# Motivating Public Sector Employees

Yair Re'em
Hertie School of Governance

working papers

# Foreword

How public managers can motivate people towards achieving public purposes has been described by Robert D. Behn in his highly influential article (1995) as one of the three big questions that scholars of public management should attempt to answer through their research. Throughout the last decade the topic has increasingly gained attention in public management research and led to an ever increasing number of publications around the concept of public service motivation.

This Working Paper by Yair Re´em focuses on this crucial public management topic in a very persuasive form by combining both theoretical concepts and research evidence and an application-oriented approach leading to specific recommendations (or tactics) for public managers on how to increase motivation. Yair Re´em successfully defended the paper as his master thesis for the Executive Master of Public Management (EMPM), a new academic program launched at the Hertie School of Governance in September 2009. It is also the first EMPM thesis to be published in the Working Paper Series of the Hertie School of Governance.

The work mirrors the core idea of the EMPM program, combining both the latest research and theory while maintaining a strong focus on the practical relevance of these findings. It aims at finding theoretical factors and practical tactics that can help public managers to motivate their employees. Yair Re´em provides an excellent overview on central theories on motivation and synthesizes these various approaches towards central factors of motivation in both the private and the public sectors. Based on a thorough meta-analysis of the most current research on motivation, especially in the public sector, and a set of interviews with public managers, the author elaborates on these motivational factors in greater detail and translates them into 46 practical tactics that can be employed by public managers.

The work is characterized by a well-argued elaboration on the question of public sector vs. private sector similarity or distinctiveness, a convincing analysis of the conceptual richness of motivation going far beyond monetary incentives, as is often overemphasized in practical debates, and an impressively broad and concisely described spectrum of possible approaches and tactics that can be made available as toolkit for public managers.

It offers interesting insights for both practitioners and academics and is a nice example of how to successfully bridge public management research and practice. We are pleased to make Yair Re'em´s work available to a wider audience in this form.

Gerhard Hammerschmid
Professor of Public and Financial Management
Thesis supervisor

# Motivating Public Sector Employees:

## An Application-Oriented Analysis of Possibilities and Practical Tools

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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by

### *Yair Re'em*

Student-ID: 094942

EMPM program, class of 2010

Hertie School of Governance, Berlin

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Advisor:

Prof. Dr. Gerhard Hammerschmid

Hertie School of Governance

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I would also like to extend my gratitude to my interviewees, who were willing to devote some of their time to answer my questions. The fingerprints of their contribution can be identified throughout this paper.

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# Executive summary

Motivation plays a key role in employee job performance. Thus, employee motivation has long been a central research topic for scholars and practitioners. As a result, an abundance of theories and approaches were developed in order to explain the nature of employee motivation in the private and the public sector. However, most of these studies fall short of practical application or offer it only for the private sector. The problem is that with the effects of the latest financial crisis governments need today, more than ever before, practical ways that can help motivate public employees to be productive and get "more for less".

To that end, this thesis aims at finding theoretical factors and practical tactics that can help public sector managers to motivate their employees. The method that was used to reach this goal included an application-oriented meta-analysis of public and private motivation literature, a set of 10 interviews with past and current public managers, and projections from the author's own experience as a public manager. The thesis first investigates the notion of motivation and its importance generally to employers, and particularly to public sector organizations. Then, the thesis establishes that private and public sectors are not as distinct as might be imagined, and thus as a next step motivational factors are deduced form both private and public sector motivation theories. Finally, concrete and practical tactics are developed and attributed to each of the factors.

The thesis finds no less than 14 motivational factors, which are translated to 46 concrete and practical tactics that can help to motivate public employees. Furthermore, the case of plateaued employees is presented in order to demonstrate how the different tactics can be combined to tackle a specific problem that the public sector confronts.

This thesis refutes, then, the common belief that public managers do not have means to stimulate their employees, due to rigid civil-service laws. Thus, managers can use this thesis as a "cookbook" to find tactics how to motivate public sector employees. Moreover, they can use the results of this thesis as a starting point to develop their own motivational factors and tactics, which would better fit their organization and employees.

# I. Introduction

Managers most often fulfill their organizational goals through the work of employees. Thus, managers need to have highly efficient and productive staff members. Although many factors contribute to productivity, job performance is viewed to be the most influential one. Job performance itself is a function of four variables: ability, understanding of the task, environment, and motivation (Mitchell, 1982, pp.82-83). Accordingly, in order to perform well employees need to have the knowledge and tools that are required for the job as well as the *will* to do what is asked from them. Therefore, motivation can be generally equated with action and the understanding of motivation unfolds to be a key to the success of any private or public organization.

For that reason, motivation has long been a central topic for scholars and practitioners. An abundance of theories and approaches were developed in order to explain the nature of employee motivation. Another handful of studies were conducted in an attempt to discover whether public sector employees have different motivation antecedents than their private sector counterparts. And indeed a special motivation theory, called Public Service Motivation (PSM), was conceptualized to explain how public employees differ from private workers in the level and type of their intrinsic desire to work and serve.

Yet, grasping motivation should not be limited to theoretical aspects alone. Managers do not live in ivory towers and they need applicable ways to transfer the concepts of motivation into everyday life practice. This is especially pertinent to the public sector where the latest financial crisis presented governments with an exacerbated situation. On the one hand, the recession has increased the demands on public services, while on the other it has led to a collapse in taxation revenues and, in turn, a retraction in funding of public services (Public Affairs Ireland, 2010, p.2). Thus, public sector managers must motivate their employees to perform at the highest levels of productivity and effectiveness and get "more for less" (Perry/Porter, 1982, p.89).

The problem is that motivating public employees is easier said than done. Public workers have a reputation for being lazy and lethargic (Wilson, 1989, p.xviii; Wright, 2001, p.560) and mangers' room for maneuver is ostensibly very little, due to rigid civil-

service laws. Moreover, the public sector suffers from aging and plateauing employees, who are especially hard to motivate. It is not surprising, then, that the question how public managers can motivate their employees is considered to be one of the three "Big Questions of Public Management" (Behn, 1995).

Although the literature is affluent with motivation theories, the problem is that most of them fall short of practical application or offer it only for the private sector. To that end, the question this thesis deals with is: what are the theoretical factors and practical tactics that can help public sector managers to motivate their employees?

The method that was chosen to answer the research question consisted of an application-oriented meta-analysis of public and private motivation literature, a set of 10 interviews conducted with managers, who have current or past experience in the German public service, and projections from my own experience as a public manager. I believe this method assures that the end result is indeed implementable in the public sector, as well as generic enough to be adapted to a range of public organization settings and civil-service laws.

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 presents the notion of motivation and clarifies what exactly we mean by saying "motivation". Different facets of the concept are also illuminated. Chapter 3 delves into the issue of the importance of motivation. It first reflects on the effects of motivation on employee performance; second, it establishes motivation as a managerial duty; and third, it explicates the importance of employee motivation in the public sphere. Chapter 4 examines whether there are differences between public and private sector employee motivation. It also answers the question whether conclusions that are drawn from private-oriented theories can be later applied in the public sector. Chapter 5 reviews different motivational theories and extracts motivational factors that are directly mentioned or alluded to by the theories. The chapter also analyzes the gleaned factors. Chapter 6 transforms theory to practice by attributing each of the factors with concrete and practical tactics that can be employed by public managers. The case of plateaued employees is also presented and a motivational strategy to tackle the problem is offered by using a combination of the tactics.

## II. Motivation – What is it all about?

We all feel familiar with the concept of motivation and yet, when asked to, we struggle to find a proper definition. In fact, in 1981 Kleinginna and Kleinginna mapped no less than 140 distinct definitions (p.263). Thus, if we are to answer the question of how to motivate public employees, we first need to understand what motivation exactly does mean. This chapter clarifies the notion of motivation as well as illuminates different facets of the concept.

The word motivation is coined from the Latin word *motus*, a form of the verb *movere*, which means to move, influence, affect, and excite. By motivation we then mean the degree to which a person is moved or aroused to act (Rainey, 1993, p.20). Dictionaries simply describe motivation as "*the goad to action*" (Mitchell, 1982, p.81), whereas scholars expand the term to **the set of psychological processes that cause the arousal, direction, and persistence of individual's behavior toward attaining a goal** (ibid.; Greenberg/Baron, 2003, p.190; Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.209).

The latter definition underlines three pillars of motivation. The first – *arousal* – has to do with the drive or energy that ignites behavior (Greenberg/Baron, 2003, p.190). The second – *direction* – has to do with the type of behavior that is exerted and whether it is in line with demand or organization goal (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.209). The third pillar – *persistence* – deals with the lastingness of behavior. Though, this factor is of less importance, because persistence can be simply defined as the reaffirmation of the initial arousal and direction processes (Mitchell, 1982, p.81).

Furthermore, the definition asserts that motivation is an *individual* phenomenon. Each individual is unique and has different needs, expectations, values, history, attitudes and goals (ibid.). Hence, a manager cannot assume that what motivates him/her will also motivate the employee. And what motivates one employee may not necessarily motivate another.

Another aspect of motivation is that it pertains to determination, intention, and *self choice*. That is, motivation is under the employee's control and he/she actively chooses whether to put effort and take action (Mitchell, 1982, p.81). There is both good and bad news here: the good news is that an employee's level of motivation can be

influenced; the bad news is that only the employee himself/herself can do that. In other words, managers cannot motivate employees; they can only influence employees in a manner that makes them feel motivated (Bruce/Pepitone, 1998, p.1; Kumar/Sharma, 2001, p.585). Thus, the verb *to motivate* is somewhat misleading and should be replaced by the phrase "*to induce motivation*", but for the sake of simplicity I will keep on using it.

Motivation, then, is fundamentally an inside job (Bruce/Pepitone, 1998, p.2). It originates from within the individual and causes him/her to be internally stimulated. This type of motivation is called *intrinsic motivation*. Ryan and Deci (2000) consider intrinsic motivation to be the most important and pervasive motivation. Because it is through this kind of natural motivational tendency that humans develop cognitive, social, and physical abilities (p.56).

Frey and Osterloh (2002) distinguish between three forms of intrinsic motivation. In the first, people engage in an activity for its own sake, since they find *the activity itself* as a source of joy and satisfaction (p.8). Examples can be hobbies that one chooses to pursue, or in the work context fulfilling an interesting task. The second form is activities which are tedious and unexciting, but *their accomplishment is a source of pleasure*. For instance, meeting a deadline at work brings a sense of achievement, albeit the process is sometimes arduous. In the third form of intrinsic motivation it is a matter of *compliance with standards for their own sake* that propels people to act. These may be ethical standards one feels a need to respect, commitment to group members, or the desire to act according to values of material or procedural fairness (ibid.). The three forms of intrinsic motivation are illustrated in figure 1.

