

University Staff's Work Motivation: Do Personal Factors Make A Difference?

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Abstract

This study explores perceptions of university staff toward work motivation, as well as the relationship between perceived personal factor and staff's work motivation. Questionnaires measuring factors of work motivation were distributed to 71 full-time working staffs of the Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City. The empirical results reveal that the levels of work motivation of staff in VNU-HCM are moderately high. The findings of this study also indicated that there were significant differences in work motivation levels in terms of age, length of employment, academic qualification, and income per month.

Keywords: work motivation, personal factor, staff, higher education, Vietnam

Introduction

An employee's performance is defined by the following factors such as: motivation, work environment, tools, materials and information needed to do the work (Kadence, 2006). Work motivation is a very important process which encourages staff to make the best efforts in performing their work missions. Motivation answers to the question of why some staff are more committed, making more effort and achieving greater performance than others (Kljajić-Dervić & Dervić, 2017). Unfortunately, many managers do not understand the concepts, principles and mechanisms of motivation (Hauser, 2014). