Challenges in Achieving High Motivation and Performance in Educational Management: Case Study of a North Cyprus Public High School

Asst. Prof. Gizem ÖKSÜZOĞLU-GÜVEN
University of Mediterranean Karpasia
No: 79, Sht. M. Huso Caddesi, Kucuk Kaymakli, Nicosia, North Cyprus

Abstract

This article provides a different perspective on teacher motivation through a case study of a North Cyprus public high school. It is a valuable, qualitative case study contributing to the existing literature in understanding performance management at public schools in complex socio-political environments. Current constraints create a very compelling environment to apply any kind of performance management tools in public high schools in North Cyprus. The participant group included 62 teachers. Data were collected using structured interviews. Content and narrative analyses were used to analyse the collected data. Results reveal motivational techniques employed by the school administration to increase performance and their effectiveness as well as the existing limitations to achieve motivation.

Key words: Educational management; teacher motivation; teacher performance; performance management; high schools; North Cyprus; Qualitative; Case Study.

1. Introduction

Teachers have considerable impact on a country's prosperity and its generations, given that they are traditional agents of education. Teachers' performance (quality of service) depends on many internal and external factors including individual, organisational and environmental ones. Education and learning are intertwined concepts especially in North Cyprus where a very traditional practice is followed. Education system is centrally controlled by the Ministry of Culture and Education and both public and private schools have to follow the national education syllabi which are decided by the Ministry. Limited funds are allocated to public schools every year contributing towards the coverage of school expenses. After the initial two years following appointment as a teacher, if government inspectors approve, teachers get their lifelong job security. They get lifelong job security with all the statutory rights including three months paid summer holiday, sick-pays, paid and non-paid leaves, thirteen month bonus salary, and union membership (KTOEÖS, 1999).

The current political conflict in Cyprus led to a de facto state, in the European Union, making North Cyprus a unique case where usual rules of thumb about employee performance management do not necessarily work (Bahçeli, 2004; Lynch, 2004). This article aims to contribute to our understanding of teacher motivation and performance management at public schools of North Cyprus. There are internal structures such as needs, emotions, values, goals, interests or beliefs that lead individuals to act in certain ways. Motivation explains how individuals are encouraged to act in certain ways through these structures.

2. Motivation

Motivation is considered as an "energiser of behaviour" from a psychological perspective (Reber & Reber, 2001:447); alternatively it can also be considered as the propensity of an individual to expand effort at work (Heery & Noon, 2001, p. 226). This article considers both definitions as applicable to the researched context. Thomas (2002) who developed the Model of Intrinsic Motivation suggests that the impact of intrinsic motivation on an individual's experiences is related with four intrinsic rewards (s)he gets during work (Thomas, 2002). Thomas argued that by learning to lead the essential ingredients of intrinsic motivation, administrators can increase the intrinsic rewards that employees derive from work and provided essential ingredients of intrinsic motivation are four main categories to put essential ingredients of intrinsic motivation under; these categories are choice, competence, meaningfulness and progress (Thomas, 2002).

Unlike Thomas's (2002) four main groups, Herzberg (1968), groups motivational factors into two groups and gather all intrinsic motivational factors together. In order to understand human behaviour, extrinsic and intrinsic factors were agreed to be crucial in motivation and performance management studies. (i.e.: Kelly, 1999; Heneman & Milanowski, 1999; Herzberg, 1968). Extrinsic motivation is the desire to attain specific outcomes; whereas intrinsic motivation is caused by positive internal feelings; intrinsic factors are the foci of this article (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2004). Albert Einstein described intrinsic motivation as; "the enjoyment of seeing and searching" (Amabile, 1999, p.80). Intrinsic motivational factors are more crucial when teacher motivation is examined because it is harder to set specific targets for teachers as it is for instance, to sales positions.

Although there are different theories suggesting various applications of motivational models, it is undeniable that employee response can vary across cultures and professions. Besides culture and profession, other factors such as rewards or incentives also influence the motivation of an employee (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004).

3. Reward

Reward refers to "the benefits which employees receive in return for working on behalf of an employing organisation" (Heery & Noon, 2001, p.311). Rewards are considered as benefits received after a successful completion of an assigned task (Luce, 1998). Two main forms are intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards consist of financial, material or social rewards such as; cash payment or various employment benefits including health insurance and occupational pension. On the other hand, job satisfaction, personal development, social status and recognition that can be attached to particular job roles are self-granted and psychological rewards which are intrinsic rewards (Heery & Noon, 2001).