Despite its significance, many a time people act not because they are intrinsically motivated, but rather because external factors prompt them to take action (Ryan/Deci, 2000, p.60). This type of motivation is called *extrinsic motivation* and it concerns whenever an activity is done in order to attain an outcome that is separable from the activity itself (ibid.). In a career context, extrinsic motivation means the desire to satisfy needs or goals that are not related to the work itself. For example, work as a mere tool for earning money.
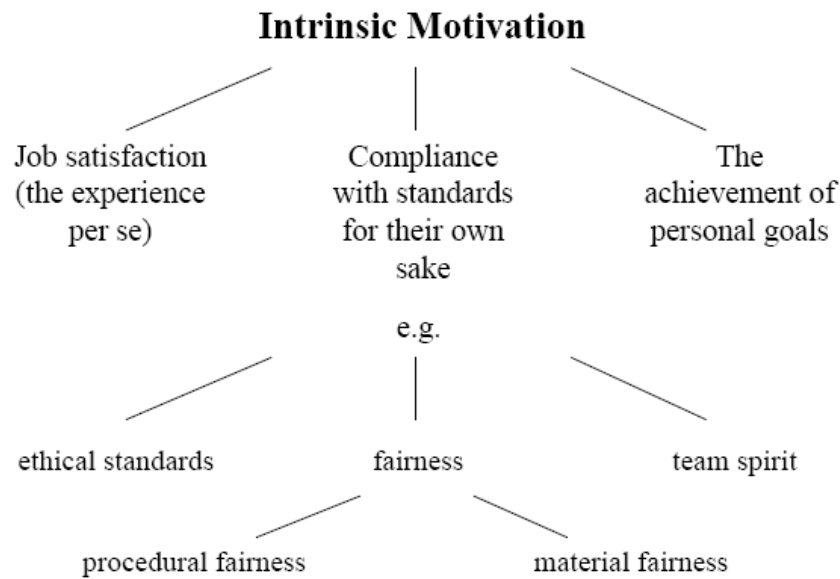
## Intrinsic Motivation



Figure 1: Forms of intrinsic motivation (Frey/Osterloh, 2002, p.9)

Be it intrinsic or extrinsic, motivation is not an end in itself, but rather a mean to an end (Wright, 2001, p.560). The ultimate goal of motivation is action, as insinuated by the last part of the definition – *toward attaining a goal*. And in the workplace, action means performance. Thus, the objective of work motivation research is "*to learn how to motivate employees to perform the duties and responsibilities assigned by the organization*" (ibid.).

That being said, it is important to pay attention not to automatically team motivation with performance. Motivation alone does not determine performance. It is only one factor in a series of components that contribute to the level of employee performance (Rainey, 1993, p.22). This topic will be further developed in the following chapter, but for time being it is enough to remember that motivation is not the same as performance. And performance should not be mistakenly understood as productivity, since sabotage and absence are motivated behaviors as well (Landy/Coote, 2010, p.365).

Motivation is also not to be confused with job satisfaction. Early experiments, such as the famous Hawthorne plant study in the late 1920s, led researchers to the false conclusion that happiness and satisfaction on the job equals high employee motivation to work. This has long been proven wrong (ibid., pp.406-407). A worker can be extremely satisfied with his/her job and at the same time be unmotivated to exert effort. In fact, that

is exactly one of the problems the public sector experiences – some employees are very pleased with their comfort work conditions, e.g. job security, and still have very little motivation to work. Nonetheless, job satisfaction should not be mislaid. It may not have a direct effect on motivation, performance, and productivity, but it sure has been found to be related to employee retention, thus indirectly influencing organizational costs associated with employee absenteeism and turnover (Wright/Davis, 2003, p.71).

Given the elaborations thus far, it is possible to conclude that work motivation is about *the internal and external forces that influence individual's degree of willingness and choice to engage in a certain specified behavior and action* (Mitchell, 1982, p.82). The purpose of motivational theories, then, is to analyze and predict the reasons that arouse and direct people to choose certain behaviors over others. Standing on the shoulders of these theories, I aim later to develop tactics that can help increase motivational behavior among public employees.

# III. Importance of Motivation

Having answered the question of what motivation is, the next question is why it is important for management, and moreover why it should be of special interest to managers in the public sector. To that end, this chapter focuses on three parts: First, it reflects on the effects of motivation on employee performance; second, it establishes motivation as a managerial duty; and third, it explicates the importance of employee motivation in the public sphere.

The number of publications is often used as an indicator for the importance, interest, and trends of certain subjects. In that sense, motivation is clearly a hot topic. The number of research articles and books that incorporated the word "motivation" in their title or abstract from 1950 to 2008 is around 65,000 (Landy/Conte, 2010, p.360). Moreover, the importance of motivation seems to be increasing within the years, since prior to 1980 the term appeared approximately 5,000 times each decade, whereas in the 1980s and 1990s it appeared more than 12,000 times each decade, and since 2000 it has been mentioned over 14,000 times (ibid.). What makes motivation so important? In one word, the answer is "performance".

Productivity is the *raison d'etre* of management (Accel-Team website, 2010). That is, managers across-the-board strive to achieve organizational goals by increasing efficiency and effectiveness. Although many factors contribute to productivity, job performance is viewed to be the most influential one (Mitchell, 1982, p.82). As was clarified in the previous chapter, work motivation does not determine employee's level of performance, but it does influence his/her effort toward performing the task (Ahlstrom/Bruton, 2009, p.198). The role of motivation in performance can be summarized in the following formula:

**Performance = Ability x Understanding of the task x Motivation x Environment**

Accordingly, in order to perform well employees need first to have the knowledge and skills that are required for the job. Then, they must understand what they are required to do and have the motivation to expand effort to do so. And last, employees need to work in an environment that allows them to carry out the task, e.g. by allocating

sufficient resources (Mitchell, 1982, p.83). The multiplication sign in the equation emphasizes the importance of motivation – if motivation is equal to zero, even the most talented employee will not deliver. Similarly, an energized and highly motivated employee can reach good performance despite having some knowledge gaps Landy/Conte, 2010, p.365). A good example for the latter situation is a new worker or trainee, who joins the organization fully motivated to work, yet lacks skills and experience. The motivation to learn and develop will quickly outweigh the weaknesses.

The effects of motivation do not stop with performance. In the group of motivated employees there are fewer work accidents, fewer rates of ethical problems, less employee turnover and lower levels of absenteeism (Jurkiewicz/Massey/Brown, 1998, p.246). Motivated employees feel less stress, enjoy their work, and as a result have better physical and mental health (Robison, 2010). Furthermore, motivated employees are more committed to their organizations and show less insubordination and grievance (Jurkiewicz et al., 1998, p.246). They are also more creative, innovative, and responsive to customers, thus indirectly contributing to the long-term success of the organization (MANforum, 2009, p.11). In short, **motivated employees are the greatest asset of any organization**.

Managers interact daily with front-line employees, especially in the case of junior and mid-level management. During these interactions supervisors unavoidably influence staff motivation with either good or bad results for the organization (Bruce/Pepitone, 1998, p.2). For example, if you are a manager who does not offer feedback and shows no interest in the employee as a human being, it is natural for your subordinate to interpret this as a sign that you do not care about him/her (ibid.). And when continuously neglected, employees are likely to switch-off and resign inwardly, i.e. their motivation to work substantially decreases (MANforum, 2009, p.11).

Therefore, actively engaging in employee motivation should be one of the primary tasks of a manager (Jurkiewicz et al., 1998, p.230). Surveys show most managers support this assertion (ibid., Kraut/Pedigo/McKenna/Dunnette, 2005, p.122) and believe they are doing a good job in motivating their staff (MANforum, 2009, p.13). Yet, reality proves the opposite is true: managers do not clearly understand the subject of motivation and more often than not motivational techniques are poorly practiced (Accel-Team

website, 2010). What is more, although many employees are highly motivated when joining an organization, the majority of resignations can be attributed to disappointment with the immediate supervisor (Bevan/Barber/Robinson, 1997, p.21,24). Very few employees leave an organization just because of dissatisfaction with compensation and promotion opportunities (MANforum, 2009, p.13).

There are many reasons why so few managers appear able to really motivate their people. One explanation can be the lack of proper education (ibid.). Another may be the complexity of motivational theories on the one hand, and the absence of practical recommendations on the other (Latham, 2007, p.259). A more interesting answer may be grounded in the "Paradox of Choice". This concept stipulates that ironically too many choices lead people to either choose none of the options or choose badly (Iyengar/Lepper, 2000, p.997; Schwartz, 2004, p.70). And in the context of motivation, a plethora of theories results in poor implementation.

Regardless of excuses, **managers have to internalize that employee performance, productivity, and retention are all depending notably on their ability to motivate** (Balk, 1974, p.320; Bowey, 2005, p.20). This holds true both for the private and the public sector. Yet, it takes more importance in the public sphere, as the performance of governments and their administrations affect our society much more than any other private sector organization (Wright, 2001, p. 580).

Furthermore, the need to get "more for less" and operate at the highest levels of productivity and effectiveness has long been a major issue within public sector organizations (Perry/Porter, 1982, p.89). However, the latest financial crisis presents governments an unprecedented challenge. As aptly put by Public Affairs Ireland (2010): "*Not only has the recession increased the demands on public services, but it has done so at a time when the collapse in taxation revenues has led to a major retraction in funding of public services*" (p.2). And so, with fewer resources and higher levels of demand, public employees are called to arms. Thus, public organization leaders must keep employees totally motivated and committed, if they are to achieve their ambitious task (Bright, 2009, p.15).

However, motivating public employees is easier said than done. There are at least five major factors that can hamper motivational efforts. First, public sector employees

have a reputation for being lazy and lethargic (Wilson, 1989, p.xviii; Wright, 2001, p.560). Although I believe it to be greatly exaggerated, as was shown by Frank and Lewis (2004, p.36,43), it may still be true in part. In 2007, Buelens and Van den Broeck proved that public employees work fewer hours and show less commitment to their organization than their counterparts in the private sector (p.68). Does this imply that public sector employees are lazy? Not necessarily, they may simply choose to invest more in their private lives and do not want to join the "rat race" (ibid., p.69). But what it does mean is that public managers have a tough starting point – their window of opportunity to motivate the employee is quite narrow and is limited to relatively short working hours.

Second, public managers often complain they do not have the necessary tools to motivate their staff (Behn, 1995, p.318). On the one hand, they say, they do not have a stick, since it is impossible to fire anyone from the public service. And on the other, they do not have a carrot to offer, as substantial financial rewards are not allowed (ibid.).

Third, public sector organizations are very hierarchical in nature, both in structure and in culture. The result is frustrated front-line employees who rarely get to see the outcomes of their work, which serves top level management and high political echelons. Moreover, hierarchical organizations foster a patronizing management approach in which the worker is coerced, rather than persuaded, to work (MANforum, 2009, p.12). In Germany, for example, 60% of employees claimed to suffer from such an attitude (ibid.).

The three former and somewhat age-old factors are joined by two more recent developments. In the baby boom years, between 1946 and 1964, there was a dramatic rise in the birth rate not only in the United States but world wide. In the US alone 75 million babies were born in that time, 27 million more than in the prior 20 years (Wolf, 1983, p.161). The labor force today, and for the next 5 to 10 years, is dramatically affected by the aging of the baby-boom cohort, who is today between 46 and 64 years old (Toossi, 2005, p.25). For example, in the US the proportion of those 55 years and older in the labor force is expected to rise to 21.2 percent by 2014 (ibid., p.42).

Baby boomers, who work in the public sector, are today in the pinnacle of their career. Yet, precisely at the moment when their career expectations are most intense, the absolute size of the public sector is shrinking due to financial cuts. Rather than expansion of opportunities, the baby boom generation is experiencing bans on promotions, extreme

competition for top positions, and a freeze of wages (Wolf, 1983, p.162). Public employees, who were supposed to be in their highest fertility years, are now doomed for a career gridlock and plateauing. Although the plateauing phenomenon is not new, in the case of the baby boom generation it is greatly exacerbated by the combination of the people boost and the job bust (ibid.). Plateaued employees require special attention from managers and ample portions of motivation.

