

## IMPLICATIONS OF MOTIVATION FACTORS IN THE ACTIVITY OF ROMANIAN SPORTS TEACHERS

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### **Abstract**

*Work motivation is an important concept in human resources management that refers to the influence exerted by certain factors on employees, determining their positive or negative actions for the performance of work tasks. Starting from theoretical arguments based on the scientific literature, we proposed as the objective of the research the evaluation of the existing stimulation system in the pre-university education system, aimed at sports teachers. The research tried to determine to what extent the needs described by Maslow are motivating factors for sports teachers in the pre-university environment, but also to identify the main specific constraints that the staff face. At the same time, we aimed to investigate the implications of leadership and organizational culture on the level of motivation.*

**Key words:** *motivation, sport teachers, human resources management, motivational factors, organizational culture, leadership*

**Jel Classification:** *M12, M54*

### **1. Introduction**

From a human resource management perspective, people are employed not just to fill open positions but must be continuously motivated to assume the significant role they can play in an organization. This is more obvious since in the current socio-economic environment, characterized by uncertainty, dynamism, and interdependence, many of the difficulties or successes of the organizations are based on human resources and their management (Bedrule-Grigoruță, 2008).

The effectiveness of an organization's use of all other available resources increasingly depends on the effectiveness of the use of human resources (Manolescu, Lefter, Deaconu, 2007). Human resources are essential and specific, because without these resources the organization would not actually exist, and those who are responsible for its dynamism give not only the "life" to other resources, but also the "will" to succeed. Competence acquired through experience in practical problems encountered by people gives the true value of the organization.

The human resource's function has become one of the main functions of the enterprise, and its development is currently supported by the strong penetration of its management into all sectors. Human resource management is not just a set of practices and tools applicable to the field, but a highly individualized scientific discipline within management science. The focus on human resource management is recent, the personnel function has evolved, changed its name to become the human resource function, and has the strategic character it proves today (Rosca, 2005).

## **2. The importance of staff motivation. Motivational theories. The hierarchy of human needs**

Understanding the reasons for employee behavior can give meaning to all management activities within any organization. Knowing these causes can improve operational efficiency, help predict and understand human behavior and decipher its moral values.

Motivating people at work means rewarding their contribution to the organization's progress, initiative, effort, but also developing, for them, the usefulness given by the subjective dimension of work (Ursu, 2005).

Addressing complex motivational issues has been the subject of professional activity. However, regardless of the opinions of various experts, the common factor in the analysis of motivation is the needs of the employees.

In the field of motivation, what we could call a classic theory, is the model published by Abraham Maslow since 1943, that started from the idea that people have five sets of needs arranged in a hierarchy (taxonomy) of importance. Maslow's pyramid highlights the importance of fulfilling each of these needs, starting from the basic needs, safety and belonging, up to the higher ones, the needs of esteem and self-actualization, which involve the fulfillment of one's potential in every aspect of life (Pânișoara, Pânișoara, 2005).

Maslow (1954) believed that people are always in search of different goals. Thus, a need placed higher on the scale of needs would become a reason for behavior if the needs located below it are met. People always want to reach higher while certain factors out of their control pull them down. If the manager knows where an employee is on the scale of needs, it will help him understand how he can be successfully motivated. The purpose of motivation is, therefore, to help people obtain the skills and knowledge they need to permanently climb the hierarchical ladder (Cernuscă, 2007).

Herzberg's motivational-hygienic theory provided a great stimulus to researchers in the field to take the knowledge of the issues of motivation and job satisfaction to another level. In 1959, Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman dropped a bombshell on the traditional view of job satisfaction by introducing the motivator-hygiene theory. The factors that lead to satisfaction are called "motivators", and those that lead to dissatisfaction were called "hygienic factors". Motivators are closely related to the work process, while hygienic factors are related to the environment. Motivators are the ones that produce the appropriate behavior. Hygienic factors can lead either to dissatisfaction or to the lack of any response. Herzberg (1966) theorized that the provision of motivating factors such as recognition, work itself, advancement, responsibility and performance generates job satisfaction, on the other hand, the lack of hygiene factors such as working conditions, pay, interpersonal relationships, job security, company policies and administration produce dissatisfaction, but are not related to job satisfaction.

The motivational model advanced by Vroom, another benchmark in the field, assumes that individuals act based on how they perceive situations. This subjective aspect of the model is considered essential. In short, individuals are motivated when their perception is that "they are not working for nothing" – meaning their effort is translated into a performance, which will be rewarded in an attractive way (Vroom, 1964).

