

DESIGNING A MOTIVATING WORK ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Motivating work environment can fundamentally stimulate employees' enthusiasm and creativity and play a huge role in attracting and retaining outstanding talents. Therefore, it is necessary to innovate the motivating work environment of small and medium-sized enterprises to enhance the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It is important to innovate SMEs' own motivating work environment and incentive mechanism to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency. This article discusses how SMEs can design motivating work environment and incentive mechanisms to fully mobilize the enthusiasm of employees to achieve the development goals of the enterprise.

Keywords: Motivating work environment, humanized management, incentive mechanisms

1. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the knowledge economy era and the popularization of human-oriented management concepts, diversification, and broadening of salary forms have prompted people to have a new understanding of the concept of salary. Salary has some connotations of modern enterprise management. Employees are receiving common investment income. As a kind of capital investment, the salary they receive is a form of corporate profit distribution and a means to promote the common development of the company and its employees.

Scholars believe that a person's ability can only be used by 20% to 30%. If it is stimulated, it can be used by 80% to 90%. Therefore, the innovation of the company's motivating work environment (Gagne et al., 2019) and incentive mechanism (Wang et al., 2020; Han et al., 2022) play a vital role for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the development stage. However, managers cannot work behind closed doors, just thinking about what kind of work facilities to add to their employees. The result of doing so will only make the managers wasteful and ineffective. If they do not want to waste improvement investment, they should approach employees before deciding to improve working conditions, listen to their voices, understand their true needs, and then satisfy them to the greatest extent possible within their capabilities.

2. MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES

Different jobs require different working environments, and different employees have different requirements for the working environment. For example, writing work requires a refreshing and quiet environment. The noisy environment will make them upset, and the inspiration of wisdom will not come. People engaged in design work need a relaxed and comfortable environment in which they can move around freely, and they need coffee or other stimulants.

In addition, in the same working environment, some employees will feel very comfortable and happy, but some employees will complain a lot and put forward various opinions on working conditions. Therefore, there is no uniform standard for the quality of the work environment, and it is limited by the differences in personal needs. In fact, no incentive factor can be applied to all employees. Partially optimized incentives will appear. The key lies in whether managers can effectively maximize them. However, managers should pay attention to the following misconceptions about motivating employees in their companies.

- a. Pure material incentives will do --- If employees can be paid enough salary, they will of course be willing to engage in any work. If employees affirm their work and supplemented with a certain bonus to stimulate, they will be very happy (unless they originally had higher expectations for the bonus). When salaries increase, they do work harder. But research has found that material incentives (Zhan et al., 2021) can only bring short-term happiness. After half a year, this motivation will gradually disappear. They are not as cheering as they were when they first received the bonus. They even cannot remember the specific amount of the bonus. This is because money alone cannot produce a continuous stimulus for a person. A sense of identity and affirmation of personal status can generate a steady stream of motivation. For example, in a high-tech product sales company, a salesman performs better than others, and the boss publicly gives him a bonus. Every employee knows who the winner of the sales award is, and this salesman thinks that he has not only been recognized by the customer but also recognized by other colleagues in the team. Identity and status in the team are the two keys to motivating employees, and money can only cheer up employees in the short term at best. Therefore, a sound mechanism should be established to allow employees to gain a certain sense of accomplishment. Give them a sense of identity, let them work very fulfilling, and give them opportunities for improvement, employees will cherish these opportunities very much.
- b. Keeping employees happy can bring higher productivity --- Managers often spare no effort to implement some measures to keep employees happy. For example, setting up a recreation room or allowing employees to make free long-distance calls. Managers wishfully believe that the joy of employees during work breaks can easily be transformed into a kind of work motivation. Employees really enjoy the break time and look forward to this moment, and some even delay working hours. But satisfaction at these moments does not necessarily translate into higher productivity, nor does it mean better performance at work.
- c. Ignore the conflict and everything will be fine --- Few people like conflict, especially in the workplace. Many people lack an attitude to solve the problem. The management often cares about whether they are popular, rather than quickly pointing out the actual problems of the employees. But if they ignore some of the shortcomings of employees, it will be detrimental to their growth in the long run.
- d. Some people are simply hopeless --- Prejudice against certain employees and complete loss of confidence in them are the most common misunderstandings. Everyone may become a talent, but the fire that ignites their passion is different. If a manager visits the entire office and sees employees playing computer games or sending private emails, he may think in his