In Germany the phenomenon of career plateauing is even worse than in the US. Apart from the baby boom effect, Germany suffers from the long-term implications of the re-unification. In the first 4-5 years following Germany's re-unification in 1989, the size of the public sector was increased (Statistische Bundesamt, 2010). Twenty years later, those who were recruited in the beginning of the 1990s expect a substantial career development, at least to the level of a section manager (*Referatsleiter*). But, in today's reality, meeting these expectations is just impossible.

The rise of pension age to 67 even worsens the situation, as the bulge of "re-unification recruits" is expected to accompany us for the next twenty years. Adding that to an already "old" public service (in 2008 the share of German public employees aged 55 or older was 21%, ibid.) and you get a recipe for a motivation catastrophe. Even early retirements are no longer a viable solution due to cutbacks. And in general, the majority of German public employees (64% in 2007) choose to reach the statutory retirement age (ibid.).

The last factor which makes motivation nowadays harder is related to the New Public Management fad. The rise of New Public Management (NPM) has had a tremendous impact on how motivation is perceived by public employees and managers (Vandenabeele, 2007, p.546). NPM advocates proliferated the pay-for-performance (PFP) system in the public sector over the last several years. Poorly implemented, PFP had little significant effect on motivation or performance. But it did manage to crowd out public employees intrinsic motivation and to blur the distinction between public and private sector, insofar as public employees expect today more monetary incentives (Christensen, 2002). Now that eroding revenues have restricted the use of financial rewards, public managers must unwind the system and refocus on non-financial motivators.

After delving into the issue of the importance of motivation, one should not be surprised that Behn (1995) considers the question "*how can public managers motivate public employees to pursue important public purposes with intelligence and energy?*" to be one of the three "Big Questions of Public Management" (p.319). And if recent developments are a clue for the coming future, then motivation will remain a hot topic throughout the next decade.

## IV. Public vs. Private Sector Motivation

The Industrial Revolution and the introduction of mass production factories provided the impetus for the development of motivation, and especially work motivation, theories. The need for businesses to improve work methods, quality, and productivity became salient and propelled studies like those of Frederick Winslow Taylor's "*The Principles of Scientific Management*" in 1911, and Morris Viteles's "*Industrial psychology*" in 1932 (Latham, 2007, pp.11-14). Later theories were no different; the vast majority of them were conceptualized while focusing on the industrial order, i.e. the private sector.

Hence, before we can draw conclusions from the corpus of motivation theory and apply them in the public domain, we must first establish whether or not there are any differences between the motivational bases of behavior in the private and the public sector. If such differences do exist, then we need to clarify whether we can still use "traditional" theories to explain motivation in the public sector or should we turn to public sector specific theories – or perhaps we can even use both.

To answer these questions we need to have a look at the variables that influence motivational behavior. Kurt Lewin summarized the antecedents of behavior in his famous formula: $B = f(P,E)$. That is, behavior is a function of the interaction between person and environment (Miner, 2005, pp.38-39). These two determinants can be further subdivided into many categories. I find it useful to use the following three major categories of variables: (1) *individual characteristics*, (2) *job characteristics*, and (3) *work context* (Perry/Porter, 1982, p.89; Wright, 2001, p.562). The first variable focuses on the employee as such and examines whether public employees are different humans beings, insofar as they have other motives, needs, or morale than their private sector counterparts. The second variable describes aspects of the job or task an employee performs, while the third pertains to the characteristics of the organizational setting in which the employee must perform the work, e.g. the organizational reward system, culture, and atmosphere. If motivation is to be different in the private and public sector, than one or more of these variables must be affected (Perry/Porter, 1982, p.89).

**Individual characteristics**

Research suggests that employees in one organization may differ from employees in another as a result of attraction, selection, and even post-recruitment adaption and attrition processes (Wright, 2001, p.563). Thus, it is plausible to believe that individuals, who opt for the public sector, are stirred by values that cannot be found in the private sector. These values can be a desire to serve the public interest, a wish to have an impact on public affairs, or an interest in achieving social justice (Buelens/Van den Broeck, 2007, p.65). By the same token, private sector employees are likely to pursue their own self-interest and favor market-like incentive mechanisms, such as pay-for-performance.

This assumption stands at the center of Public Service Motivation (PSM) theory. PSM, as will be elaborated in the next chapter, argues that public employees are indeed "unique" human beings, insofar as *they behave differently from their private sector counterparts and are not driven by extrinsic motives alone*" (Anderfuhren-Biget/Varone/Giauque/Ritz, 2010, p.3). Therefore, the question of differences between public and private employees narrows down to whether workers in each of the two sectors are driven more by intrinsic or by extrinsic motivators.

Although the question at hand is now more concrete and lucid, the answer remains vague. Hitherto, research failed to provide a conclusive or consistent support for the assertion that "*employee reward preferences coincide with the function served by the sector in which they are employed*" (Wright, 2003, p.4). To begin with, several studies indicate that compared to private sector employees, public sector employees are less motivated by extrinsic monetary rewards (Frank/Lewis, 2004, p.43; Buelens/Van den Broeck, 2007, p.67). Yet, other studies assert that such differences do not exist, and even if they do, public employees still consider financial incentives to be highly motivating (Wright, 2003, p.4). In fact, recently Weibel, Rost, and Osterloh (2010) showed how the notorious pay-for-performance scheme can successfully boost public personnel efforts, given the right circumstances and proper implementation (p.405).

Inconsistency can also be found with regard to higher-order needs, e.g. achievement, autonomy, self-actualization, and self-development. While some research suggest that public employees value higher-order needs more than their private sector peers (Frank/Lewis, 2004, p.46), other works prove the adverse or find no distinction

(Wright, 2001, p.565; Buelens/Van den Broeck, 2007, p.67). Moreover, studies even disagree whether public sector classic values, such as helping the other and benefiting society, are more predominant in public or private employees (Wright, 2003, p.4).

However, there is agreement that in both sectors interesting jobs, which allow helping others, motivate employees to put in extra effort on the job (Frank/Lewis, 2004, p.46). It is also largely accepted that public sector employees, who clearly show affection for public sector values (i.e. have PSM), place more value on intrinsic nonmonetary opportunities than on extrinsic rewards (Perry/Wise, 1990, p.371; Bright, 2009, p.29).

In sum, attempts to establish a clear relationship between employee characteristics and sector employment have produced mixed results. Furthermore, although PSM has been proven to be a strong predictor of work motivation and of a desire for non-utilitarian incentives (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010, p.20), public managers should not presuppose that all their employees desire only nonmonetary incentives (Bright, 2009, p.30). Therefore, the first variable – *individual characteristics* – does not rule out using "traditional" motivation theories in the public sphere.

**Job characteristics**

Research has conjectured that what a person does at work, i.e. the nature of the job or fulfilled tasks, can influence work motivation (Wright, 2001, p.574). In other words, it is not the sector itself that determines motivational patterns, but rather the content and type of the performed tasks (Buelens/Van den Broeck, 2007, p.68). For example, job characteristics like *routineness* and *job specificity* have been found to affect the level of work motivation (ibid.; Wright/Davis, 2003, p.73). *Routineness* concerns the degree to which employee's daily tasks are varied and provide opportunities for new experiences; and *Job specificity* deals with the clarity of the assigned tasks, their success indicators, and relative importance. In general, studies report that jobs, which are routine or have unclear tasks and goals, have a negative effect on work motivation (Buelens/Van den Broeck, 2007, p.68).

The public sector, as a service provider, is mainly associated with administrative work, while the private sector is characterized by manufacturing, marketing and sales functions (ibid.). And since administrative work is often bureaucratic, tedious, inappreciable, and not appealing, it may be the basis for sector differences.

Organizational goals can also contribute to the distinction, as public organizations usually pursue particularly diffuse and intangible goals compared to those of private business firms and they more often have multiple and conflicting goals (Perry/Porter, 1982, p.91; Rainey, 2009, p.149), such as promoting a clean environment on the one hand, and encouraging financial growth on the other.

Studies that tried to track job characteristics differences have produced mixed findings (Wright, 2001, p.568). For instance, Buelens and Van den Broeck (2007) found that although administrative jobs hold low motivating potential in both sector, public administrators were significantly less motivated (pp.68-69). Contrarily, a survey that compared executive students from the public and private sector reported that public employees, more than their private counterparts, thought that their jobs were motivating and provided them with great opportunities and worthwhile accomplishments (Wright, 2001, p.568).

Scholars debate also the role of personal and organizational goals in creating sector differences. Rainey (2009), for example, found no differences in the attitudes of public and private sector employees toward organizational goals (p.307). Wright, on the other hand, suggested in 2004 that the nature of organizational goals has a detrimental effect on work motivation, which, in turn, reinforces sector differences (p.73).

With all these inconsistencies in mind, I find that more than the studies provide any evidence that job characteristics differ as a function of sector, they underline the importance of job characteristics as an antecedent of motivation. Hence, "traditional" theories that incorporate job characteristics (like *Job design*) should and must be used to explain motivation in the public sector.

**Work context**

The work context of public sector organizations is perceived to be fundamentally different from that of private sector organizations (Wright, 2001, p.566). Yet, only a scanty number of studies compare the impact of work context on sector differences (ibid. p.574; Buelens/Van den Broeck, 2007, p.66). Work context involves matters that are both in the immediate and extended environment of the employee (Perry/Porter, 1982, p.91). Immediate surrounding pertains to employee's peer group, supervisor, and the desire to

work in a friendly and respectful atmosphere. The extended environment includes elements of job security and stability, and type of organizational reward system.

Public sector employees are generally assumed to favor people-oriented leadership style more than do private employees (Buelens/Van den Broeck, 2007, p.66). They are also believed to consider their peers and supervisors significantly more important (ibid.) In addition, Jurkiewicz et al. (1998) found that public employees are first and foremost motivated by job security and stability, while private employees' number one motivational factor was high salary (p.243). In a 2007 study, Buelens and Van den Broeck reaffirmed these statements and concluded that "*public sector workers* [*are*] *more strongly motivated by the desire to work in a supportive working environment*" (p.68).

Wright (2001) pointed out that public sector employees perceive a weaker relationship between organizational rewards, such as pay and job security, and performance than do private sector employees (p.567). He also stressed that oftentimes the atmosphere in public organizations impedes workers' motivation for action, since they are afraid to do wrong (ibid.).

While these few studies appear to validate the influence of the work context on motivation levels in each of the two sectors, I believe they also emphasize the necessity to use "traditional" theories that highlight the role of supportive environment (e.g. *Job design*) and performance-reward relationship (e.g. *VIE theory*) as motivational factors.

**Conclusion**

The debate over whether there are similarities or differences between employee motivation in the private and the public sector seems to remain controversial. Rainey (2009) suggests that "*both sides are right*", i.e. the public sector does often present "*unique challenges in motivating employees*", but this should not prevent public managers from applying "*a great deal from the general motivation literature*" (p.246). Thus, "*The challenge*", according to Rainey, "*is to draw from the ideas and insights in the literature while taking into consideration the public sector context*" (ibid.).

