

Chapter 9

Promoting a Productive Work Environment

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain what is meant by the phrase, "A satisfied need is no longer a motivator."
- List other factors (besides individual motivation) that influence staff members' job performance.
- Explain how membership in a work group can result in either an increase or a decrease in a staff member's productivity.
- List the different formats that supervision can employ, and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

What different staff types bring to an organization (demographic characteristics, formal education, credentials, life experiences) is important. However, once they start working, much of what they do and how they do it will be influenced by their work environment. As managers, we have a responsibility to assume an active role in shaping the work environment so that the behaviors of staff members are consistent with the goals of the organization and the needs of its clients.

What conditions increase the likelihood that staff members will be productive and that clients will receive quality services? What we know about the characteristics of "good workers," no matter what their job description, provides some hints for us. Some of their characteristics are largely beyond the control of the manager. For example, we know that good workers are likely to be physically and emotionally healthy. They also tend not to be preoccupied with their own problems or those of loved ones. However, there are other characteristics of good workers that managers can promote at least to some degree, primarily through creating a healthy organizational climate. Good workers feel positively about the organization and its goals. They are proud to tell others where they work. They respect and work cooperatively with coworkers. They are knowledgeable about their job and how to meet its demands. They also have job security (their jobs are safe) and they are confident that what they are doing is correct (ethical) and makes an important contribution to achieving the organization's goals.

UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION

An important determinant of staff members' behaviors and attitudes toward their work is their individual motivation—the needs that they attempt to meet through their work. As social workers, we are accustomed to helping clients meet many of their needs. We have no

similar obligation to meet the individual needs of staff members—they are not our prime beneficiary (Chapter 2). So, why do managers concern themselves at all with staff members' needs and seeing that they are met to the degree possible? It is because, if staff members' needs can be met, they are more likely to be good workers, people who provide better services to our clients—our prime beneficiary.

We have all probably heard someone remark in disgust that "he has no motivation." The speaker may have been a teacher, a parent, a volunteer coordinator, or a manager. The remark provides a way for the speaker to vent his or her frustration, but it is not an accurate description of reality. It might have been more accurate for that person to have said, "I cannot seem to identify what motivates him," or "I have not yet been able to use my knowledge of his motivation to increase his productivity," or even, "what motivates me has no effect on him." However, everyone is motivated by something. People with no motivation at all would not survive for long. They would not get out of bed, would stop eating, and would soon die.

We have emphasized a belief that the knowledge and competencies required to perform the management activities of the social worker often are similar to those needed for the performance of management activities. Effective use of the knowledge of motivation is a "people skill" that is certainly an asset to the counselor or therapist or to the macro-level practitioner. But, it is equally valuable for the manager.

There is no shortage of research on human motivation. It did not take long for managers and students of organizational behavior to notice that workers do not all seem to be equally driven or motivated by the same needs and forces. This realization came in part as a response to the scientific management theories of Frederick Taylor and others (Chapter 3). Taylor's theories, the reader will recall, were dependent on a belief in the existence of "economic man," that is, the belief that money is the primary motivator of workers. The eventual recognition of the limits of Taylor's theories led other theoreticians to the conclusion that Taylor's belief about motivation was at best an overgeneralization and at worst a gross misunderstanding. Subsequent beliefs about motivation tended to emphasize the diversity of needs and forces that influence an individual's behavior. We will look at a few of the better-known theories of motivation to see what each has to say to the manager.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

One of the more familiar theories is attributed to Abraham Maslow (1908–1970).¹ Maslow's hierarchy of needs is generally illustrated by a pyramid containing five categories or levels of needs. They are, in ascending order, physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. The choice of a pyramid to illustrate the various need levels is a reflection of Maslow's belief that many persons find themselves stalled at the first (physiological) level, fewer are functioning at the second (safety) level, fewer yet at the third level, and so on. In fairness to Maslow, his hierarchy was developed at a time (following the Great Depression) when this may have been a more accurate description of the distribution of people and what motivates them than is probably true today. We now believe that, at least in human service organizations, most people have their most basic needs already met and that many more than just a few persons (including many professionals) are motivated by a need for self-actualization. Thus, some students of organizations suggest that an upside-down pyramid might be a more accurate portrayal today.

