

# Herzberg's two-factor theory

In the second of a series of articles on motivation theorists, Bruce Jewell outlines the ideas of the American psychologist, Frederick Herzberg, whose two-factor theory of job satisfaction remains highly influential

Employee motivation is one of the most popular topics in the AS/A2 specification, and of all the theorists of motivation, Frederick Herzberg remains one of the most influential and well known. However, as with many popular theorists, there is always the problem of distortion of their original ideas so that, periodically, it is

necessary to go back to the original theory to identify what was actually said. For instance, Herzberg did not say that pay is unimportant.

But, before looking at his theory, we need to set Herzberg in context. Motivational theories can be divided broadly into content theories and process theories. The former are based on the notion that

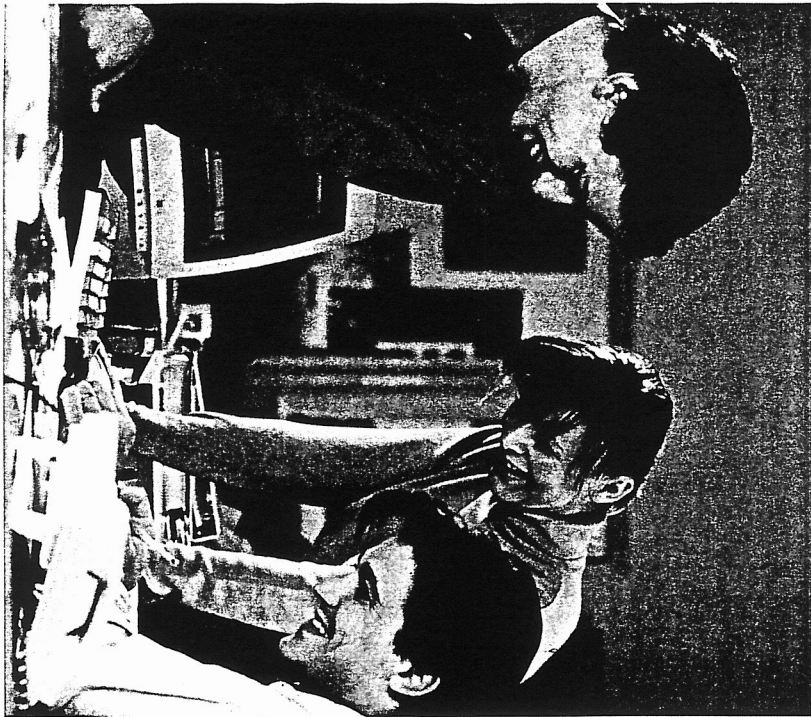
motivation comes from the desire to satisfy a particular need. The various content theories (e.g. Taylor and Maslow's theories) differ only in terms of what the need is and how it is satisfied. The process theories (e.g. equity and expectancy theory) focus on the thought processes involved, rather than the end results. Herzberg's theory is a content theory but, whereas F. W. Taylor focused on payment linked to output as the way to motivate, Herzberg is very much in the human relations tradition that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century. Elton Mayo had shown in the 1920s and 1930s that man is a social and not just an economic animal. Abraham Maslow had shown in the 1940s that there is a hierarchy of needs that have to be satisfied.

## Who was Frederick Herzberg?

Herzberg was born in 1923 and after service in the Second World War he became a clinical psychologist in Pittsburgh. Research on what motivated people led to the publication of his most important work, *The Motivation to Work*, written with Bernard Mansner and Barbara Bloch Snyderman in 1959. His academic career in management education took him to universities in Cleveland and Utah.

## The two-factor theory

Herzberg's two-factor theory (see Figure 1) grew out of research that he undertook with engineers and accountants in the 1950s. Finding out what people thought about their work was in itself a major contribution since, before the human relations revolution in management thinking, people were given a low priority. Herzberg asked these people to recall times when they felt good about their job, why they had these positive feelings and what was the effect on their performance. He then asked the same people about the opposite situation. He discovered from his survey that the positive things that respondents had to say about work experiences were not the opposite of the negative. Low pay



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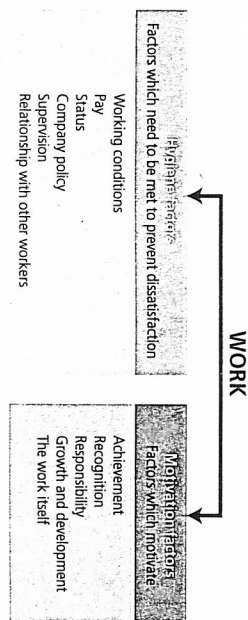


Figure 1 Herzberg's two-factor theory

makes workers unhappy but high pay does not guarantee that they are happy.

