect of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on coaches' satisfaction. An antagonistic interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on coaches' satisfaction with the coach-athlete relationship was found, too. From the practical point of view, the findings suggested that coaches' enjoyment, happiness and satisfaction with their coaching involvement is largely dependent on experiencing high levels of intrinsic motivation.

**Concluding Thoughts:** Despite considerable criticism on Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory, it has been widely accepted and remained a topic of great interest among

sales managers and psychologists because of theoretical and practiced simplicity as endorsed by [23]. There is an improved likelihood of empirical substantiation of predictions of the theory if replication of Herzberg's methodology is undertaken. Since Herzberg's theory is still valid [4] even though half a century is gone since it was first proposed, so organization leadership is urged to first identify what satisfies or dissatisfies their workforce and initiate change programs to nurturing their job satisfaction and elevating job dissatisfaction which may motivate them for higher productivity and retention besides reducing their exit turnover or its intentions. Further, researchers may conduct meta-analytical study or systematic qualitative review rather than non systematic review as undertaken in this particular study.

### REFERENCES

1. García-Bernal, J., A. Gargallo-Castel, M. Marzo-Navarro and P. Rivera-Torres, 2005. Job satisfaction: empirical evidence of gender differences, *Women In Management Review*, 20(4): 279-288.
2. Oshagbemi, T., 1999. Academics and their managers: A comparative study in job satisfaction, *Personnel Review*, 28(1/2): 108-123.
3. Steers, R.M., and L.W. Porter, 1992. *Motivation and work behavior*. McGraw Hill: New York.
4. Jones, N.B. and G.C. Lloyd, 2005. Does Herzberg's motivation theory have staying power? *Journal of Management Development*, 24(10): 929-943.
5. Wong, S., V. Siu and N. Tsang, 1999. The impact of demographic factors on Hong Kong hotel employees' choice of job-related motivators. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 11(5): 230-241.
6. Shipley, D. and J. Kiely, 1988. Motivation and dissatisfaction of industrial salespeople-How relevant is Herzberg's theory? *European Journal of Marketing*, 22(1): 17-30.
7. Castillo, J.X. and J. Cano, 2004. Factors explaining job satisfaction among faculty. *Journal Of Agricultural Education*, 45(3): 65-74.
8. Locke, E.A., 1976. The nature and causes of job satisfaction. In Dunnette, M. D. (Ed.). *Handbook of Industrial and Organisational Psychology*, 1297-343. Rand McNally, Chicago, IL.
9. Spillane, R., 1973. Intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction and labour turnover: A questionnaire study of Australian Managers. *Occupational Psychology*, 47: 71-74.
10. Mottaz, C.J., 1985. The relative importance of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards as determinants of work satisfaction. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 26(3): 365-385.
11. Maidani, E.A., 1991. Comparative study of Herzberg's two-factor theory of job satisfaction among public and private sectors. *Public Personnel Management*, 20(4): 441-48.
12. Savery, L.K., 1996. The congruence between the importance of job satisfaction and the perceived level of achievement. *Journal of Management Development*, 15: 6.
13. Wiley, C., 1997. What motivate employees according to 40 years of motivation surveys. *International Journal of Manpower*, 18(3): 263-280.
14. Ruthankoon, R. and S.O. Ogunlana, 2003. Testing Herzberg's two-factor theory in the Thai construction industry. *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management*, 10(5): 333-341.
15. Kamdron, T., 2005. Work motivation and job satisfaction of Estonian higher officials. *Intl Journal of Public Administration*, 28: 1211-1240.
16. Snape, D.J. and J.B. Snape, 2006. Motivation of scientists in a government research institute scientists' perceptions and the role of management. *Management Decision*, 44(10): 1325-1343.
17. Seberhagen, L.W., 1970. What motivates civil service employees? *Public Personnel Review*, pp: 48-50.
18. Behling, O., G. Labovitz and R. Kosmo, 1968. The Herzberg controversy: A critical reappraisal. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 11(1): 99-108.
19. Kendall, E.L. and C.C. Robinson, 1975. Motivation and productivity of the technical employee. *Industrial Management*, 6: 1-8.
20. Gardner, G., 1977. Is there a valid test of Herzberg's two-factor theory? *J. occup. Psychol.*, 50: 197-20.
21. Manolopoulos, D., 2008. An evaluation of employee motivation in the extended public sector in Greece. *Employee Relations*, 30(1): 63-85.
22. Jowett, S., 2008. What makes coaches tick? The impact of coaches' intrinsic and extrinsic motives on their own satisfaction and that of their athletes. *Scand J Med Sci Sports*, pp: 1-10.
23. Ivancevich, I.M., A.D. Jr. Szilagyi and M.J. Jr. Wallace, 1977. *Organizational behavior and performance*. N/A