Moreover, Wright (2001) asserts that the public sector does not need to have its own theories of human motivation. In his view, "*a general theory of organizational behavior should be able to incorporate, if not account for, meaningful differences across*

*sectors*". However, he agrees that sector differences, if they exist, have "*important implications for the application or interpretation of any theory used to describe and improve work motivation in the public sector*" (p.563).

Durant, Kramer, Perry, Mesch, and Paarlberg (2006) reached the same conclusion as Rainey (2009) and Wright (2001). In an essay that reviews and summarizes over 2,600 research articles about ways to motivate human performance, they infer that "*social science theories underlying traditional motivational programs are sufficiently robust to be used as heuristics for designing new programs for a transformed public sector*" (p.511).

What is more, research shows that the amount of attention that is paid to sector differences as a determinant of work motivation is unwarranted. Buelens and Van den Broeck (2007) proved that factors like gender, age, and education are at least as important as sector of employment in explaining motivational differences (p.68). They also found that hierarchical level is the most important factor in explaining differences in motivation (ibid.). Jurkiewicz et al. (1998) also found hierarchy to be more significant than sector of employment (p.247).

Altogether, studies confirm what we already know about motivation – it is an *individual* phenomenon. Therefore, as a first step, managers should refrain from classifying employees and must start treating them as individuals. That is, managers should tailor each and every employee his/her own motivational strategy according to the needs and desires of the employee (Bright, 2009, p.30). And while doing so, managers can draw ideas from both "traditional" as well as new (e.g. PSM) motivation theories.

# V. Motivation Theories and Factors

As was mentioned in the previous chapters, research is rich in theories pertaining to motivation. Since it is impossible to cover all of them, this chapter reviews only the most prominent theories of motivation – those which appear repeatedly in organizational behavior books. The theories are classified into two groups: need theories and cognitive theories. Need theories, also known as content theories, are concerned with analyzing the needs and motives that affect human's motivation. Cognitive theories, which are also called process theories, concentrate on the psychological and behavioral processes behind motivation (Rainey, 2009, p.274). Two additional and exceptional theories are presented: one is a technique theory and the other deals solely with public employees' motivation.

While reviewing the different theories, a special focus is given to motivational factors that are directly mentioned or alluded to by the theories. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to summarize and analyze the gleaned factors, which in the next chapter will serve as the basis for the development of motivational tactics.

## *Need Theories*

Early theories of motivation, mainly conceptualized during the 1950s, explain motivation in terms of the satisfaction of basic human needs (Greenberg/Baron, 2003, p.192). That is to say, a core set of needs provides the motive force for people's actions (Dunford, 1992, p.75). Although heavily attacked and questioned during the years, need-theories are probably "*the best-known explanation for employee motivation*" (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.209). I will describe five such theories, which also often receive the title "person as machine" theories, since their premise is that motivation is largely an automatic, mechanical, and unconscious response to internal human needs (Landy/Coote, 2010, p.369).

Abraham Maslow's (1943) ***hierarchy of needs*** theorizes the existence of five sets of innate drives/needs, which are arranged in a hierarchy of prepotency, i.e. a high order need will become dominant only after lower level needs are satisfied (p.375). Maslow's five level needs, in ascending order, are *physiological* (e.g. hunger, thirst, sex), *safety* (the

desire not to feel endangered and wish for a physically and emotionally secure environment), *love* (the "*hunger for affectionate relations with people*" and belongingness), *esteem* (the longing for self-respect, strength, achievement, reputation, recognition by others and appreciation), and the need for *self-actualization*, which is the aspiration "*to become everything that one is capable of becoming*" (ibid. pp.372-382).

Maslow's model is highly seductive, thanks to its sheer simplicity and ability to provide an easy understanding of a complex matter (Dunford, 1992, p.76). Yet, the theory was never validated, despite a continuous effort in a plethora of experiments and researches held during the past 60 years. Therefore, Watson (1986) argues the theory is "*next to useless*", albeit he admits it served as a good "*propaganda*" that altered the "*way managers think about their employees*" (pp.107-110).

Addressing the deficiencies of Maslow's work, Clayton Alderfer (1969) formalized a spinoff of the hierarchy of needs. His approach, known as **ERG theory**, clusters Maslow's five needs into three groups: *Existence* (which corresponds to Maslow's physiological and safety needs), *Relatedness* (similar to the love need), and *Growth* (parallel to the esteem and self-actualization needs) (pp.146-147). Unlike Maslow, Alderfer thought that an individual could focus on all three groups simultaneously without any specific order (Greenberg/Baron, 2003, pp.194-195; Robbins/Judge, 2008, pp.210-211). Despite Alderfer's changes, ERG theory has not received much more empirical support than Maslow's work (Dunford, 1992, p.78).

Maslow and Alderfer have been harshly criticized, but their theories remain valuable insofar as they suggest specific ways to motivate employees (Greenberg/Baron, 2003, p.195). For example, Van Wart (2008) infers from Maslow that managers should use **recognition** and **rewarding** to enhance lower-end needs, and inspiring techniques, such as the encouragement of **relatedness/commitment** feelings, to meet higher-end needs (pp.217-218). Following Van Wart's definitions, hereinafter, by recognition I mean intangible incentives such as showing appreciation (e.g. a good word) and providing praise (e.g. a trophy). And by rewarding I refer to tangible incentives such as promotions, perks, provision of additional responsibility, and so forth (ibid.).

Mitchell (1982) also recommends that organizations pay more attention to upper level needs and fulfill them through systems emphasizing **autonomy** and recognition

(p.84). Meaningful work is also a motivator according to Behn (1995, p.319). And as Chalofsky and Krishna (2009, p.197) explain – "*Meaningful work is not just about the meaning of the paid work we perform; it is about the way we live our lives. It is the alignment of purpose, values, and the relationships and activities we pursue in life*", thus, it includes the need to maintain a proper **work-life balance**.

Kumar and Sharma (2001) add some more motivation factors and say that "*doing something worthwhile*", that is an **important work** can satisfy the need for self-esteem (p.618). Furthermore, they interpret the love need as humans' predilection for a "*conversation, sociability, exchange of feelings and grievances*" (ibid.), hence, the necessity for good **interpersonal relationships** in the workplace.

In 1960, the Maslovian needs hierarchy was expanded by Douglas McGregor into the interface of management and motivation (Dunford, 1992, p.77). In his work, labeled ***Theory X and Theory Y***, McGregor argues that two approaches dominate managers' attitude toward their employees. They either believe that employees inherently dislike work and thus should be coerced into performing it (Theory X), or they assume that employees grasp work as a natural part of life and thus can enjoy it and even seek for responsibility (Theory Y) (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.211). Critics such as Watson (1986) do not believe that McGregor's work holds water and consider it to be "*grandiose claims and vast generalisations*" (p.111). Though Watson does think that managers can find in this theory a useful service if they begin to think how to motivate employees (ibid.).

Loyal to his Theory Y concept, McGregor recommended that managers promote employee **participation** in decision-making, provision **responsibility**, create **challenging** jobs, and maintain good **interpersonal relationships** in the group (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.211). According to Bruce and Pepitone (1998), Theory Y also implies that "**recognition** *and self-fulfillment are as important as money*" (p.13). Meaningful work and **Work-Life-Balance** are another outcome of Theory Y (Behn, 1995, p.319).

Like McGregor, Frederick Herzberg followed the "*humanistic path laid down by Maslow*" (Watson, 1986, p.111). He developed the ***two-factor theory***, which suggests that there are only two basic sets of needs, not five (Landy/Coote, 2010, p.371). Moreover, Herzberg (1968) differentiated between the two needs/factors and asserted that one set

promotes "*job satisfaction (and motivation)*", thus named *motivator factors*, whereas the other only prevents job dissatisfaction, thus named *hygiene factors* (p.91). Herzberg thought that hygiene needs (parallel to Maslow's physiological and safety needs) stem from "*mankind's animal nature...to avoid pain from the environment*", hence in the workplace we look for job security, good **working environment**, **fairness** of company policy and administration, and **interpersonal relationships** (pp.91-92).

Yet, according to Herzberg meeting hygiene factors would only eliminate dissatisfaction, but would not result in actual motivation. This can be achieved only by fulfilling motivator factors, such as **recognition**, **achievement**, the work itself (i.e. **meaningful, interesting,** and **important work**), **responsibility**, and **growth** or **advancement** (ibid.).

Detractors of the two-factor theory question the reliability of Herzberg's methodology. But regardless of this admissible criticism, Herzberg's work had major effect over generations of managers (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.214) and majorly influenced the development of the more valid theory of job redesign/enrichment (Miner, 2005, p.65). Although the latter, which was conceptualized by Hackman and Oldham, do not have its origins in motivation-hygiene theory.

Among the group of need theories the most supported one is David McClelland's *theory of needs*. Too bad it is also the least applicable one (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.214). McClelland specified three needs: the *need for achievement* (nAch), which is the drive for accomplishments; the *need for power* (nPow), which is the desire to influence; and the *need for affiliation* (nAff), which is the wish for friendships (ibid.). Of the three needs, McClelland focused on nAch. He said that high achievers are strongly motivated by **interpersonal relationships**, **responsibility**, **feedback**, and **goal setting**. (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.215; Dunford, 1992, p.79). Unfortunately, McClelland also said that the three needs are subconscious and can only be revealed by the use of expensive, time consuming psychological evaluations, thus making the theory impractical for daily use (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.215).

The approaches to motivation hitherto discussed share the notion that innate needs drive human behavior. Figure 2 summarizes the similarities between the five theories (Dunford, 1992, p.81). However, today there is little enthusiasm for approaches that

attribute human beings solely a mechanical behavior excluding the process aspect of motivation. That is, acknowledging the capacity of individuals to gather and analyze information and make rational decisions. Motivation theories that take this process into account are called *cognitive theories*, or "person as scientist" theories, because they emphasize not only humans' needs, but also the way people choose to satisfy them. And the way is no less important than the need itself.

| Maslow | Alderfer | McGregor | Herzberg | McClelland |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| self-actualization | | | | Achievement |
| | Growth | Theory Y | Motivators | |
| Esteem | | | | Power |
| Belongingness | Relatedness | | | Affiliation |
| safety | | | Hygiene | |
| | Existence | Theory X | | |
| physiological | | | | |

Figure 2: Similarities between need-theories (Dunford, 1992, p.81)

### Cognitive theories

VIE Theory

Instead of focusing merely on individual needs, **VIE (Valence, Instrumentality, Expectancy) theory** looks at the role of motivation in the overall work environment. The theory, which was conceived by Victor Vroom, argues that people are motivated to work when they believe that their efforts in the workplace will result in a desired outcome. Vroom assumed this belief is threefold (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.231):

1. *Expectancy*: one's expectation that exerting a given amount of effort will lead to good performance;

2. *Instrumentality*: individual's confidence that good performance will be rewarded; and

3. *Valence*: the belief that the offered reward/outcome will satisfy a desirable need or wish of the individual.