heart that they are not motivated to work or working seriously at all. In fact, employees who are playing are equally passionate and even more motivated than those who are working hard. It is just that they did not put their energy directly into their work. If this employee has merit, leaders should find out the tricks to inspire one's enthusiasm for work and to let one's release passion at work (Kessi et al., 2022).

- e. No need to bother motivating employees --- Almost every business owner is eager to attract smart people to join because these people learn faster and get started quickly. Therefore, the bosses take it for granted that these people do not need to bother, they will discipline themselves. However, there is no necessary link between a high intelligent quotient and good self-management ability. Some smart employees often do not know where they are motivated to maintain their work enthusiasm (Lantara, 2019). Instead, they are more likely to lose themselves or get tired of work, which ultimately leads to little interest in work and low efficiency. Therefore, employers should understand how to create a good working environment so that every employee is full of vitality. They should know employees' strengths and interests (Zhang et al., 2021) and make the best use of their talents. Hence, everyone can do what they love and shining on their posts.

3. MOTIVATING WORK ENVIRONMENT

The motivating work environment of SMEs are the need for the survival and development of enterprises. It is necessary for them to seek development in good times, but it is more important to survive in adversity. They must attach great importance to provide a positive work environment (Younies et al., 2017) for employees to adapt to the needs of individual growth and development. Only by providing a motivating work environment based on their own development goals, economic strength, and employee characteristics to fully mobilize employees' enthusiasm and creativity. It may also promote the rapid and sustainable development of enterprises. If SMEs want to achieve long-term development and enable them to continuously develop and grow in the fierce market competition, then it is essential to innovate and design their own motivating work environment. Employees are diverse in their motivators thus making it difficult for managers to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to recruit and retain talents. Some of the important motivating factors (Calk & Patrick, 2017) are discussed as follows.

3.1 Provide Employees with Satisfactory Jobs

Loving a job is a prerequisite for doing it well. Employers need to pay attention to the following points to create a satisfactory job for employees. They should provide a good working environment for employees. It must provide employees with a good workplace, necessary tools, complete work information, and coordination among the relevant departments of the company. Employees can feel satisfied at any time when they work. If the work environment has a negative impact on the work of employees, they will continue to be dissatisfied. When employees can always feel the discomfort of the environment, no matter how motivated the company is, there will be no good results. Besides, the skill characteristics and personality characteristics of the employees must match the job conditions of the post. Companies often

think that the higher the quality of their employees, the better the job. When high-quality talents do a dull and mechanical job, they will not retain the job and resign as soon as possible.

On the other hand, the content of the work should be rich and challenging. When employees work for a period, their enthusiasm will have a great downward trend. The design of the work content can alleviate this problem. For example, workers on the assembly line. After they are engaging in the same job for a long time, their enthusiasm will decline. If the content of their work is adjusted appropriately by job rotation (Rage & Rage, 2017) or job enrichment (Putri & Setianan, 2019), their interest in work will be raised again. Challenging work is more conducive to employees' personal creativity, finds a sense of accomplishment from creation, and realizes self-worth. Performing a challenging job not only means the improvement of employees' abilities, but also the improvement of their own competitiveness and career resources. Therefore, managers must make the work challenging for employees to have outstanding performance. Use challenges to create passion and use passion to drive them to forge ahead and create success. If the job provided by the company is boring, then employees will become unmotivated, low morale, and even plan to leave the company. Because of the boring and monotonous work, they cannot realize their own importance and sense of value.

