

Perceptions versus Reality of Employees' Motivational Needs

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Background

Understanding and reinforcing the motivational needs of employees is critical to ensuring optimum job performance and satisfaction. But do managers always know what drives their employees – or do they work from unsupported stereotypes of the motivational needs of men and women at different ages?

In a body of research addressing this question, Allworth Juniper compared managers' perceptions of the key motivational drivers for men and women across different age groups with self-reports of the motivational needs of job applicants who had completed psychometric testing in the practice over the past six years.

Overall, the results show that, while there is some alignment between managers and professionals' perceptions of the motivational needs of male and female employees at different ages compared with job applicant's self-reported motivational needs, there are also some key differences.

Procedure

Two sets of data were gathered in the research: managers and professionals' perceptions of employees' key motivators and job applicants' self reported motivational needs.

a) Managers and professionals' perceptions of motivational needs

People in management and professional roles were invited to complete an on-line questionnaire asking them to select the three motivators that they perceived to be most important for each of four different groups of employees, these being: younger males; older males; younger females; and older females. The three motivators for each group were chosen from a list of 18 motivational attributes adapted from SHL's Motivation Questionnaire (MQ). The questionnaire

took approximately 7 minutes to complete and participants were advised that their results would remain private and confidential.

Participants included Allworth Juniper's professional contacts (invited via PsychScope, the Practice's monthly email newsletter); the general public via an invitation posted on the home page of Allworth Juniper's web-site; and friends and family (via personal invitation).

A total of 53 valid responses were returned. Roughly 1/3 were male and 2/3 female. They worked across a broad range of industries and occupations in roles such as HR Manager, Architect, Lawyer, Marketing Director, and Care Manager.

b) Motivational needs of job applicants

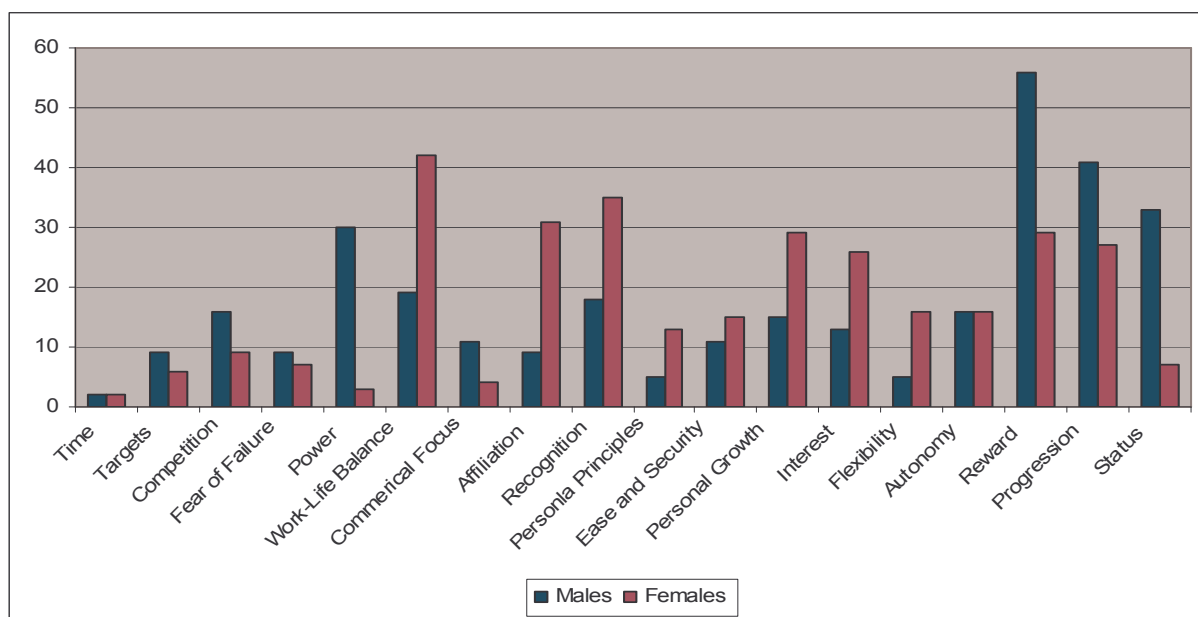
Motivational needs of job applicants were analysed using retrospective data for 1,881 job applicants who had completed the SHL Motivation Questionnaire (MQ) as part of psychometric testing with Allworth Juniper between 2003 and 2008. Of the 1,881 applicants, 1,165 were male (61.9%) and 716 female (38.1%). The mean age of applicants was 35.6 years for males and 31.5 years for females (overall range = 20 to 62 years).

Results

Gender Differences

Analysis of the data provided by managers and professionals indicates that they *perceive* a number of differences in motivational needs as a function of gender. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, respondents consider that males are more motivated than females by Competition, Power, Commercial Focus, Reward, Progression and Status. Females on the other hand, were perceived to be more motivated than males by Work-life Balance, Affiliation, Recognition, Personal Growth, Interest, and Flexibility.

Figure 1: People's perceptions of how motivators differ as a function of gender



The perception of managers and professionals that males are more motivated than females by Competition, Power and Commercial Focus aligns with the findings of gender differences in self-reported motivational needs amongst job applicants. Likewise, the perception that females are more motivated than males by Work-life Balance, Recognition and Personal Growth reflects job applicants' self-reported motivational needs.

That said, whilst managers and professionals perceive females to be more motivated than males by having Flexibility in the workplace, job applicant self-reports of their motivational needs show the opposite. Respondents also indicated that they perceive females to be more motivated than males by Affiliation (i.e., interacting with other people and working in a harmonious team) and by having Interest in their work (i.e., being provided with creative and stimulating tasks). Self-reported needs from job applicants, however, suggests that there is no significant difference between males and females in their need for Affiliation and Interest in their work.