The five levels reflect what Maslow believed were the primary motivators seen among individuals. People who have not satisfactorily acquired the basic necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter) are motivated by offers that promise to help meet their physiological needs.

Having met these most basic of needs, people might "graduate" to the safety-need level. Here, motivators take the form of protection from threat or danger or loss of what has been acquired. For individuals who have met their safety needs and have thus reached the third (social) level, needs reflect a preoccupation with the question, "What do others think of me?" Affiliation and acceptance are primary motivators at this level. Belonging is of utmost importance, and the promise of being able to fit in is a powerful influence on behavior. At the fourth (esteem) level, the important question is more likely to be, "What do I think of myself?" An individual at this level is driven by a need for self-esteem. Recognition, status, and prestige are important, but only because of their potential for enhancing what is most sought, namely high self-esteem and a good feeling about oneself. The fifth level (self-actualization) is the highest need level. It involves the use of one's talents, challenge, creativity, and the opportunity for working to full potential. People operating at this need level would have satisfactorily met all of their lower-level needs; thus, appeals to lower-level needs would no longer be motivators for them.

The idea that people are motivated by different needs, or even that the needs are hierarchical in nature, was really nothing new. Maslow's major contribution was the conclusion that human beings are only motivated by *unmet* needs, specifically by the need above the highest one in the hierarchy that has already been adequately met. Of course, implicit in the idea of adequate need fulfillment is the recognition that what is "enough" for one person may not be "enough" for another. People tend to have different thresholds for their need gratification. Some require relatively little in order to move on to the next higher level. Others appear to be fixated at one level and never seem to be able to meet that need. For example, for people who have been victims of acts of terrorism, safety needs may always be their major motivator. Or, people who lost their jobs during the recent economic recession, exhausted their savings, and had to live on nothing but unemployment benefits for many months may require a long time (if ever) to progress beyond the lowest need level.

Maslow's needs hierarchy is a useful way of explaining client behavior. For example, it helps to explain why a client who lacks the basic necessities of life (one who is operating at the physiological need level) might derive limited benefits from insight therapy or counseling efforts aimed at enhancing self esteem. How could appeals to higher-level needs be expected to motivate a person who has not yet progressed beyond the first need level? Conversely, the Maslow conceptualization would also explain why an affluent client in a private independent setting might be more enticed by the affiliation with others afforded by a Friday night bingo game (an appeal to the third need level) than by the possibility of winning the \$10 grand prize. After all, a satisfied need (according to Maslow) is no longer a motivator.

Application of the needs hierarchy concept to the social worker's management activities is readily apparent. One staff member might be operating at one need level; another may be at another level. It is not inconceivable that all five levels might be represented among the members of a single work unit. It is incumbent on managers to know their individual staff members well enough to assess accurately which needs have been adequately met and which (the next higher level) have not and, therefore, are a potential source of motivation. For example, managers should be reasonably certain that staff members are operating at the highest (self-actualization) level before offering them new work responsibilities that will require more creativity and innovation. Similarly, managers should be reasonably certain that staff members are not operating at the social need level before moving them to a quiet, isolated work environment with fewer distractions, but few opportunities for social interaction.

Some critics of Maslow—for example, Lawler and Suttle²—concluded that there was little to document even the existence of a needs hierarchy. They saw only two distinct

types of needs, biological and nonbiological. Biological needs were met. Other needs, such as safety, were met. In the life cycle, higher-level needs naturally progress or even maturation, and needs. Negative changes in our life cycle (significant other) can also send us to a previously been gratified. Even if we accept the theory or believe that it is flawed, it is. Specifically, if we accept the idea that unmet needs immediately above the highest met need, we will be more likely to avoid a morale. Whenever possible, we will move to levels and not to needs that are already met.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Frederick Herzberg (1923–2000) challenged Maslow's assumption that people are motivated by a hierarchy of needs. In fact, his theories of motivation are based on a belief that most workers tend to be motivated by the potential for self-actualization.