In the late 1960s, John Locke's groundbreaking research on the importance of goals in increasing motivation paved the way for the modern perception of goal setting. In his 1968 article "Toward a Theory of Motivation and Task Incentives," he showed that clear goals and adequate feedback motivate employees. Furthermore, he continued the theory by pointing out that working towards a goal is a major source of motivation – which in turn improves performance.

Ryan and Deci (1985) developed the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), explaining how motivational processes influence various behavioral outcomes. According to SDT, depending on the level of self-determination, a person can show autonomous motivation, controlled motivation or

amotivation towards an activity. The thesis suggests that people are happier and more productive when they are motivated from within, not by external factors.

The theory focuses on three fundamental psychological needs:

Competence: The feeling that we can influence the outcome and that we have the necessary skills.

Relatedness: The need to belong and have meaningful relationships.

Autonomy: The desire to be the root cause of our own actions without being forced or manipulated.

### 3. Highlights of motivation in the field of physical education and sports

The literature highlights the fact that there are a multitude of theories and methods of motivating people, being a domain of interest, in continuous expansion. However, they do not work for every situation, which is why the particularities of each field must be considered, as well as variables both inside and outside of each individual organization. This is because management does not offer an ideal solution for every situation, but it is necessary to adapt motivational techniques and methods for each case in practice. We must also emphasize on this occasion the importance of the role of the manager who must consider the daily routines of the employees, concrete challenges they face and determine job satisfaction by carefully interpreting their behavior, their words, and actions. It can be particularly useful to study the job satisfaction levels of groups of employees through interviews, questionnaires, and focused discussions.

Our study starts from these considerations and aims to identify particularities regarding the motivational system applicable to sports teachers in pre-university education. Thus, a first direction of research sought to investigate to what extent physical education teachers in pre-university education present distinct levels of motivation.

The theory of self-determination has provided a framework widely used to explain motivational processes, allowing a better knowledge of the educational field, starting from studies conducted in the context of physical education, having as its object the motivation of sports teachers.

As pointed out by Vasconcellos et al. (2019) in the educational context, teachers can experience autonomous motivation by presenting either an intrinsic motivation (referring to the inherent pleasure of teaching) or an identified regulation (referring to the recognition of didactic values).

Referring these theories to our subjects of study, physical education (PE) teachers, we can affirm that in the ideal situation they engage in their profession, because they enjoy teaching. However, other reasons can also underlie the functioning of teachers. They may engage in teaching because they see the value of learning new skills to students, because they want to prove to themselves that they are good teachers, or because they feel pressured by others to perform well as a teacher (Van den Berghe et.al, 2014).

However, when teachers are faced with controlled motivation, they are likely to act under certain workplace pressures. When controlled, teachers may exhibit introjected regulation (as an internal pressure, such as the desire to avoid feelings of guilt) or external regulation (as an external pressure, such as the desire to comply with an external requirement). Finally, when teachers are controlled motivated, they are not likely to understand why they participate in teaching. Thus, a point of interest of the research consisted in identifying the constraints, the pressures on sports teachers with an effect on motivation.

Studies on perceived workplace pressures have identified four types of work-related pressures experienced by physical education teachers (Pelletier et al., 2002). The first category identified and measured the perceived time constraints associated with physical education lessons (for example, "Sometimes I rush to finish my lessons" "I do not fit in the time available"). The second and third categories looked at pressures arising from school authorities (e.g., "My teaching

methods are dictated by school policy”) and school peers (e.g., “I feel that my peers question my teaching methods”). The final category assessed the pressure felt by teachers to be evaluated based on their students' performance (e.g., “If students do not perform, the quality of my work may be questioned”).

To conclude, these various motivational motives and constraints have a differential impact on teacher functioning, on their behavior and emotions. Teacher functioning is not only important for teachers themselves but also for students, as it is assumed to be related to their classroom teaching practices.

All these theories were considered in the formulation of the objectives and the realization of the discussion guide within the applied part of the research.

#### **4. Qualitative analysis- focused discussion on the topic of motivational factors**

The applied part of the research aimed to evaluate the motivational system applicable to sports teachers in pre-university education. Thus, a first research hypothesis aimed to demonstrate the fact that physical education teachers in pre-university education present various levels of motivation corresponding to the motivational factors associated with Maslow's Theory. A second research hypothesis sought to demonstrate the fact that in this field there are specific constraints that affect the level of motivation of teaching staff and implicitly the way of performing tasks.