Therefore, it is wise to develop career planning for employees. Job seekers, especially those with a highly educated, choose their jobs for their future development. No employee will be satisfied with a job that has no future. Companies must formulate career plans to let employees understand their development opportunities in the company. They know their work prospects.

3.2 Humanized Management

Humanized management (Wua, Yangb & Cholavit, 2021) is based on humanistic care and achieves the purpose of motivating employees by satisfying the deep-seated psychological needs of employees. It is the need of modern management and an important means of motivating employees. Companies that want to implement humanized management can start from the following aspects.

- a. Authorized incentives --- The practice of modern human resources has proved that employees have the desire to participate in management requirements. Any employee does not want to be just an executor and has the need to participate in decision-making. Meeting this need of employees can not only motivate employees but also benefit the long-term development of the company. After authorization, do not interfere with the employee's power, otherwise, it will make the employee feel distrustful. It should avoid duplication and overlap. Specific power is only granted to a specific employee.
- b. Target incentives --- Goal motivation refers to the purpose of mobilizing enthusiasm by setting appropriate goals and stimulating people's motivation. The reason why the goal can play a role in motivating is that the goal in the direction of the organization and the individual's struggle. The completion of the goal is a manifestation of the employee's work result and the embodiment of the employee's sense of accomplishment. The key to goal motivation lies in the setting of goals, and only appropriate goals can have a motivating effect.

- c. Competitive incentives --- Many managers are afraid of competition within the enterprise, believing that this will disrupt the order of the enterprise. In fact, if managers conduct reasonable guidance on competition, competition can play a role in motivating employees. For the less advanced employees in the enterprise, the manager should encourage them to catch up. For the advanced employees in the enterprise, the manager should encourage them to continue to lead. It is wise to create a level playing field in the enterprise, advocate individual competition, and advocate team competition to stimulate employees' passion for work. In addition, for the orderly nature of competition, companies can formulate some rewards and punishments (Palminteri & Pessiglione, 2017) to regulate competition.
- d. Corporate culture incentives --- The shaping of the corporate culture has become an important means of motivating modern corporate spirit. Practice has shown that the loss of talents for companies with a good culture is significantly lower than those for companies that do not value the shaping of corporate culture. When the corporate culture is consistent with the employees' values and fully reflects the respect for the employees, the employees will be integrated with the company, will be proud of their own company, and will have a strong sense of belonging (Pesonen et al., 2020) to their own company. They are willing to dedicate their own wisdom to the enterprise.

3.3 Propose an Achievable Vision

Among all the incentives, it is important to continue to provide an achievable vision that employees aspire to. A convincing vision can bring many driving forces to the work and make employees go all out in the next tasks. Most employees like that what they are developing is "cool" stuff and a lot of people like to use it. They hope it will become the focus of everyone's attention, become an indispensable part of many people's lives, and change the world, even if only a little bit. They also hope that the services or products they develop can conquer the market and bring commercial benefits to the company.

It is very important for employees to understand the meaning of the work they are about to complete. No one wants to work hard, but what they do is a piece of software that is meaningless and worthless. Of course, if money is paid to a certain level, more and more people may be able to accept it. Most employees would rather the purpose and product of their work have the meaning and value they recognize. It is easy for employees to get a lot of positive psychological energy because of the value and meaning of the product itself. This drives them to continue to work, just to see the day when their product comes out, to see with their own eyes that it is favored by users, and to see what really changes the world. Even if it is inevitable to encounter a low ebb during the development process, they can gradually get rid of the ebb due to the supplement of positive energy. It must be noted that the vision is not deceiving, it is not fabricating a story that looks very pleasant to lure employees into so that they can develop at full speed. The vision is that the person who put forward it also believes so sincerely through expression so that all people in the same team can clearly understand, and they are willing to believe that this is the common goal of the team. As the proponent of a vision, not only try to let everyone understand at the beginning of the development work, what kind of results can be obtained after everyone's hard work, but also on the hard road of development. They must

constantly remind everyone not to forget what the vision is and how beautiful is the end. Everyone may have a low ebb, but if they can comfort themselves in the ebb and raise themselves up, it is the imagination and expectation of a good vision.