Herzberg proposed that there are two types of factors: hygiene factors and certain other factors. Hygiene factors include, for example, high salary, benefits. They are, of course, very important. But, they do not guarantee that a staff member will be motivated. They are potential satisfiers or (if not present) dissatisfiers.

The second group, motivators, are factors that lead to growth. They include, for example, challenge, achievement, and responsibility. They are factors that lead to growth. Thus, they are factors that lead to growth.

Herzberg and his colleagues identified two types of motivation factors into their theory. Herzberg seemed to suggest that the factors of hygiene factors. Not surprisingly, their theory described as hygiene factors. The most important—they were just not effective. It exists when both motivation and satisfaction are present. Motivated and satisfied with the job.

Job enrichment is not a new concept. Organizations; certain jobs are designed to be enriched. It is suggested that job enrichment is a concept that has been acknowledged that some jobs are enriched. They have little or no enrichment. and, in fact, a manager would not want to do that. solutions. One of these is job enrichment.

types of needs, biological and nonbiological, with nonbiological needs emerging only after biological needs were met. Other researchers³ noted that, as people move on through the life cycle, higher-level needs naturally predominate. This may occur as a result of career progression or even maturation, rather than as a result of gratification of lower-level needs. Negative changes in our life situation such as losses (e.g., a health crisis, loss of a significant other) can also send us "back down" the needs hierarchy to a level that had previously been gratified. Even if we acknowledge that there are many exceptions to Maslow's theory or believe that it is flawed, it still offers us some basic insights worthy of reflection. Specifically, if we accept the idea that a satisfied need is not a motivator and that only unmet needs immediately above the highest level gratified are potential sources of motivation, we will be more likely to avoid costly mistakes that can damage individual and group morale. Whenever possible, we will offer rewards that appeal to workers' current need levels and not to needs that are already met or that they do not yet experience.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Frederick Herzberg (1923–2000) is one well-known theoretician who argued against Maslow's assumption that persons who are motivated by a need for self-actualization are rare. In fact, his theories of motivation⁴ developed in the 1950s and 1960s are based on the belief that most workers tend to be more productive when efforts are implemented to build the potential for self-actualization into their jobs.

Herzberg proposed that for the individual, work contains certain factors called hygiene factors and certain other factors known as motivation factors. Hygiene factors include, for example, high salary, job security, status, good working conditions, or fringe benefits. They are, of course, very nice to have. If not present, they can make an individual feel dissatisfied with a job. But, and this is the important point, their presence is no guarantee that a staff member will be highly motivated. They are not motivators; they are only potential satisfiers or (if not present) dissatisfiers.

The second group, motivation factors, appeals to people's need for self-actualization. They include, for example, challenge, interesting work, freedom, responsibility, and potential for growth. Thus, they are factors that are intrinsic to the nature of the work itself.

Herzberg and his colleagues worked with employers and managers to build more motivation factors into their employees' jobs. He called this job enrichment. Sometimes, Herzberg seemed to suggest that motivation factors should be built in even at the expense of hygiene factors. Not surprisingly, labor unions have not always eagerly embraced job enrichment. Generally, their efforts have been directed at gaining more of what Herzberg described as hygiene factors. However, Herzberg never said hygiene factors were unimportant—they were just not effective motivators. In fact, he believed that the ideal situation exists when both motivation and hygiene factors are present. Then, workers are both highly motivated and satisfied with their jobs.

Job enrichment is not very applicable to all staff members in human service organizations; certain jobs are necessarily dull and repetitive. But Herzberg never really suggested that job enrichment is appropriate for everyone or for all work settings. He acknowledged that some jobs, by their very nature, are not candidates for job enrichment. They have little or no opportunity for creativity, self-actualization, and so forth and, in fact, a manager would want to discourage them. However, Herzberg had other solutions. One of these is job enlargement. It entails a limited expansion of an individual's

job responsibilities. How might job enlargement work in a human service organization? Consider the custodial staff members in a large public agency. Carpets must be vacuumed, wastebaskets must be emptied, recyclables must be collected, and so forth, usually every day. Nothing could make this challenging, stimulating work, and we wouldn't want to encourage creativity in how it is done. But there is still the potential to make the job a little more attractive. It could be enlarged to include greater input into decisions that must be made. For example, custodial staff members could help to decide (or even decide among themselves), for example, which brands of cleaning supplies and trash bags should be purchased or when carpets require shampooing.

A related approach called job rotation entails building variety into a job to relieve boredom and other associated problems. In our example, this might be done by rotating custodial staff members among floors or departments at regular intervals. In this way, the tasks may not vary, but at least there is a "change of scenery" every so often and the opportunity to interact with different people. If some floors or departments are regarded as harder work or less pleasant than other settings in some other way, job rotation also ensures that no one person will be "stuck" with them more than any other custodial staff members.

Would Frederick Taylor have seen the need for job enrichment, or even job enlargement or job rotation? Probably not. They would be seen as unnecessary, since Taylor thought that people were primarily motivated by money. But in the modern workplace we often see people and situations that seem to support the need for them. For example, we may see coworkers who are not productive despite the presence of a variety of hygiene factors. Job security, relatively high pay, and the best fringe benefits in the world might not be enough to help a social worker "catch fire" in a job that is dull and repetitive and that seems to offer no challenges or no outlet for creativity.

We have also seen dedicated, highly productive individuals who work for low salaries, sharing a work cubicle with another employee, and with virtually no hygiene factors present. They love their work and speak highly of it and the organization. We might speculate that their job is probably rich in challenge, freedom, opportunity for professional growth, and/or other motivation factors as described by Herzberg.

What is the message here for the social work manager? Many of the professionals and paraprofessionals with whom we work might be expected to seek gratification for their self-actualization needs. After all, few people who pursue financial wealth choose to enter social work or most other helping professions. And most have adequately met their other, lower-level needs. As managers, we may be in a position to engage in a little job enrichment, even if we cannot do much about including more of the hygiene factors that we all would like. However, building in more motivation factors requires time and thought, as well as the support of superiors.

Job enrichment may appeal to the needs of many professionals, but the manager cannot assume that even all professionals necessarily have met their other, more basic needs and now seek responsibility, challenge, autonomy, and so on. Some do not. For them, opportunities for self-actualization may be more resented than welcomed, especially if they are perceived as "just piling on more work," or being offered instead of such benefits as raises or other hygiene factors. Of course, people in the other types of jobs described in the previous chapter (e.g., paraprofessionals or support staff) may respond to efforts at job enrichment in the same way.

There also are some people who have a strong need for self-actualization, but they may not seek to gratify it through their work. They may be amateur artists or gourmet cooks

or they may restore old cars or make their own furniture as an outlet for their creativity. If so, they may seek nothing more than good pay from their job—enough to support the costs of their creative outlets. They would not likely be spurred to new heights of productivity by efforts to enrich their job. The only enrichment they may want is through their paycheck!

In addition, the behaviors of staff members in the workplace can easily be misinterpreted if we assume that they are directly related to their primary needs. For example, not everyone who seeks a promotion or volunteers to work overtime does so because they are motivated by a need for self-actualization. They may simply view the promotion or the overtime as a means to an end. Perhaps, the promotion will carry a salary increase that will enable the staff member to buy the new car that she wants. Or the overtime pay will help her to meet the extra expenses that a new baby in the family has brought. Conversely, an individual who turns down a promotion offer or one who refuses to work overtime may also be motivated by something outside the organization. Perhaps, the promotion would entail travel and more time away from his family or the overtime would mean that he could not take full advantage of the basketball season's tickets that he just bought.

Unless they are careful, managers can easily err in interpreting and responding to what they perceive to be staff members' needs. Or, they may accurately assess the source of their motivation, but wrongly assume that the workplace is where they endeavor to meet their needs. Not all employees perceive their job as central to their identity or their major source of need gratification. It is simply a part of their lives, albeit a necessary one. This is OK. Many staff members who think of their work as "just a job" nevertheless can make valuable contributions to the organization.

Case Example

Lamar was bright, energetic, and upwardly mobile. At age 28, he was the director of a large employee assistance organization (EAP) that employed a professional staff of 24 and had EAP contracts with several large manufacturing firms. He was also well respected in the social work professional community.

Lamar's organization was only four years old. Initially, he hired three other social workers to provide services. All were personal friends who he knew well and respected. As the demand for services increased and as new contracts came along, the organization had grown quickly. However, Lamar continued to take an active part in all personnel matters and in decisions related to work assignments. While he no longer knew his staff members as well as he had when the organization

was smaller, Lamar couldn't help but notice one of the newer social workers, Bruce. He observed that Bruce was highly productive and seemed to be well-liked. Two senior staff members also had come to him with praise for Bruce's attitude and the quality of his work. He volunteered to take on new cases despite carrying a full caseload. He came to work early and often worked late. He never seemed too busy to listen to other staff members' problems or to just allow them to vent their frustrations. Lamar found himself wishing he could hire ten other social workers just like Bruce—people with Bruce's competence, enthusiasm, and dedication. Lamar was not surprised when he read Bruce's performance evaluation (completed by his immediate supervisor). It was the best that he had ever seen.

(continued)

Case Example *Continued*

As a manager, Lamar knew the importance of rewarding his staff members for exceptionally good work. He knew that someone as competent as Bruce would be very marketable elsewhere, and he did not wish to lose him to another organization.

Lamar called Bruce in for a conference to discuss his future with the organization. He began by complimenting him on his high performance evaluation and the other favorable comments that had been made by his coworkers. He told Bruce that he really appreciated his work and his positive attitude toward it, and he assured him that it would not go unrewarded. Bruce clearly savored all the praise. Lamar went on to describe the other two EAP contracts that he had bid on and hoped to receive. He volunteered that, while he could make no promises, Bruce was being considered for the position of coordinator for the next contract received. This would be a promotion that would entail considerably more money, status, and the opportunity to supervise four or more new staff members who would be hired. Bruce's response was, "I'm not sure that I'm ready for that!" Lamar dismissed his reaction as humility, or, perhaps, just a way for Bruce to fish for another compliment. Lamar had little doubt that a high achiever like Bruce would jump at the chance for a promotion when the next coordinator position became available.

A new major EAP contract was signed in August. It was scheduled for full implementation on January 15. The staff members were informed about it in early September. Three other current staff members immediately applied for the coordinator job, but Bruce did not. Lamar asked for his letter of application and received it a week later. During October and November, plans proceeded for the new EAP. During that time, Lamar began to receive complaints about the quality of Bruce's work. Bruce seemed far less enthusiastic; he took several sick days with no evidence of any medical problems.

What had once been the organization's most highly motivated and competent employee now looked no better or worse than any other staff member. When by December 1st Lamar had to make a decision on the choice of the new coordinator, he could not in good conscience justify selecting Bruce for the job. He chose another applicant.

Not one to avoid the more unpleasant tasks of management, Lamar called each of the applicants who was not selected (including Bruce) into his office individually to announce his decision before it became public knowledge. While he didn't relish this task with any of the other three, he especially dreaded it with Bruce because of their earlier conversation. He need not have been concerned. Bruce seemed genuinely relieved. He confided to Lamar that he really liked his current coworkers and his present job, and had no desire to supervise others. Shortly afterward, Lamar again began to hear positive comments about the quality of Bruce's work.

Discussion Questions

1. Should Lamar have continued to be involved in all personnel matters himself after his organization had grown much larger? Why or why not?
2. What clues did Lamar miss that might have told him that a promotion for Bruce would not be a good idea?
3. With reference to Maslow's need hierarchy, at what level did Bruce seem to be functioning? How did Lamar misread it?
4. Why did Bruce's work change after his first meeting with Lamar?
5. Why would Herzberg's strategies for job enrichment probably be ineffective in appealing to Bruce's individual motivation?
6. Why do you think Bruce did not say he was just not interested in the coordinator job when Lamar first discussed it with him?