Another research hypothesis aimed at verifying how leadership or organizational culture can influence the motivation level of personnel in pre-university education units. In the current context, where the general perception of the role of a leader within organizations has changed over time, specialized literature emphasizes the need for leaders able to motivate and inspire their subordinates by their own example. Furthermore, a leader must recognize a subordinate individual's own qualities and abilities, to identify their potential and should aim to help in its development (Constantin, 2024).

To study the problem of staff motivation from the perspective of professionals, pre-university teachers, a qualitative method, the focus group, was used. The use of qualitative research brought more knowledge regarding and contributed to the in-depth understanding of the studied aspects.

By conducting this research, we wanted to find out if the needs described by Maslow are related to the motivating factors for pre-university sports teachers. Based on the answers of those present at the focus group, we aimed to offer an interpretation that highlights what would motivate the employees of the institution the most, as well as the main constraints, with the final goal of formulating conclusions and improvement proposals. Our findings can represent important benchmarks of good practices and may offer solutions to some problems facing the sports and educational field. The method of focused group helped us to efficiently value the perception of professionals for the identification of factors with an impact on the good functioning of educational management.

Specifically, the focus group analysis had the following objectives:

- analyzing research questions.
- measuring the professionals' own perception.
- identifying other aspects that were not initially included in the initial research questions.
- discussing proposals for improvement measures.

The advantages of choosing the focus group method are:

- quick organization.
- the stimulating character, as the specific environment encourages the provision of information, as well as the specification of deep beliefs in relation to the debated issues. At the same time, in a group individuals feel better, they can speak more than usual, giving more complete answers, less affected by inhibitions (Wimmer, Dominick, 1991).

A main feature of the focus group is that "this method encourages during the discussion the free expression of the participants, at the same time aiming to address the main points of interest fixed in advance" (Bulai, 2000).

The actors of the focused discussion were sports teachers, active in pre-university education in Sibiu, Alba and Vâlcea, master's students at the Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu within the Specialization Physical Education and School Sports (Educație Fizică și Sportivă Școlară. Two discussion meetings were held with the participants, each lasting approximately 80 minutes. Although at first sight the group can be qualified as homogeneous, at a closer look, several elements of heterogeneity can be found, consisting of the different age and experience of the participants, from 1 to 22 years of work experience or the status of holder or substitute, elements that have brought interpretations varied on the issues discussed. It should be mentioned that in addition to the willingness to participate in the discussions, another criterion in the selection of the participants was precisely the interest shown in the researched topic.

The educational units to which the participants belong are in turn characterized by heterogeneity, through the lens of urban/rural environment, access to resources, overpopulation/underpopulation, prestige and educational results. These are:

- Brădeni Secondary School-rural
- Art High School Sibiu-urban
- "Decebal" Secondary School, Cricău-rural
- "Regina Maria" Secondary School, Sibiu-urban
- "I.L. Caragiale" Secondary School, Sibiu-urban
- Avrig Secondary School-urban
- Secondary School no. 25 Sibiu-urban
- Câlnic High School-rural
- Tomșani Secondary School -rural.

The session followed the drawn-up focus group protocol - on the following main stages:

- a) introductory stage.
- b) asking questions and recording the answers.
- c) the phase of free discussions.
- d) the conclusions and completion of the session.

The introductory stage aimed at illustrating the purpose of the study and the subject matter, being facilitated by the presentation of the participants. This initial stage continued with the actual questions contained in the interview grid, followed by the presentation, and recording of the answers. The basic principle of the discussion was that "there are no right or wrong answers to the questions that will be asked and therefore every opinion expressed by the participants is extremely valuable for this study" and another important clarification made at the beginning of the meeting aimed to emphasize the use information for scientific purposes only. To obtain the answers of the specialists, the brainstorming technique was successfully used on each item targeted by the research. This technique was considered important because, being a participatory qualitative technique, its value consisted in encouraging a large number of significant ideas related to the studied topic.

## 5. Research results

We further illustrate the main research questions considered within the focused discussion method, the responses recorded and the relevant additions resulting from the debates.