Finally, managers and professionals clearly perceive males to be more motivated than females by the extrinsic motivators of Financial Reward, Progression and Status. Self reports from job applicants, however,

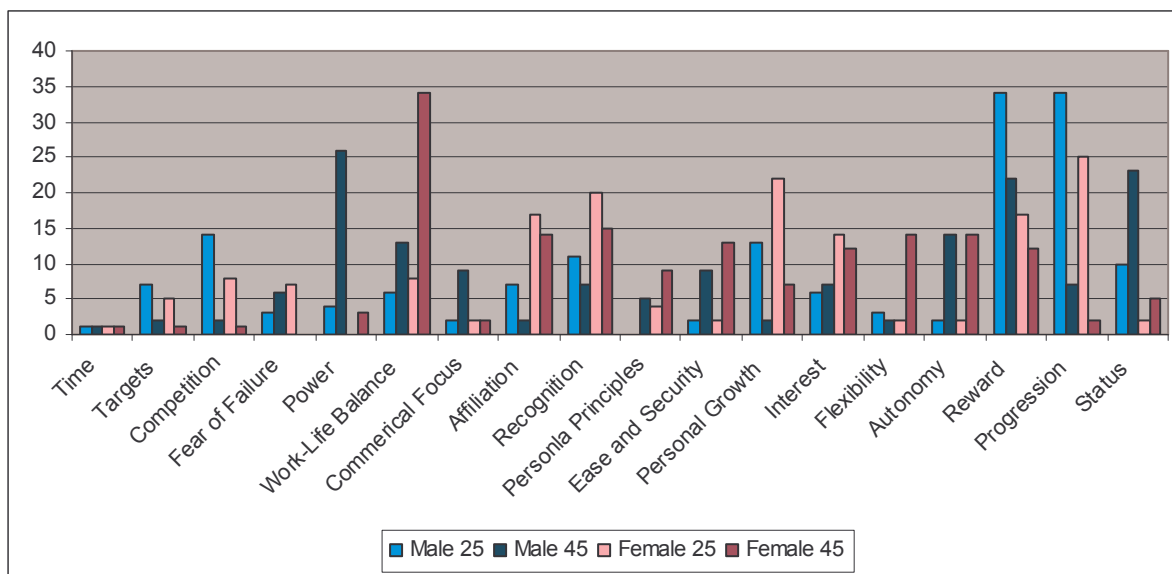
suggests that there is no significant difference on these extrinsic motivational factors between the genders.

Generally speaking, these results indicate that there is some alignment between what managers and professionals *perceive* to be the difference in motivators between males and females and what job applicants themselves report. In addition, however, there are some stereotypes in people's perceptions about gender differences and motivational drivers that are not supported by self-reports of motivational needs, particularly concerning extrinsic incentives.

Age Differences

Figure 2 below illustrates that managers and professionals perceive there to be some substantial differences in how motivators differ for younger as compared with older employees. Key perceptions appear to be that younger employees (those aged around 25 years) are more motivated than their older counterparts (those aged around 45 years) by Competition, Personal Growth, Material Reward and Progression. Inversely, older employees are perceived to be more motivated than younger workers by Work-life Balance, Ease and Security (i.e., provision of pleasant working conditions and job security) and Autonomy.

Figure 2: People's perceptions of how motivators differ as a function of age and gender



There is some alignment between managers and professionals' perceptions of motivational needs across different age groups compared with the self-reported needs of job applicants at different ages. Specifically, older employees seem to be less motivated by Competition, Personal Growth and Progression opportunities and more motivated by Power and Autonomy. In addition, older female applicants are more motivated than younger female applicants by Flexibility in a role.

There are also, however, some areas in which managers and professionals' perceptions failed to align with self-reported motivational needs of job applicants. For example, a key perception was that maintaining a Work-life Balance is more motivating for older than it is for younger employees (particularly for females). In fact, job applicants' self-reports suggest that older employees have less need to maintain work-life balance and are actually more inclined to want to be immersed and involved in their work than younger employees. The other perception that does not align with job applicants' reported motivators is managers and professionals' view that older employees are more motivated than their younger counterparts by Ease of working conditions and Job Security. Self-reported motivational needs of job applicants failed to show any difference between older and younger males in their need for Ease and Security

and, for females, the reverse was the case. That is, older females have less need for Ease and Security than younger females.

Finally, managers and professionals' perception that older employees have less need for Financial Reward than younger employees was not substantiated by the self-reported needs of younger and older employees. Nor was the perception that older employees have a greater need than younger employees for Status.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the limitations of the small sample of management and professional participants, this research shows that many perceptions they may hold about how workplace motivators differ as a function of gender and age are reflected in what employees report themselves, that is, there is some alignment between people's general perceptions and self-reported motivational needs in the Australian workforce. At the same time, however, there are also a number of key perceptions or stereotypes that managers and professionals hold that are not supported by self-reports from job applicants of their motivational needs. These primarily relate to extrinsic motivators such as Material Reward, Progression and Status for gender differences and, need for Work-Life Balance and Ease and Security in relation to age differences.

Due to the gap found between managers and professionals' perceptions and what job applicants report themselves, it is important that we do not 'stereotype' what particular groups of employees need or want in a role in order to remain motivated. That is, it is important for employers to give greater consideration to the unique factors that influence a particular employee's motivation. Indeed, even though we may have some insight into what generally motivates different groups of people, a person's motivational needs will remain unique, at least to some extent, for that particular individual.

Further Information

For further information on this research or to find out how motivational profiling can be used to help uncover the unique motivational needs of employees for selection and career development purposes, please contact one of Allworth Juniper's psychologists on (02) 9223 2774 or via email: office@allworthjuniper.com.au