The motivational effect will then depend on the combination of these three beliefs, i.e. the level of confidence one has in the fulfillment of all three stages (see

Figure 3). With that in mind, Greenberg and Baron (2003) suggest that managers strengthen the linkage between employees' expectations and actual result. In congruence with the three stages of VIE theory, they first call employers to enhance the possibility that employees' efforts will lead to good performance. This can be achieved by taking care of staff **growth and advancement**, or more specifically by **training**. Second, they recommend managers to administer a **rewarding** and **recognition** system which is directly linked to performance. And third, this system should be flexible to ensure that it is "*positively valent to employees*" (pp.209-210).
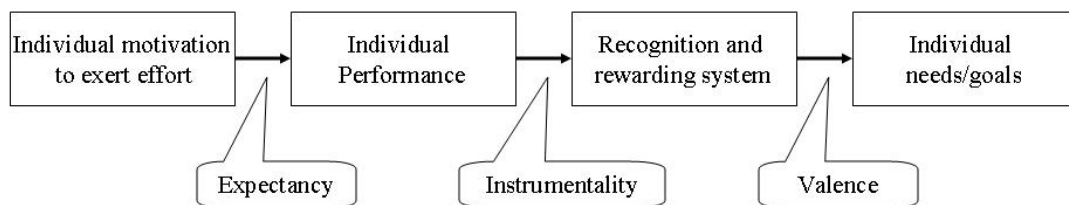


Figure 3: The three drivers of motivation according to VIE theory (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.231)

Furthermore, Wright (2001) believes that especially in the public sector employees tend to perceive low level of instrumentality, i.e. weak relationship between rewards and performance. For that reason, he urges public managers to emphasize the mission valence and the **task importance** that are associated with the work in public sector (p.581).

The main deficit of Vroom's theory is that it gives the impression that people act on a rational basis after assessing the situation and the potential outcomes. Only in real life seldom do people hold complicated calculations as VIE theory suggests (Dunford, 1992, p.86). More often humans make decisions with limited rationality and let emotions play a significant role in their decisions (Landy/Coote, 2010, p.364)

Equity Theory

J. Stacy Adam's *equity theory* is based on the assumption that employees' motivation to work is influenced by their perception of the degree of equity/justice in the organization (Dunford, 1992, p.83). According to Adam, employees constantly think about their inputs to the job (e.g. effort, experience, education) and their outcomes (e.g.

salary, promotions, prizes). Then, they make an output-to-input ratio and compare it to the perceived ratio of their friends and coworkers (Robbins/Judge, 2008, pp.226-227). If the "comparison" of the ratios shows identical results, employees are motivated and keep on with their jobs. But, if it shows that others gain more or sometimes even less, a tension is created and subsequent actions to relive that tension will be taken (Landy/Coote, 2010, p.375). For example, an employee who sees his "equal-to-him/her" coworker being promoted over him/her will be demotivated to put effort on the job, since he/she needs to readjust the output-to-input ratio.

Further developments of Adam's theory recognize that employees seek equity and fairness not only when it comes to their outcomes but also on-the-way to get there. That is, people are motivated when decision-making procedures are done in a fair manner (Greenberg/Baron, 2003, p.204). More so, when making judgments about fairness, employees take into account also "*the dignity and respect demonstrated in the course of presenting an undesirable outcome*" (ibid. p.205).

Unfairness feelings should not be underestimated. They were most frequently reported as a source of job dissatisfaction in Herzberg's research (Miner, 2005, p.135). Therefore, Greenberg and Baron (2003) conclude that managers should demonstrate **fairness** with all their employees as well as nurture good **interpersonal relationships** (pp.205-206). Though validation of the theory has been generally affirmative, experts stress that the relevance of the theory may change from culture to culture. For instance, there are more chances that the theory would fit an individualistic society rather than a collectivist one (Landy/Coote, 2010, p.376).

Goal Setting

*Goal-setting theory*, formalized by Edwin Locke and Gary Latham, is most likely the most researched, dominant, and validated theory of employee motivation (Durant et al., 2006, p.509). The theory claims that specific and difficult yet attainable goals, along with **feedback**, motivate and lead to high performance more than vague goals such as the exhortation to "do your best" (Locke/Latham, 2002, p.706).

However, high performance will be achieved only if the employee accepted the goal as his/her target. Therefore, it is recommended that employees **participate** in the process of **goal-setting**. Though, goals assigned by superiors may also achieve high

result when given to employees who are "*already intrinsically motivated and who thus find the assigned goals less onerous*" (Miner, 2005, p.172). **Important** goals can also regulate individuals' motivation and behavior (Wright, 2001, p.560).

Most often difficult goals indeed motivate employees, but sometimes they may also be seen overwhelming and intimidating, causing employees to feel unconfident of their possibility to accomplish a goal. Hence, it is vital to increase employees' belief in their capacity to perform a task or to reach a specific goal. Albert Bandura coined this belief as *self-efficacy* (Landy/Coote, 2010, p.383). Self-efficacy has been shown to play a critical role in the enhancement of performance in the public sector and in the reduction of absenteeism among public employees (Wright, 2001, p.578).

As figure 4 exhibits, goal-setting theory and self-efficacy do not compete with one another but rather complement each other (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.223). And they both suggest that adequate training can ensure goal achievement (Locke/Latham, 2002, p.708).
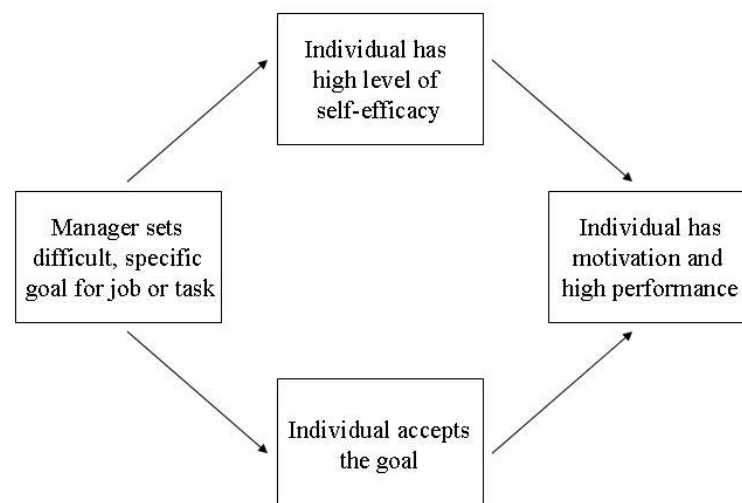


Figure 4: The joint effects of goal-setting and self-efficacy (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.223)

Despite being the most promising theory of work motivation, surveys show that goal-setting is rarely used as a mean for motivation (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.221). The vast majority of interviewees for this Master thesis argued that goal-setting is not applicable in the public sector, due to the dynamics and lack of financial incentives that characterize the work in the public arena. This, in contrast to theorists (Perry/Porter,

1982; Wright, 2001; Durant et al., 2006) who strongly call for the use of goal-setting in the public sector.

*Technique Theory – Job Design*

Based in part on need-theories, researchers have proposed that jobs that satisfy higher-order needs, such as self-actualization and personal growth-need, are capable of motivating employees (Landy/Coote, 2010, p.399). This approach, which is known as *job enrichment*, include elements that afford employees a sense of **challenge** or accomplishment (Durant et al., 2006, p.507), thus countering feelings of routine and tedious work.

Hackman and Oldham (1980) developed a **job characteristic model** that identifies how jobs can be enriched to help people feel more motivated. The model, as seen in figure 5, suggests that five *core job characteristics* foster three *critical psychological states* that, in turn, lead to high internal work motivation (pp.75-83).
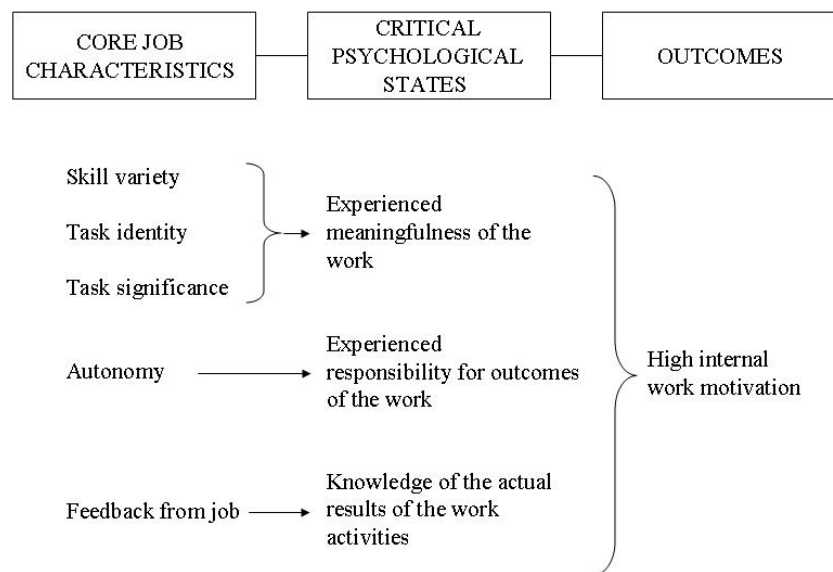


Figure 5: The job characteristic model (Hackman and Oldham, 1980, p.77)

The first three job characteristics are *skill variety* - the degree to which a job requires the use of a multitude of skills; *task identity* - the extent to which a task requires that one individual will perform it from beginning to end; and *task significance* - the level

of impact a job has over the lives of people inside and outside the organization. Tasks that fulfill these three criteria contribute substantially to employees' perception of their work as meaningful, **important**, and valuable (ibid. pp 78-79).

The fourth job characteristic, *autonomy*, refers to the degree to which employees have freedom, independence, and discretion to plan, schedule, and do their work. According to Hackman and Oldham (ibid. p.79), high level of autonomy nurtures a self-**responsibility**, since employees then view their work outcomes as directly linked to their own efforts. The last job characteristic is ***feedback***, which helps employees understand the results of their work. Therefore, high degree of direct and clear feedback about the effectiveness of ones work can help direct efforts in the right way (ibid. p.80).

In the past, research has been quite skeptic whether the job characteristic model applies in the public sector (Wright, 2001, pp.574-575). Yet, more recent works strongly advocate its practicability as a mean to reduce turnover and absenteeism as well as a way to increase job satisfaction, organizational **relatedness**, and productivity (Durant et al., 2006, p.508). Job design is, therefore, a very lucrative theory for the public manager. But, it has its own limitations – it can only motivate employees who have high growth needs, i.e. they want to be given more tasks and responsibility, and at the same time they have the knowledge and skills to tackle new assignments (Hackman and Oldham, 1980, pp.82-85). Though, the lack of competencies can be overcome by proper education and **training** (Hackman, 1987, p. 326).

### *Public Service Motivation (PSM) Theory*

The ***Public Service Motivation theory*** postulates that public employees are unique and differ from their private sector counterparts insofar as they are driven primarily by intrinsic motives rather than extrinsic ones, such as financial rewards (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010, p.3). The idea of PSM was developed in response to the rise of the New Public Management movement since the beginning of the 1980s, which calls for the introduction of market-style mechanisms like performance-related pay into the public sphere (Perry/Wise, 1990, p.367; Perry/Hondeghem, 2008, p.1). NPM proponents believe that public employees are motivated by their own self-interests, and

thus their behavior should be controlled by extrinsic incentives (Perry/Wise, 1990, p.367).

PSM, on the other hand, posits that public servants are driven by higher-order needs and have a zeal for serving the general public good. Therefore, Le Grand (2006) names the former "*knaves*", whereas the latter he calls "*knights*" (p.2). Several attempts have been made in the past to define PSM (e.g. Perry/Wise, 1990, p.368; Vandenabeele, 2007, p.547), yet most of them were quite obscure. Lately, Perry and Hondeghem (2008) offered a simple definition, which claims that PSM focuses on "*motives and action in the public domain that are intended to do good for others and shape the well-being of society*" (p.3).