3.4 Sense of Accomplishment

In addition to achievable vision, satisfaction with a sense of accomplishment (Allam, Malik & Geogre, 2021) is also a good way to motivate employees. Most employees hope that they will continue to improve in the field of technology and realize themselves through work. It is like overcoming a difficult technical problem. It is a great pleasure for many individuals. Boring and not difficult work may be easy for employees, but there is no sense of accomplishment at all. Employees can feel what they have overcome through work and make themselves better and stronger which is what they want. Employers may not be able to give employees unlimited monetary rewards, but they can continue to let them get a sense of accomplishment from work. Therefore, the leader must appropriately assign work to the employees. It is not suitable to always assign too simple tasks to the same employee. They must always engage in tasks that are challenging for them. When there is a challenge, there will be room for learning and progress, and when the challenge is overcome, a sense of accomplishment (Nakai et al., 2017) will arise in their heart. Of course, you cannot always throw the hardest work to employees who are unable to challenge. The ability of different employees and the time pressure to complete the work must be weighed. Moreover, the work components assigned to the employees must be deployed.

Like the achievable vision, they must let the employees understand how important the work they are currently engaged in, and what kind of success they are currently achieving, and what kind of help they can provide to the whole once the work is completed. Encouragement needs to be expressed sincerely through words. Employers can motivate employees through encouragement. Encouragement is a sincere compliment, and there is no need to begrudge. Because employees all want their performance to be affirmed, and this affirmation must be sincere, not flattery based on unconscionable theories. Being affirmed at work is also a source of a sense of accomplishment. The motivated employees are more able to devote themselves to the work wholeheartedly so that the work efficiency is improved. Employees who can be motivated when they encounter a low ebb can also get out of the ebb and return to normal work. If the team leaders can make good use of motivational methods, they can make the development team more powerful.

3.5 Pay Attention to Incentive Mechanism and Welfare System

One of the main purposes for employees to work in a company is to obtain a certain amount of material remuneration. Remuneration is closely related to people's survival needs and is one of the most effective stimuli. The level of compensation can even represent the value of employees in the company. Therefore, a reasonable salary system has a great incentive effect. Employers should strengthen the fairness of incentive mechanisms (Ting et al., 2019) to play the role of positive motivation. Salary and benefits are relatively traditional incentive methods in terms of material incentives. Nowadays, equity incentive has become the powerful

motivating mechanisms. According to statistics, 90% of the Fortune 500 companies in the United States have adopted equity incentives, and their productivity has increased by one-third and profits have increased by 50%. Equity incentives have a strong incentive effect. Equity incentives use company shares as a tool to reward employees to enhance their sense of belonging. It can make up for the shortcomings of traditional incentive methods, closely link employees with the company, restrain employees, and stabilize employees. The role of the company to fully mobilize the enthusiasm of employees. It is an advanced long-term incentive method.

There are more than a dozen kinds of equity incentive methods (Jiao, Wang & Azaare, 2022). Two commonly used methods are discussed as follows.

- (a) Stock options --- This is the most used and most standardized equity incentive method among companies. It grants employees the right to accept stocks in the future and is a form of remuneration. It is mostly used to motivate senior leaders and key employees.
- (b) Futures --- Most of the equity incentives commonly used by Chinese companies are variants of futures stocks. The stock futures index refers to the ownership of corporate equity through partial down payment and installment repayment by the grantee. For ordinary employees, usually, equity incentives are not used as the main incentive means. Because it is unlikely that they may get a lot of equity. The company's overall performance is less likely in relation to their work and personal income, and the effect of equity incentives (Alhadab & Al-Own, 2019) will not be too great. Equity incentives are mainly aimed at the senior personnel of the enterprise. Their work performance is directly related to the overall interests of the company. Therefore, as a long-term incentive method, equity incentives are one of the most effective measures to retain talents.