Regarding the first question in the questionnaire, a significant percentage of those interviewed, eight out of nine people, considered that their work is stimulating and engaging, to a great and very great extent. Asked to justify the answer, we could see a similarity in opinions, so they unanimously declared that they like working with children, thus they feel motivated to approach physical education and sports classes as efficiently and productively as possible. "My

motivation level is permanently high. Children like to play. This aspect for me is an exciting one because I am constantly looking to bring new games and new teaching methods as attractive as possible for children", "I really like working with children, discovering new sports talents, giving them confidence in their own strength". Only one of the interviewed teachers considered their work to be motivating only to a small extent, citing discipline problems or inadequate material base as constraints. Referring to the Theory of Self-Determination, we find the confirmation of the need for competence, which was explained as the feeling that we can influence the outcome and that we have the necessary skills. According to Deci et al. (2001) competence refers to the desire to feel able to influence the environment and manage one's classrooms. Closely related to competence, the responses also brought into focus the need for autonomy, a second pillar of self-determination theory. When experiencing the satisfaction of autonomy in teaching, teachers feel that they can implement their own ideas and proposals in the classroom. And for the participating teachers, autonomy is important, as a condition for a creative and flexible approach to achieving goals and conducting the activity effectively.

The degree of concentration and attention regarding tasks during working hours, another aspect monitored, was considered high, especially in the situation where the training base is not appropriate, which increases the risk of injuries. At the same time, following Vroom's theory, it was found that there is no correspondence between effort and rewards. We can consider that the salary meets the elementary needs at the base of Maslow's pyramid, without being considered fair by participants, in relation to the effort and the specifics of the work.

According to motivational theories, the need for safety has a key role, being on the first steps of the pyramid of needs, in which sense we tried to investigate this aspect at the level of the studied educational units. Regarding stability and security, as expected, perspectives differed depending on whether one was a full or substitute teacher. Thus, in some opinions, the workplace offers security and stability in some extent, both financial and emotional, but the fact that there are not enough tenure positions, and it is necessary to take the tenure exam repeatedly is, indeed, an "imbalance" in stability desired by teachers. Other participants in the discussion considered that work does not offer security if you are not a holder because regardless of the performances you bring to the school, students, etc. every year you must take an exam, being competitive fierce and the number of titular positions remaining a surprise until the last moment: "I believe that, unfortunately, in any school, substitute teachers cannot have security in terms of keeping their job".

It seemed important to us to investigate aspects related to the organizational climate, the relationship with management, respectively with colleagues, in the context where most motivational theories emphasize the need for employees to relate. The focus discussion confirmed this aspect and revealed that the level of motivation is different.

An interesting aspect that was not initially considered, but along the way became an important hypothesis to verify, was that there is a link between leadership and the degree of motivation of the staff. One of the respondents pointed out that she is very satisfied with the relationship she has with the director. "She is a leader who values and supports the opinion of each employee". Therefore, a participative leadership style that empowers employees by involving them in decision-making is a strong motivating factor. On the opposite pole, there were situations where the participants in the discussions invoked the fact that the director cannot be qualified as a leader, in the context he/she is influenced by parents and does not consider the position of his own subordinates. These strained relations with the management, combined with an overcrowding of the school and, implicitly, with the lack of the material base necessary for physical education classes are the main reason staff retention cannot be ensured.

Related to the relationship with colleagues, in most cases it was found that this is a good one, which contributes to the increase of job satisfaction ("It is a young group, and the colleagues of the department are exceptional"). However, some sports teachers do not feel understood and appreciated by their colleagues, complaining about the lack of support in conducting specific

activities such as participating in various school competitions. In practice, teachers are ranked according to the subjects taught, sport being unjustifiably qualified as a less important discipline, and consequently, sports competitions and their achievements. This attitude affects the relationships between colleagues, bringing serious prejudices to the need for respect and self-esteem of sports teachers.

These aspects were also invoked when analyzing the way work is evaluated and appreciated. Participants who considered that their work is not evaluated and appreciated properly, were asked to justify their choice. Analyzing the answers of the teachers, we concluded that the correct evaluation and appreciation of the work of the staff is uncertain, there are pro and con opinions on this topic. Dissatisfied teachers considered that a real evaluation and appreciation of their work should not be limited to the periodic evaluation carried out within the organization, but should be related to students, parents, society. " For some students, sport is not an interest and because of this they refuse to participate no matter how nice a game is, they are supported even by their parents not to practice certain activities, because they get tired and sweat. The benefits of sport activities are not fully seen". "First of all, because of low salaries and then because of society's lack of respect for the status of a teacher ". "Certain educational subjects remain a priority, no real interest is showed for physical education, music, visual arts".

The needs of continuous development, of self-fulfillment, represent higher needs that can influence the degree of motivation of the staff. Most of the teachers interviewed, namely seven out of nine, answered that their work offers them the opportunity to develop new skills. Giving an interpretation of the answers, we deduce that the results and achievements that sports teachers acquire give them self-respect. Half of them strongly agree that self-esteem increases with their achievements and results, relating to intrinsic motivation. The other side considers this statement to be true, also referring to extrinsic motivation.