When we examine theory in practice, some of the findings from Griffith's (2004) research suggest that the size of the bonus and the active support from principals are also important in teacher motivation. Teachers do not get motivated by the pay bonus unless they find the amount large enough. Also, active commitment of the administrators is the key to the success of group reward programmes. Furthermore, perceptions of the teachers on fairness have an influence on their motivational reactions; therefore it may be necessary to explain the logic behind the performance measures, the mechanics of the programme, and the level of improvement in goals. Last but not least, face validity of student achievement assessments, other measures of school performance and reliability are also found to be important in reward programmes (Griffith, 2004).

Incentives, on the other hand, are stimulants or catalysts which influence or motivate people's actions. According to a study on teacher motivation, non-material rewards such as social environment, self-expression and sense of accomplishment have relation with job performance effectiveness. Therefore in order to motivate teachers to increase their contribution to achieve organisational goals, incentives can be offered (Luce, 1998). When we look into practice, in a study, when a certain skill was taught by an extrinsically motivated teacher, students reported lower task enjoyment and lower interest in learning than those taught by an intrinsically motivated teacher (Pelletier et al, 2002). Also a field experiment study revealed that, teachers are more controlling and less effective when they are externally pressured to produce good student results (Pelletier et al, 2002).

Another interesting study was an international project and had a sample of 3000 teachers from four countries. The aim of this project was studying teacher and school executive career satisfaction, motivation and mental health; the greatest satisfaction was recorded with core business teaching such as; individual professional development, and student achievement. On the other hand, more extrinsic matters such as the status of teachers, and imposed educational change created the greatest dissatisfaction (Scott and Dinham, 2003). Intrinsic motivation is more effective for teachers than extrinsic ones according to the International Teacher 2000 project results. However, non-participation in decision-making, lack of administrative support, failure to provide essential instructional resources and lack of trust in the professional expertise will cause the teacher to experience dissatisfaction (Zembylas and Papanastasiou, 2004).

This study aims to present a different perspective on teacher motivation by providing an exemplar of motivation techniques utilised in a socio-politically challenging North Cyprus. In order to achieve this, following research questions were posed: (1) What are the motivation techniques used by the school administration? (2) To what extent are they successful in achieving teacher motivation? (3) What are the limitations experienced in motivating public school teachers?

4. Research Design

Case study was chosen as the research strategy since case studies are rich, empirical descriptions of particular instances of a phenomenon that are typically based on a variety of data sources (Saunders et al., 2003; Yin, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989). 62 interviews were conducted with the teachers who are full time employed at the case study public high school.

4.1. Participants

Participants were teachers of one of the largest public high school in the capital city of North Cyprus, Lefkoşa. Out of 99 full time teachers who made up the full population of the school, 62 of them agreed to participate in this study; 22 of them were male and 40 of them were female. Table 1 presents teachers' experience in teaching at public schools. Code "G" stands for "Group", which is embedded in individual quotes given from the participants. This is useful in seeing a participant's length of work while reading their narratives. Interview participants were specially trained in the subject that they teach at the school. Their subject areas and the number of people interviewed from a particular subject area are presented in Table 2.

4.2. Data Collection

Structured interviews with 62 teachers were employed for data collection. Interview questions were prepared by reviewing the existing literature on motivation and performance management in education (Table 3). Two impartial peer opinions were also taken into account while designing the questions. A pilot study which consisted of 6 teachers contributed to the final version of the interview questions. For linguistic consistency, before data collection, the questions were translated from English to Turkish by the researcher and from Turkish to English by a language professional that is fluent both English and Turkish. Participants were coded based on their participation order, subject area code and length of experience. For instance, I4-MAT-G2 represents Interviewee number four, who teaches mathematics and has a work experience 1-5 years. Average length of the interviews was 39 minutes, the shortest being 18 minutes and the longest being 52 minutes.

5.   Data Analysis

Collected qualitative data were transferred to QSR-Nvivo 8 (qualitative data analysis software) for ease of analysis. Data were analysed through narrative and content analysis methods. For descriptive data, analysis was carried out using SPSS – V.15 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) which aided to find parameters of frequency, mean and standard deviation. Frequency analysis provided clear numerical indications of agreement and disagreement on certain issues examined. These are presented in percentages in this article. Narratives, on the other hand, were used to reflect participant experiences and views on examined issues and how they perceive administration's approach. This method was chosen as narrative analysis assumes that people communicate mainly through their stories and examining individual stories may help to uncover their priorities, interpretations and experiences (Boje, 2000).

6. Findings

Teacher opinions on the effectiveness of current motivational techniques used by the school administration during the last two years presented through frequencies in Table 4. Throughout the presentations, strongly agree and agree percentages are given cumulatively; same was done for disagree and strongly disagree percentages. 70% of the participants approved that they are motivated by getting verbal recognition from the principal. This shows that verbal recognition and communication is crucial in motivating teachers. 65% of them are motivated by letter of recognition from the school administration and 62.7% feel motivated by a letter from the Ministry of Education and Culture. 53.3% of the participants are motivated by an opportunity to supervise a student group on a field trip but only 35% of the teachers expressed their agreement in being motivated by a verbal recognition from vice principal.