4. STRATEGIES TO MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES

The work efficiency of employees is completely different in different working environments. In a closed and inferior working environment, employees will hate every minute of work and cannot concentrate on doing things. The error rate will increase significantly, and the brain drain will also increase. Therefore, for managers to truly achieve the goal of motivating employees, it is necessary to create a suitable working environment. A good working environment can maintain and improve the work performance of employees. It inspires people and makes employees full of passion, self-consciousness, and a happy mood during the work process.

There are many strategies that can inspire employees in a motivating work environment.

The following strategies may be used for motivating employees.

- a) Set realistic goals for the company and its employees --- The goals should be challenging and achievable through hard work.
- b) Employees can participate in decision-making --- Employees should allow to make decisions and express their opinions openly.

- c) Understand the work performance of employees --- Employees should be able to communicate and feedback frankly with senior management to reduce stressful and unnecessary social interaction (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022).
- d) Communicate with employees frequently --- Managers should explain to employees what to do and why to increase mutual understanding and strengthen their trust in communication.
- e) Listen to employees --- Managers should try to understand what employees are talking about, give praise to their ideas and suggestions, and make them feel important.
- f) Sincerely care for the growth and development of employees --- Managers should make suggestions to subordinates when appropriate. They should cultivate and encourage social supports among employees.
- g) Praise be frank and sincere --- Public praise is one of the most powerful ways for managers to inspire employees' enthusiasm and increase their importance.
- h) Frequently and frankly exchange opinions --- Managers should resolve the conflicts that may lead to major crises in a timely manner.
- i) Be open-minded --- Managers should be willing to listen to new opinions, even those that are very different from them.
- j) Reprimands are only given when necessary --- Managers should blame the employees in private places. The purpose is to correct and educate if necessary.
- k) Try to make people interested and willing to work --- Managers should help employees to achieve their personal goals, and thus may also achieve organizational goals.
- l) Delegating power properly --- Managers should let employees do it boldly at work.
- m) Do not use threats --- Managers should not force employees to complete their work? They should eliminate unnecessary threats and punishments.
- n) Provide support to employees --- Managers should support employees and provide them with some opportunities for flexibility and personal choice (Chatterjee, Chaudhuri & Vrontis, 2022), including actively seeking opportunities for them.
- o) Encouragement for employees --- Managers should set their own goals and ensure their employees know how to work to achieve the goals. They should encourage their employees to improve resilience and coping abilities in an unchanged working environment (Stauder, Cserhati & Thege, 2018).

5. CONCLUSION

When it comes to motivating work environments, the first thing many people think of is financial incentives. Whether it is salary, additional bonuses, year-end bonuses, and employee stock allotment, and so on. Indeed, money is undoubtedly quite motivating for work. When everyone comes out to work, in addition to meeting some additional needs from work, money

income is also one of the main motivations. However, the actual conditions of each company are different. Some companies can provide good remuneration and performance rewards, but some companies cannot.

The mental state of each employee is very important to the company. As long as the positive mental energy can be maintained continuously, it will be helpful to the company's productivity and innovation. Especially in the continuous work of employees, sometimes they are easy to fall into a psychological low. For example, they feel that their job is boring, fighting for some meaningless reasons, and so on.

The morale of employees can be further boosted through proper motivation. They can also find meaning in their work and be more active in their work. Motivation should be a means to meet their personal needs. Every employee has one's needs. Of course, monetary compensation is an important need. Work in a comfortable working environment, work with favourite partners, and stimulate development the enthusiasm for new products, as well as the sense of accomplishment when completing products and overcoming technical obstacles, are all employees who want to be satisfied at work. Therefore, employees can continue to meet these needs in the process of work through some methods or design a motivating working environment, it can achieve the effect of motivating employees.

If an enterprise cannot provide employees with sufficient opportunities for advancement (Massimino & Turner, 2018), it is mostly due to the stagnation of the enterprise as a whole or certain department. At this time, companies must be determined to act, design certain levels and titles, and create enough levels, or adopt the method of survival of the fittest to free up seats, so that capable employees can be promoted again and again.

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