Accordingly, we asked an additional question, namely whether individual recognition of merits would bring satisfaction, and the unanimous answers led us to the conclusion that it is not enough the fulfillment for the job well done and the results achieved, but people expect proof of respect from management, colleagues.

Related to the importance of work in the process of continuous learning and development, we could observe that the interviewed persons claim that their work offers them opportunities, which contributes to increasing motivation. Below are some interesting answers:

"There is a constant need for something new in this field. When we talk about groups of students under the age of 14, physical education classes must always be different and touch as many sports branches as possible."

"I learn daily, from children, things that help me develop as a person and a teacher. Training courses, sharing experiences with colleagues, etc. give me the opportunity to learn and develop both professionally and personally."

"When working with children you always have something new to learn. "

"I believe that in the field of education and beyond, we always need continuous development adapting to the times."

"The more you learn and develop, you can become your best professional version and encounter personal fulfillment."

The research aimed not only to investigate the level of motivation, but also to provide directions for identifying some improvement measures. Thus, the most key factors that would contribute to increasing motivation, related to the profession and the specifics of the sport activities, were synthesized. Most could be anticipated from previous discussions, namely:

- ✓ Better conditions for sports activities.
- ✓ Participation in professional training courses.
- ✓ Respect for the teaching profession.
- ✓ Salary increase.

- ✓ Children's greater desire for physical education classes. Less protective parents.
- ✓ A pleasant atmosphere from management and colleagues.

What is interesting is the fact that the teachers insisted on the appropriate sports base, which from our point of view contradicts the qualification given by Herzberg, who considers the working conditions as hygiene factors, a factor that cannot generate motivation in work. Achieving the objectives, obtaining notable results, conducting the activity in safe conditions are interdependent with the training conditions and were unanimously considered a motivating factor.

Other aspects considered were also related to the organizational climate and even the organizational culture, thus the need to establish a stricter regulation for students, containing not only rights but also obligations and real sanctions, was brought into discussion, so that teachers feel protected by both management and an appropriate legal framework. It was concluded that this is necessary but not sufficient for a positive climate based on respect and effective communication.

From another perspective, "a motivational factor would have been that in the first year of activity I had a mentor who could explain and show me how both the planning and the hourly activity should look". Therefore, an organizational culture based on leadership and mentoring activities, which would contribute to the integration of newcomers, would increase the degree of motivation of beginning teachers.

Without being able to exhaust this topic, we tried to identify aspects that can negatively influence motivation in work, being perceived by sports teachers as pressures. Thus, the factor that was mentioned unanimously was the pressure exerted by the school authorities, followed by peer pressure, time constraints, the pressure to be evaluated based on students' results and behavior.

## 6. Conclusions

A person's motivation to work means his belief that by performing under given conditions he will obtain the elements for satisfying his own needs. Value systems involve incentives, assign precise meaning to the consequences of employees' actions, and influence the degree to which individuals are free to adhere to certain values.

Motivating employees involves a constant effort and should be the main goal of every manager, as recent years have brought major changes in Romanian employees' expectations. If in the past financial motivation was considered the only way to increase productivity, today employees are looking for more and no longer see salary bonuses as the only motivation for achieving personal and professional goals.

The research led to the conclusion that sports teachers, through the work they carry out, satisfy their needs described in Maslow's Theory as well as mostly the three basic psychological needs (BPN), namely autonomy, competence and relationship defined by Deci and Ryan (1985), whose satisfaction leads to the most autonomous forms of motivation and ensures optimal psychological functioning in humans. We found that although the employees consider the work within the educational unit to be demanding, most of them also consider it satisfactory. They can acquire new skills, and the function provides security and stability to the holders. A significant percentage affirmed that they are extremely focused on fulfilling their duties and achieving sports results, the atmosphere at work being welcoming. However, we were able to find significant differences regarding their degree of motivation, in each case increased job satisfaction being associated with leadership, with a management attitude that inspires the staff, to be in solidarity with them, respectively with an organizational culture that facilitates integration staff, good communication, equal treatment, open and honest communication and everyone's involvement in decision-making.

In conclusion, it can be deduced that human resource management and employee motivation are crucial aspects in the studied field, because an effective approach to these aspects can lead to increased productivity and performance within it. Effective staff management can

ensure that the right employees are in the right places, so they can develop their skills and competencies to contribute to the institution's goals. At the same time, each individual manager must assume the role of leader and find the most suitable solutions adapted to each collective and everyone within the organization.

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