Perry and Wise (1990, pp.368-370) recognize three categories of PSM:

1. *Rational* – individual's involvement in the public sector is grounded in a wish for utility maximization. For instance, attraction to public policy making.

2. *Norm-Based* – involvement is generated by efforts to conform norms, e.g. the desire to serve the public or self-commitment to reach social equity.

3. *Affective* – involvement is triggered by emotional responses to social contexts. That can be compassion or self-sacrifice/altruism.

All three categories have been proven to have motivational influence on public employees (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010, p.14). In part, this can be explained by a self-selection process that helps endow public organizations with a high PSM workforce (Gailmard, 2010, p.36). The growing evidence of the existence of PSM has led Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem (2008) to develop strategies that reinforce individuals' PSM behavior (pp.268-269). These strategies "*incorporate public service values across all levels of the organization's management system*" (ibid. p.268). That is, the work of Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem actually ascribe PSM-oriented tools to traditional motivational factors. For that reason, I prefer not to assign PSM theory a new motivational factor, but rather use existing factors, which help to harness in practice the positive effects of PSM.

Drawing, then, on Paarlberg, Perry, and Hondeghem's strategies, PSM supports the use of **training**, **feedback**, **important work**, **goal-setting**, **participation**,

**interpersonal relationships**, **relatedness**, and **rewarding** as motivational factors (ibid. pp.271-279) Furthermore, alongside PSM, **recognition** has been shown to be a strong motivator in the public sector (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010, p.20).

*The Factors*

The review of theories has revealed different approaches to work motivation and a variety of recommended motivational factors. Figure 6 presents the list of 14 motivational factors that were aggregated as well as their distribution among the theories.

Figure 6: Motivational factors and their distribution among motivation theories

The distribution table should not lead one into the conclusion that factors that quantitatively dominate the chart are more salient than others. For example, *important work* and *goal-setting*, which appear six times each, are not necessarily more prominent than *interesting work* and *fairness*. As the theories differ in quality and validity, any attempt to draw conclusions from the table may mislead the reader. Therefore, figure 6 should serve only as a plain, easy-to-read map of the various theories and motivational factors and no more than that.

The 14 selected factors are not carved in stone. The literature is affluent with suggestions for potential motivational factors (e.g. Perry/Porter, 1982; Jurkiewicz et al., 1998; Durant et al., 2006). Yet, my choice was to focus on those that are directly mentioned or alluded to by the theories. By the same token, factors could have been labeled and clustered differently, though I find the current division useful and at times also unavoidable. Thus, some of the factors are self-explanatory, while others require clarification:

1. *Recognition* vs. *Feedback* – It was mentioned above that recognition deals with intangible incentives such as the show of appreciation in the form of a pat on the back or a good word, or the provision of praises like trophies, thank you letters, and plaques. Recognition always has a positive connotation and it acknowledges good behavior or actions. Feedback, on the other hand, can also address poor performance and has a more formal and structured nature than recognition.

2. *Growth, Career Development, and Training* – some motivation theories suggest that training can serve as a motivator. Others encourage offering career perspectives. The rationale behind these recommendations may be different, but foremost it is rooted in human's growth-need. For that reason, I decided to group all three as one motivational factor, though in the tactics chapter *career development* and *training* will be treated separately.

3. *Relatedness/Commitment* – these two underpin belongingness feelings that bring employees to undertake actions for the sake of the group or organization regardless of personal benefit. Van Wart (2008) calls this factor "*inspiring*" (p.218).

4. *Participation vs. Responsibility/Autonomy* – participation involves consulting with people on work-related matters and allowing lower level employees to actively take part in managers' decision-making process. By contrast, *responsibility/autonomy* refers to freedom that managers delegate to their subordinates in the process of carrying out their tasks. That is, managers define what needs to be done (the "what") and entrust their workers with the ability to come-up with their own implementation plan (the "how").

5. *Achievement/Challenge/Goal*-setting – a number of theories assert the importance of the sense of success or achievement as a behavioral driver. Others emphasize the necessity of challenge in the workplace and the benefits of clear goals. I hold up the opinion that these three elements are interrelated in a causal relationship – goal-setting serves as a mean for creating a challenging job that, in turn, promotes feelings of achievement upon task accomplishment. Hence, they are grouped together.

6. *Working Environment vs. Interpersonal Relationships vs. Fairness* – Working environment in some textbooks and articles is regarded as an employee's entire surrounding in the workplace (e.g. Perry/Porter, 1982, p.91). However, I believe it is conducive to divide this criterion into three: *working environment*, which refers to *physical* conditions in the

organization, such as the availability of clean lavatories; *interpersonal relationships*, which refers to the *atmosphere* in the organization, e.g. personal friendships; and *fairness*, which deals with *processes* in the organization, i.e. how people are being treated and organizational rules of conduct are administered.

My selection of factors is buttressed by the result of a survey among EMPM students at the Hertie School of Governance (HSoG). In an exercise during a Human Resource Management course, students were asked to note their 5 most relevant motivational factors. As can be seen in figure 7, the result indicates 15 factors (my 14 plus *superior characteristics*), which are ranked according to their popularity among the students.

More affirmation comes from a survey that was held in the public service of Vienna. This research specified four motivational factors as the most important ones for public employees: *job security*, *interesting work*, *autonomy*, and *work-life-balance* (Egger-Peitler/Hammerschmid/Meyer, 2007, pp.33-34). Three of these factors are included in my list. *Job security* is not mentioned, since managers cannot directly influence this factor, thus there is little point to talk about developing tactics that help foster job security.

Figure 7: Results from an EMPM student survey in HSoG (n=23)


Egger-Peitler, Hammerschmid and Meyer work (ibid.) highlights the fact that some of the motivational factors are intrinsic in nature, whereas others stimulate extrinsic motivation. Applying this grouping method to the 14 factors gives the following division:

1. Intrinsic – relatedness/commitment, achievement/challenge/goal-setting, responsibility/autonomy, growth (training), interesting work, important work, participation, fairness, work-life balance.
2. Extrinsic – rewarding, recognition, feedback, interpersonal relationships, growth (career advancement), working environment.

It is no surprise that intrinsic factors outnumber extrinsic ones. As was discussed in previous chapters, at the end of the day motivation is an internal process that directs behavior. Thus, the more individuals are intrinsically interested in the goals they pursuit,

the more they are likely to attain these goals. Moreover, these "intrinsically motivated" people will be happy even if they do not attain the goals, because they also take pleasure from the process of striving toward them (Robbins/Judge, 2008, p.218).

Albeit extrinsic motivation may now seem pale and impoverished, often a time this is the type of motivation that managers meet in the workplace. Moreover, extrinsic motivation should not be equated with poor results (Ryan/Deci, 2000, p.55). For whatever reason employees are motivated, they can deliver good performance (Frey/Osterloh, 2002, pp.21-23). Therefore, in the next chapter tactics will be suggested to all 14 motivational factors, intrinsic and extrinsic.

# VI. From Theory to Practice

In the previous chapter, 14 motivational factors were gleaned from 9 motivation theories. Though these factors move us one step forward toward real-life practice, they are too broad and abstract. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to translate each of the factors into concrete and practical tactics that can be employed by public managers.

The recommended tactics are based on public sector motivation literature, a set of 10 interviews conducted with managers, who have current or past experience in the German public service, and my own experience as a public manager. I believe this method assures that all selected tactics are implementable in the public domain. Tactics are also generic in fashion to allow their adaptability to a range of public organization settings and civil-service laws.

The chapter is structured in a way that each factor is attributed with its own tactics. Tactics are preceded with explanations and then they are expressed in one simple sentence. Some tactics can foster more than one factor, yet for the sake of simplicity they are mentioned only once, and their multipurpose feature is mentioned in the explanation part (by italic and bold letters). At times, tactics may seem to the reader to be obvious or too simplistic. Yet, it is amazing to find out that even the clearest tactics, are not always practiced. And yes, tactics are intentionally simplistic, because motivation in practice is not so complicated; it is the collection of little steps that are in reach of every public manager.

Ending the chapter is a short example how several of the tactics can address a specific public sector motivation problem. The case of plateaued employees is presented and a motivational strategy to tackle the problem is offered.

Finally, it should be noted that all interviews for this chapter were held as background talks, and thus quotes are brought without any direct reference to the interviewee (using italic letters between quotation marks). A list of the interviewees and a full summary of the interviews are in the possession of the author of this thesis.

*Rewarding*

Rewarding concerns tangible incentives such as promotions, increases in pay, increased discretion, superior work assignments, provision of additional responsibility, and so forth (Van Wart, 2008, p.218). A Reward does not necessarily have to be a pecuniary one. Money is always nice, but money is not always available, and may also not be an employee's prime motivator (ibid., p.220). Therefore, the first task of a manager is to find out what motivates his/her employees and make a match between employee's desires and the offered reward (Greenberg/Baron, 2003, p.209).

**Tactic 1**: *Administer rewards that are positively valent to employees*

While offering rewards, as well as ***recognition***, managers should make sure they do not demotivate unrewarded employees. Therefore, it is important to keep a sense of ***fairness*** in the process by basing rewards and recognitions on clear guidelines and by linking them to employee performance. Only then will the rewards and recognitions achieve their full motivational capacity on the one hand, and prevent grievance on the other. Moreover, a direct behavior-reward relationship will actively motivate employees to exert effort on the job.

**Tactic 2**: *Rewards should be closely tied to behavior and performance*

It is especially important to have a sound behavior-reward linkage when the rewards include promotion or financial bonuses. This can be realized by using a performance appraisal system. However, such a system is often extremely bureaucratic and includes a great amount of paper work as well as in-depth and time consuming appraisal talks. Let alone the fact that the time period of performance appraisals is characterized by employee anxiety and tension in the office. Hence, the recommendation is to offer rewards only once a year and in proximity to employee appraisals.

**Tactic 3**: *Rewards should be offered in conjunction with annual appraisals*

Rewards and ***recognitions*** serve as a mean to direct behavior, thus managers should make sure it is the right one. This can be achieved by designing the awarding criteria inline with goals and values that the organization wishes to foster, such as camaraderie or altruism.

**Tactic 4**: *Rewards' criteria should reflect organizational goals*

The success of a Pay-For-Performance (PFP) system in the public sector has long been questioned and debated. In general, PFP has a reputation to have little positive impact on public employee motivation and performance (Durant et al, 2006, p.507). Furthermore, and worse, PFP is likely to crowd out intrinsic motivation (Paarlberg/Perry/Hondeghem, 2008, p.279) and blur the motivational distinction between public and private sector employees by emphasizing monetary incentives (Christensen, 2002). Therefore, most public mangers oppose a PFP system and make statements like "*financial benefits cause more frustration than motivation*" and "*monetary bonuses do not motivate – once the cake has been eaten, it's not motivating anymore – and the majority of public employees have a fair income, so there's no real need for a bonus*".

Yet, PFP is often unsuccessful because of inadequate implementation, e.g. lack of sufficient funding and a weak pay-performance relationship. Therefore, managers are called to implement a PFP system only under certain circumstances. Weibel et al. (2010) find that PFP can successfully motivate public employees who are less likely to find their work interesting. Low level employees of public administration often find their job not intrinsically rewarding, and in that case PFP can augment extrinsic motivation without endangering a great amount of intrinsic motivation. These types of jobs are usually also easier to measure, and thus a pay-for-outcome mechanism can be established (p.405).