When teachers were asked what would possibly increase their motivation, so they perform better; 69.4% of them stated that they believe educational system should change, 16.1% of them suggested that administration should change, 14.5% of them said appraisal system should change, and 6.5% of them mentioned the limited training opportunities and asked for more opportunities. Also 4.8% of them mentioned working hours, 1.6% asked for a pay increase and 1.6% of them asked for the Ministry of Education and Culture to show interest in school problems. Table 5 presents their responses as a summary.

During the interviews, teacher responses emphasised issues of subject group meetings, lack of inspectors, motivational power of money, communication within the school, teacher-student ratio, government support and strengths and weaknesses of the administration. Teachers believe that their performance is affected by the system and agree that if changes are made in the educational system that would motivate them to perform better.

At the case study school, subject group meetings (e.g.: meetings of physics or literature teachers) do not have a periodic schedule. Although some subject groups meet once or twice a week, some subject groups meet whenever it is necessary. In spite of an overall positive response on group meetings, there were also distinguishable responses. For instance, according to I3-PHY-G4, I21-PE-G5, and I24-CHEM-G2 although some of the subject groups have very strong bonds between its members, in some subject groups there are no bonds at all. They suggested this as one of the reasons of decreased performance and low motivation. I21-PE-G5 admitted that she cannot express her opinion during subject group meetings because there is an issue of seniority.

> Some senior colleagues do not express any opinion and say "*you are right, let's do it your way*" but indeed they are offended and you hear about it later on. Other senior colleagues on the other hand, say "*we are more experienced, this is the way it should be, you are wrong*". Therefore I do not express my opinion during subject group meetings and I try not to be actively involved at during the meetings. (I21-PE-G5)

She believes this has something to do with the culture as well. She says "in our culture, younger people must show respect to elder people". On the other hand, I7-GEO-G4 expressed her positive opinion about her subject group and said all ten members of her group are getting along very good and they work efficiently. However she stressed on the need of for a head of subject group, which she believes will make group meetings more efficient. In terms of reward system, school administration stated that they do not have any authority to apply any reward system other than the one approved by the Ministry. However, since their appointment, given the procedural limitations, they attempted to motivate teachers by using the most applicable methods of rewarding such as written and verbal positive recognition. However, interviewees had a common view that reward-punishment system does not exist neither in their school nor other public schools.

58 out of 67 participants agreed that if they knew successful completion of a given task is followed by a reward and incompletion results in punishment, they would be motivated to perform better. I3 PHY-G4 and I5-PHIL-G4 completely supported the idea of training and seminars as motivators, and I42-ART-G6 considered training as unnecessary. Besides I3-PHY-G4, I5-PHIL-G3 and I42-ART-G6, rest of the interviewees did not perceive training and seminar opportunities as motivators. Moreover I37-PHY-G3 got offended by the question and responded by saying that he does not need any training or seminar to improve his skills because he his methodology and teaching skills are developed enough and the reason of low motivation and performance is low student quality. School administration also agreed with interview participants that most of the teachers do not see seminars and training opportunities as motivators. Administration stated that although they provide training opportunities and seminars, lack of teacher interest is the reason why they do not see them as motivators.

There use to be an inspector system in place, where an inspector could visit a teacher's class without prior notice with possible sanctions. All of the interviewees stressed on lack of inspectors and severity of its effect on performance and motivation of teachers. 62 of them agreed that because there are no inspectors anymore, teachers do not get prepared to their lectures and their performances cannot be measured effectively anymore.

> There is no system which differentiates a non-working teacher from a working one and since there have not been any inspectors for a long time decisions related with promotions of the teachers cannot be given objectively. (I32-PSYCH-G4).

I57-BIO-G4 who experienced old practice when inspectors were visiting the school said;

> In those days both the motivation and performance of the teachers were higher. There were inspectors for every subject and during those years, teachers were always well-prepared to their lectures, were always dressed accordingly and were ready for uninformed inspections. After the existing inspectors' retirement, because of the constitutional renewal no one could be assigned to inspector positions and there are a lot of teachers who are not dressed appropriately as a teacher. They also do not get prepared for their lectures. (I57-BIO-G4)

He suggested that having inspectors and creating a multi-faceted and more functional performance measurement system will result in higher performance and motivation. Currently the performance measurement system is only an eight pages long form, which has not been renewed for at least 29 years. I6-TL-G5 also stressed the importance of inspectors.