At this point he drew on his clinical experience. Mental health is not the opposite of mental illness. Putting it more simply, a dirty kitchen will result in ill-health. An ultra hygienic and spotlessly clean kitchen does not guarantee good health. From this, he argued that human beings have two sets of needs:

- lower-level needs, such as to avoid pain and deprivation
- higher-level needs, such as to grow psychologically

The lower-level needs are similar to the lower-order needs in Maslow's hierarchy, and the higher-level needs equate to the top strata in Maslow's hierarchy.

## Hygiene factors

The factors seen by people as negative and a cause for concern, Herzberg called hygiene factors. These factors relate to the context in which a person works, such as company policy and administration, supervision, working relationships, working conditions, status, security and pay.

These factors are not positive motivators — it is simply that their absence or inadequacy causes dissatisfaction at work. Their presence will merely keep workers reasonably happy without motivating them to improve their performance.

## Motivators

The factors seen by people as positive and which gave job satisfaction, Herzberg called motivators. These are also known as growth factors and they relate to what a person does at work, rather than the context in which it is done. The motivators meet human needs as distinct from animal needs. They include the need for achievement, personal development, job satisfaction and recognition. Improving these factors will increase job satisfaction.

In essence, these motivators are the factors which contribute to job satisfaction, whereas the hygiene factors, if absent or inadequate, will cause job dissatisfaction.

## Necessary and sufficient conditions

Hygiene factors act in a negative way to cause dissatisfaction. The presence and adequacy of hygiene factors is a necessary condition for employee motivation, but they are not sufficient in their own right. To ensure motivation, the presence of hygiene factors must be accompanied by the presence of the positive motivators. Both are necessary but not sufficient in their own right to motivate.

## Job enrichment

As motivation comes from the work itself, the practical impact of Herzberg's theory has been:

- to reinforce the view that it is essential that the hygiene factors are met — this means decent rewards, fair rules and pleasant working conditions
- the development of schemes to redesign jobs

Job redesign involves changing the content or process of a specific job to increase job satisfaction and performance. It might take the form of:

- job rotation, providing variety by the planned movement of employees from one job to another
- empowering workers to take decisions
- setting up autonomous work groups and job enrichment (or vertical loading)

What exactly is 'job enrichment' and how does it increase satisfaction and performance? We can define it as a job-design scheme that incorporates achievement, recognition and other high-level motivators into the work. An enriched job is designed to provide more responsibility,

## Box 1 How to enrich a job

Enriching a job involves vertically extending the worker's role in the production process to create a challenge. It includes:

- planning tasks
- control over quality
- greater autonomy
- empowerment
- greater participation
- undertaking whole and meaningful tasks
- reduction in supervision
- creation of natural work units
- feedback
- setting own targets
- greater flexibility

## Box 2 Benefits of job enrichment

- Opportunities for the employee's psychological growth
- Increase in productivity
- Increase in job satisfaction
- Reduction in labour turnover and absenteeism
- Improvement in quality

control, feedback and authority for decision-making (see Box 1).

The work of Hackman and Oldham also focused on enriching jobs by providing for skill variety, autonomy, feedback on performance, giving employees whole tasks to do and ensuring that the task is significant. The enriched job provides opportunities for employee's psychological growth and therefore increases job satisfaction. The benefits of job enrichment can be seen in increased productivity, reduced labour turnover, reduced absenteeism and improvement in quality (see Box 2).

## Evaluation of Herzberg's ideas

Herzberg was one of a small number of influential writers who emphasised the importance of employees as human beings. This was in contrast to the mechanistic view of scientific management theory. Herzberg's work has had a lasting impact on human resource management, especially in terms of concepts such as job enrichment, job satisfaction and self-development. Critics, on the other hand, claim that his approach is more relevant to non-manual workers. They argue that financial rewards play a more significant role for manual workers and it is more difficult to think of ways to enrich low-skilled jobs.

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