**Tactic 5**: *Establish pay-for-performance only under specific circumstances*

### *Recognition*

Recognition pertains to both informal and formal intangible incentives that show appreciation and provide praise. Recognition always has a positive connotation and it acknowledges good behavior or actions. Recognition generally costs nothing and is immensely motivating, yet is underutilized (Van Wart, 2008, p.217). For example, managers can intersperse informal recognition while managing by walking around. They can also offer a good word, a short written comment on a submitted paper, a celebration toast, a pat on the back, or just a warm handshake.

**Tactic 6**: *Provide informal recognition, it costs nothing*

Formal recognition also does not cost a lot, but it requires thought and preparation. Taking the time and putting the thought into preparing the element of

recognition, is sometimes even more appreciated than the element itself. Formal recognition may be letters of appreciation, trophies, or plaques that state the achievement.

**Tactic 7**: *Take the time to prepare formal recognition*

There are two settings to provide recognition: person-to-person and person-to-group. That is, managers can choose whether they want to acknowledge good behavior one-on-one with the employee, or they want to make the achievement public. The latter form can be done by using the internal electronic system, addressing the staff plenum, or by hanging accomplishment posters on the department walls. A public recognition can motivate not only the employee in question, but also his/her colleagues and subordinates.

**Tactic 8**: *Use both person-to-person and person-to-group recognition*

Feeling valued is a fundamental emotional need. Employees in all ranks want to feel valued, yet junior staff members or low-level service providers especially look for a guidance and good word. Furthermore, recognizing one employee is not mutually exclusive to recognizing another. Each one in his/her own time and fashion.

**Tactic 9**: *Recognize as many employees as possible at all levels*

Unlike rewarding, recognition is timeless and should be offered throughout the year, in particularly informal recognition. However, managers should not automatically recognize every behavior (especially not in a formal way), in order not to wear out the effectiveness of the tool and make it be taken for granted.

**Tactic 10**: *Recognize all year long in appropriate intervals*

*Feedback*

Feedback is the way managers continuously shape employee performance. When done correctly, it motivates employees and improves their actions. However, poorly carried out it can achieve adverse results and demotivate employees. Thus, managers should structure feedback in a way that helps the employee to accept the comments. Rather than using criticism and focusing on negative performance, a better strategy is to have the attention on devising methods for future improvements (Lazeby, 2008, p.24). As one interviewee put it "*managers must refrain from shaming employees; it does not make their results better*".

**Tactic 11**: *Focus more on future performance than on past mistakes*

Due to its sensitivity, feedback should not be given offhandedly, but rather after granting a heedful thought to the purpose/content of the feedback as well as the way of delivery. While structuring a feedback, managers should think about at least two concrete cases that support each of the arguments. This will prevent resentment and promote acceptance of the criticism. During the feedback employees should be given the opportunity to reciprocate and self-diagnose their performance (Van Wart, 2008, p.217). Moreover, managers can tremendously benefit if they allow 360-degrees feedback, i.e. they let the employee express his/her own feedback over the manager's performance.

**Tactic 12**: *Be prepared for the feedback and allow employees to respond*

Timely and precise error correction is the key for improvement, and it prevents unsatisfactory practices from becoming routine and fossilizing (ibid.). Managers need to remember that the compromises of today will become the norms of tomorrow.

**Tactic 13**: *Monitor and correct errors on a timely basis*

An employee's appraisal plays a significant role in his/her future in the organization. Hence, it is important that managers document in details all the feedbacks they give to their staff. This can serve later as a reference point in the next review. In organizations that managers rotate often, it becomes even more crucial to have a documented report on staff performance, so to ensure continuity and a swift transition.

**Tactic 14**: *Document all employee feedbacks and evaluations*

*Relatedness/Commitment*

Relatedness/belongingness feelings increase organizational commitment, which, in turn, cause employees to undertake actions for the sake of the group and organization (Vandenabeele, 2007, p.553). Thus, public sector managers should strive to create a distinctive "corporate" identity to their teams with which employees can identify. As a first step, to achieve this goal, managers should create a mission statement that can serve as their team motto. A mission statement is a powerful tool to unite employees and enhance their performance by giving them a common focus. One interviewee named this strategy as the "*we have a mission*" tool.

**Tactic 15**: *Create a mission statement that unites the team*

Next, managers should use energetic or emotional language with inclusive terms such as "we", "us", and "our", while attempting to inspire the team (Van Wart, 2008,

p.220). For example, when talking about the outcomes of the department, it is better to say "our paper received good remarks", than the same but with "my".

**Tactic 16**: *Build a team spirit by talking in inclusive terms*

Furthermore, both managers and employees should communicate their uniqueness to the rest of the organization. Occasional successes must serve as a window of opportunity to build the team's reputation as an "elite" group, since "*everybody wants to belong to and work for the elite group*".

**Tactic 17**: *Establish a reputation of an "elite" team*

Inside the group managers should increase employees' opportunities to meet and work together. For example, common projects can be assigned or a seminar can be jointly attended. By the same token, recurring staff meetings allow peers to update each other and exchange experience as a team. Having lunch together, celebrating birthdays in the office, or having a one-day trip together, are all means to the same end.

**Tactic 18**: *Create opportunities for the team to meet and bond*

### Responsibility/Autonomy

Responsibility and autonomy are a matter of taste – some employees like it and wish for more, others make efforts to avoid it. Thus, managers must learn their employees' characters before giving them more freedom. Young employees, who are at the bottom of the hierarchy chain, are usually very motivated by receiving responsibility.

**Tactic 19**: *Make sure an employee really desires responsibility and autonomy*

When granting responsibility, managers should clearly distinguish between their role and the role of the employee. In general, it is recommended that managers define the task (the "what" to do), whereas employees are free to come up with an implementation plan (the "how" to do). Furthermore, managers, who offered their employees responsibility, should get off their tails and give them a real opportunity to deliver.

**Tactic 20**: *Define only the "what" to do and let the employee decide on the "how"*

In the life of an organization opportunities to convey responsibility are affluent. Yet, if managers find none, they can create their own opportunities. For example, an interviewee suggested that "*managers build small teams in their department and make one of the employees report on the work progress*". Another offered "*to assign employees*

*with project management tasks*". And the most creative recommendation was "*to nominate an employee as a deputy- or co-manager*".

**Tactic 21**: *Create opportunities to delegate responsibility*

*Achievement/Challenge/Goal setting*

Research firmly suggests that goal-setting is an extremely effective tool for public managers to motivate and improve the performance of public employees (Durant et al., 2006, pp.509-510). However, goal-setting is hardly implemented in the public domain, due to several reasons. First, public sector often has a weak link between performance and rewards, thus employees motivation to peruse the goals is diminished (tactic 2 responds to this problem). Second, the politicized environment in which administrators operate is vulnerable to constant goal changes. And third, employees suffer from political procedural constraints that impede their ability to attain the target; no matter what effort they put (Perry/Porter, 1982, p.95). Interviewees also stressed the vagueness of goals and tasks in the public service, which makes it harder to point out to what extent a goal has been accomplished. For example, one interviewee complained that "*there are no measurements for law making*", thus it is imposable to motivate low-makers with goal-setting techniques.

Although all these points are true, goal-setting remains the leading motivational theory. Hence, public managers should aspire to utilize goal-setting techniques despite the difficulties. One way to overcome the hurdles is to state goals in terms of organizational input or output, rather than outcomes, because of the complexity of measuring achievement and procedural constraints that hinder effectiveness (ibid.). For example, if the majority of the work is unplanned and reactive, than a goal may be reducing reaction time.

**Tactic 22**: *Set goals in terms of input or output when outcome is unmeasurable*

When tasks are too wide or complex to achieve, then a set of intermediate goals (e.g. milestones in the project) should be defined. Moreover, it is better to set implicit goals, such as do-your-best, than not having goals at all. Substitute goals can also be exploring strategies to reach the ultimate goal (Durant et al., 2006, p.510).

**Tactic 23**: *Setting "soft" goals is better than not having goals at all*

*Growth*

Career advancement

Along with career services, managers should hold timely, structured, and thorough interviews with employees to understand their needs and aspirations. Next, managers should provide career advice and fit a career plan to the employee (Van Wart, 2008, p.217).

**Tactic 24**: *Hold timely interviews with employees to discuss career opportunities*

It is also the task of managers to provide special opportunities for subordinates to prepare for a future position. That is, managers can allow people to take additional *training*, allow subordinates to represent the division in meetings, attend conferences, and gain vital experience as well as self-confidence. Managers can also prepare employees by exposing them to the overall picture, i.e. subordinates can be introduced to other significant people inside and outside the organization, and can be given assignments with visibility (Van Wart, 2008, pp.216-217)

**Tactic 25**: *Provide employees with opportunities to prepare for future positions*

Career opportunities in the public sector are sometimes scarce or rigid; therefore, interviewees call managers to seek ways to break the normal advancement framework. For example, "*managers can send their employees for secondment inside or outside the state*". By that, employees gain new views and invaluable experience, which can open up career doors upon return.

**Tactic 26**: *Expand the basket of career opportunities in a creative way*

Training

Training plays a vital role in motivating employees and preventing them from failing, due to a lack of abilities. Hence, managers should provide employees with as much training as possible in order to increase their competencies and chances of doing a successful job. Training can be formal, i.e. at a class, or informal, i.e. on-the-job. Informal training is probably the most important training employee can get and it includes the sum of experiences he/she undergoes at work. Informal training pertains mainly to observing: watching how peers perform a task, following the actions of an assigned mentor, and even closely looking at the deeds of the boss. Informal training is

also the result of every project an employee performs, thus it is important to have a lesson learning process after accomplishing a project.

**Tactic 27**: *Be aware of the power of informal training and foster it*

Whereas informal training usually costs nothing, formal training comes with a cost. First, it is the fees employers need to pay; and second, it is the time that managers lose while their employees (and more often than not, it is the excelling employees) are learning. Despite these costs, managers must send employees to formal training, as this is their only chance to learn and bring new ideas back to the department.

**Tactic 28**: *Send employees to formal training despite the costs*

Finally, training does not always have to be directly related to work. It can also be related to personal empowerment or just provide some escape time from the day-to-day routine. For example, several interviewees recommended that managers send their employees to the academy of public administration to take language classes, regardless if it is relevant or not for the job.

**Tactic 29**: *Provide training as an empowerment and refreshing tool*

*Interesting work*

What a person finds interesting is very subjective, thus before assigning employees to tasks, managers should find out what interests each of their subordinates and try and make a match.

**Tactic 30**: *Aspire to make a match between employees' interests and the work*

Sometimes it is clear what an interesting task is, e.g. dealing with a hot topic that occupies the media or politicians minds. In this case, an interviewee suggested that "*managers should give the hot topics to those employees they want to motivate*". Though, managers must take caution to over all distribute "good" projects as equal as possible in order not to create demotivation.

**Tactic 31**: *Use "hot" projects to motivate employees*

Another way to make the job interesting is by diversity and framework breaking. For example, junior employees work on bits and pieces of a big puzzle they never get to see. Therefore, managers can motivate them by letting them see the top of the pyramid and by having them present their work to senior management. This fosters also the

*participation* factor. Job rotation every few years can also make work more interesting and keep employees agile. Rotation promotes *training* and *career development* as well.