> Especially newly appointed teachers are more relaxed now, because they know there is no inspector to evaluate their performance. This leads to low motivation, low performance and loss of respect of students. (I6-TL-G5).

School administration also supported the common view that having inspectors would decrease the problems and would increase overall teacher performance, motivation and quality at schools.

7. *Discussion and Conclusion*

The main aim of this study was to explore teacher motivation in public schools by looking at the tools utilised by school administrations, how effective they are and the challenges school administrations face in applying diverse motivational techniques. Investigating these through a case study of a public school in a socio-politically challenging North Cyprus made this research a unique contribution. Furthermore, it facilitated to provide teachers' perspectives on the ways they would feel motivated to perform better.

Research findings revealed that due to the limitations imposed by having a centralised governance of education, administrators are limited in types of motivational techniques they can use. Also data suggested an influence of individual perceptions, culture and self-motivation on performance. Although teachers are satisfied and feel motivated with current, non-monetary incentive schemes they believe that it is still poor and could be improved.

It also emerged from data that besides known motivational techniques, better reward-punishment system is crucial for higher motivation. This thought also received a common agreement in the literature (Kessler, 1995). Furthermore, there was consensus on the inspector system's efficiency. This means tighter government control and sanctions, which promise to trigger the sense of fairness and distinction of low and high performers as also argued by Griffith (2004).

Another aspect of motivation that teachers highlighted was the current performance evaluation system. It is an eight pages long form, which is completed by the school administration annually and it consists detailed questions about each teacher. This form has been used at least for 29 years without any update. Both administration and teachers agree that the form is not objective and has questions that are impossible to answer accurately. Also, no feedback is given to employees at the end of this evaluation. To increase employee performance, a completely new system of evaluation can be recommended that takes into consideration the opinions of students and colleagues besides the administration. This is also suggested by the existing literature and would provide a 360 degree feedback on a teacher's performance (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2004). A feedback system like this one would provide teachers the opportunity to improve performance.

It can be argued that structural deficiencies and limitations imposed by the governance style have an impact on public school teachers; however this does not reduce the importance of individual motivational differences and perceptions on performance. Only acknowledging the interplay of both individual and situational factors provides an opportunity to create a more effective tool to motivate teachers. As evidenced by this article, although socio-political or structural limitations may impose challenges in creating a systematically working motivation scheme, it is still possible for school administrations to initiate individual motivation through utilising intrinsic tools available. Further research exploring teacher motivation in similar environments is promising in yielding rich data for comparative research. This will enable us to provide new performance management tools and motivational techniques tailored to motivate teachers working in unique environments.

Table 1: Teachers' Public School Experience

Public School Experience	Code	Frequency
Less than a year	G1	1
1- 5 years	G2	5
6-10 years	G3	20
11-15 years	G4	21
16-20 years	G5	11
21-25 years	G6	4
Total		**62**

Table 2: Teachers' Subject Areas and Assigned Codes

Subject Area	Code	Frequency
Mathematics	MAT	8
Turkish Language	TL	8
Physics	PHY	6
Biology	BIO	6
Chemistry	CHEM	5
Physical Education	PE	5
History	HIST	5
English Language	EL	4
Geography	GEO	3
Psychology	PSYCH	3
Philosophy	PHIL	2
Economy	ECON	2
Music	MUS	2
School Counsellor	SC	2
Arts	ART	1
Total		**62**

Table 3: Question Themes Covered with Teachers during the Interviews

Question	Theme
1 to 5	General Questions (i.e.: experience, gender)
6-12	Voluntary Responsibility Taking and Performance
13-21	Motivation
22-33	Individual Opinion on Current Working Environment

Table 4: Teachers' views on motivational strength of the current incentives

	Verbal Recognition from Vice Principals	Verbal Recognition from the Principal	Recognition Letter from the School	Recognition Letter from the Ministry	Supervising School Field Trips
Strongly Agree	*15.0*	*43.3*	*43.3*	*45.8*	*35.0*
Agree	*20.0*	*26.7*	*21.7*	*16.9*	*18.3*
Undecided	*16.7*	*6.7*	*10.0*	*3.4*	*3.3*
Disagree	*31.7*	*16.7*	*18.3*	*20.3*	*23.3*
Strongly Disagree	*16.7*	*6.7*	*6.7*	*13.6*	*20.0*
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*

Table 5: Teacher responses to the question: A change in what would motivate you to perform better?

Change in what would motivate to perform better?	Preferences (in percentages)
School Administration	*16.1*
Educational administration system	*69.4*
Appraisal system	*14.5*
Working hours	*4.8*
Training opportunities	*6.5*
Pay	*1.6*
Ignorance of the problems by the Ministry	*1.6*

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