**Tactic 32**: *Diversify employees' work, e.g. by participation and rotation*

*Important work*

Public employees do not have a difficulty to see the importance of their organization and its impact on society. Yet, they do have occasionally a problem to find the congruence between the organizational goal and their own immediate work. The solution is to provide a convincing rationale for the task with a linkage to the greater goal (Wright, 2003, p.8). Therefore, managers should communicate to their employees how the work they are doing influences and contributes to the end result. This can be achieved, according to one interviewee, "*by updating employees over the outcomes of meetings managers had outside of the department*". Another way is to show how what started in the department reached to the top level. For instance, a seasoned interviewee stated that "*most often drafts that were phrased by low-level staff are adapted without major amendments*".

**Tactic 33**: *Communicate employees the impact of their work*

Furthermore, employees interpret interest as important. That is, if the media, politicians, or you as a manager are interested in a certain topic, it means that topic is important. Hence, managers should always show interest in the work of all of their employees. When possible, they should involve the media to cover the actions of the department. This can be good both for outside public relations and inside motivation. People like to read good articles about their workplace, and, as one interviewee aptly said, "*often employees believe the media more than the manager*".

**Tactic 34**: *Show employees the amount of interest their work receives*

*Participation*

Participation in decision making strengthens employees' ***commitment*** to decisions, as well as their sense of ***fairness*** in the process (Durant et al., 2006, p.508). Participation serves not only as a motivator but also as a ***training*** tool, which prepares employees for future leadership tasks. Therefore, managers are urged to involve employees in their decision making process.

**Tactic 35**: *involve employees in your decision making processes*

Furthermore, employee participation does not undermine the decision maker's perceived wisdom or authority. We all need an advice from time to time and a participative approach may bring in new insights and ideas. Managers should take on good advices and acknowledge their appreciation for the valued contribution (Van Wart, 2008, p.213).

**Tactic 36**: *Take on good suggestions and show appreciation for the contribution*

*Interpersonal relationships*

Showing courtesy to and interest in all employees (regardless of hierarchy) means their basic humanity is appreciated and valued (Van Wart, 2008, p.216). Hence, it is recommended that managers adopt a person-orientated leadership style and demonstrate a positive regard for others to the greatest degree possible. Showing courtesy includes, but not limited to, a good morning smile, use of proper language, and respect. Showing interest concerns talking to employees on subjects that are beyond the job, e.g. news, sport, or an employee's latest vacation.

**Tactic 37**: *Show courtesy to and interest in all employees*

Managers should also be attuned to the workplace climate and be able to proactively intervene when necessary (Paarlberg/Perry/Hondeghem, 2008, p.277). According to one interviewee, Having an "open-door" approach (better literally than by appointment) "*significantly assists in understanding employees and grasping the atmosphere in the department*". Inviting employees for one-on-one lunch also supports this effort, as well as boosts employee's self-appreciation and affective feelings toward the organization.

**Tactic 38**: *Be attuned to the workplace climate and intervene when necessary*

*Working environment*

Whether working environment is plainly a satisfier or an active motivator is still to be decided. What is sure, though, is that there is no use trying to motivate high performance, while employees are frustrated by not having the right quality and amounts of equipment they need for their work (Bowey, 2005, p.19). Thus, managers should make sure their staff has the adequate space, tools, IT systems, and materials they need for the

job. It is especially true when it comes to new recruits, who receive their first impression of the workplace from the status of the working environment. Managers are then urged to prepare in advance all the equipment a new employees needs (e.g. a desktop and a chair). Managers should also hold a healthy (physically and mentally) working environment.

**Tactic 39**: *Maintain an equipped and healthy working environment*

*Fairness*

Manager cannot satisfy everybody all the time, but they can be fair all the time by applying rules and policies consistently. Naturally, from time to time there is a need to make an exception. Assuming managers cannot keep exceptions quiet, they need to communicate, without going into details, that fairness was kept despite the exception.

**Tactic 40**: *Apply rules and policies consistently*

Transparency also nurtures fairness, as employees are aware of the rules/criteria and can better understand what is behind managerial decisions.

**Tactic 41**: *Have a transparent policy and decision making system*

Last, as one interviewee stressed "*employees cannot be fooled by cheap tricks*"; managers must be frank even if they have bad news for the employee. Employees appreciate honest managers more than ones that fool them around. Managers also need to show empathy to all employees and let them know that they understand their needs even if they cannot meet them.

**Tactic 42**: *Be authentic with your employees*

*Work-Life-Balance*

Managers are recommended to listen to subordinates' personal problems that affect their work, and take the time to counsel them. Managers should not become therapists, but for most routine issues a friendly ear and a warm encouragement, are enough (Van Wart, 2008, p.217)

**Tactic 43**: *Take the time to listen to employees' personal problems*

Managers should also strive to find ways to assist their employees to combine work and a healthy family life. In that sense, it is recommended to introduce programs such as job sharing (i.e. splitting positions), teleworking, and flexi-time.

**Tactic 44**: *Offer a working arrangement that supports Work-Life-Balance*

Moreover, managers are urged to shift their focus from employees' input to their output. As one interviewee said "*the time an employee leaves the office is irrelevant; what is important is his/her achievement during the day*".

**Tactic 45**: *Measure employee performance by focusing on their output*

Finally, managers should prevent their staff from burning out. Therefore, managers need to understand that they cannot expect full capacity performance all the time. Moreover, managers should take the initiative and send employees home to rest when they are no longer productive (e.g. after a long day or when feeling ill).

**Tactic 46**: *Force your staff to take proper breaks and rest*

### *Plateaued employees*

Motivating plateaued employees is one of the major challenges a public manager faces. The problem with plateaued employees is that not only they stop to be productive and actively disengage; they may also spread demotivation in the department and "infect" other employees. Thus, managers should not overlook plateaued employees (tactic 38) and attempt to encourage them by using a combination of the above tactics.

First of all, managers should show authentic interest in the employee, discuss the situation with him/her, and try to find a real solution for the matter, while ignoring past history. An interview with even a higher management level can also signal the importance the direct manager gives to the matter (tactics 11,12,24,34,37,42).

Second, managers can compensate for the lack of a career perspective by offering other satisfying alternatives, such as interesting jobs according to the employee's preference, more responsibilities over sub-teams or projects, participation increase in decision making, an opportunity for rotation, or even reduction of working hours (tactics 21,26,30,31,32,44).

Each combination of the tactics can be applied according to the needs of the individual employee and the motivational strategy the manager chooses to pursue.

# VII. Conclusion

The public sector faces these days an unprecedented challenge, which can be overcome only by the work of highly motivated and productive employees who get "more for less". Yet, there is a common belief that public managers do not have means to stimulate their employees, due to rigid civil-service laws. This thesis completely refutes such a belief.

By holding an application-oriented meta-analysis of public and private motivation literature, a set of 10 interviews with past and current public managers, and using projections from the author's own experience, the thesis found no less than 14 motivational factors, which were translated to 46 concrete and practical tactics that can help motivate public employees. Furthermore, it was demonstrated how the different tactics can be combined to tackle a specific problem that the public sector confronts.

Motivation is an individual phenomenon, thus a one-size-fits-all approach to employee motivation does not work, and there is no recipe for motivation. However, one can illustrate the motivational factors as ingredients and the tactics as preparation instructions. In that case, this thesis can serve as a "cookbook" from which public managers can choose their favorite flavors. That is, mangers can decide according to the circumstances of the individual employee which tactics to use and in what order.

Moreover, this thesis suggested 14 motivational factors and 46 implementation tactics, yet there are probably more. In that sense, public managers are urged to view the results of the thesis as a starting point to develop their own motivational factors and tactics. Next, they are encouraged to ask their employees what things are important to them. And then, they should sit down with each employee and tailor a motivational strategy that is specific to the employee's individual needs and aspirations.

The implementation of the tactics that are advocated here is not easy. It requires courageous and vigorous managers, who are willing to tackle the challenge of motivation and be honest and open with their employees. Yet, if public managers do choose to take action and absorb the proposed motivational tactics, instead of whining about being helpless, than there is a good chance that public administration performance will improve dramatically.

## Appendix A. Summary of Factors and Tactics

| Factor | Tactic |
|---|---|
| Rewarding | Tactic 1: Administer rewards that are positively valent to employees<br>Tactic 2: Rewards should be closely tied to behavior and performance<br>Tactic 3: Rewards should be offered in conjunction with annual appraisals<br>Tactic 4: Rewards' criteria should reflect organizational goals<br>Tactic 5: Establish pay-for-performance only under specific circumstances |
| Recognition | Tactic 6: Provide informal recognition, it costs nothing<br>Tactic 7: Take the time to prepare formal recognition<br>Tactic 8: Use both person-to-person and person-to-group recognition<br>Tactic 9: Recognize as many employees as possible at all levels<br>Tactic 10: Recognize all year long in appropriate intervals |
| Feedback | Tactic 11: Focus more on future performance than on past mistakes<br>Tactic 12: Be prepared for the feedback and allow employees to respond<br>Tactic 13: Monitor and correct errors on a timely basis<br>Tactic 14: Document all employee feedbacks and evaluations |
| Relatedness / Commitment | Tactic 15: Create a mission statement that unites the team<br>Tactic 16: Build a team spirit by talking in inclusive terms<br>Tactic 17: Establish a reputation of an "elite" team<br>Tactic 18: Create opportunities for the team to meet and bond |
| Responsibility / Autonomy | Tactic 19: Make sure an employee really desires responsibility and autonomy<br>Tactic 20: Define only the "what" to do and let the employee decide on the "how"<br>Tactic 21: Create opportunities to delegate responsibility |
| Achievement/Challenge/Goal setting | Tactic 22: Set goals in terms of input or output when outcome is unmeasurable<br>Tactic 23: Setting "soft" goals is better than not having goals at all |
| Growth - Career advancement | Tactic 24: Hold timely interviews with employees to discuss career opportunities<br>Tactic 25: Provide employees with opportunities to prepare for future positions<br>Tactic 26: Expand the basket of career opportunities in a creative way |
| Growth - Training | Tactic 27: Be aware of the power of informal training and foster it<br>Tactic 28: Send employees to formal training despite the costs<br>Tactic 29: Provide training as an empowerment and refreshing tool |
| Interesting work | Tactic 30: Aspire to make a match between employees' interests and the work<br>Tactic 31: Use "hot" projects to motivate employees<br>Tactic 32: Diversify employees' work, e.g. by participation and rotation |
| Important work | Tactic 33: Communicate employees the impact of their work<br>Tactic 34: Show employees the amount of interest their work receives |
| Participation | Tactic 35: involve employees in your decision making processes<br>Tactic 36: Take on good suggestions and show appreciation for the contribution |
| Interpersonal relationships | Tactic 37: Show courtesy to and interest in all employees<br>Tactic 38: Be attuned to the workplace climate and intervene when necessary |
| Working environment | Tactic 39: Maintain an equipped and healthy working environment |
| Fairness | Tactic 40: Apply rules and policies consistently<br>Tactic 41: Have a transparent policy and decision making system<br>Tactic 42: Be authentic with your employees |
| Work-Life-Balance | Tactic 43: Take the time to listen to employees' personal problems<br>Tactic 44: Offer a working arrangement that supports Work-Life-Balance<br>Tactic 45: Measure employee performance by focusing on their output<br>Tactic 46: Force your staff to take proper breaks and rest |

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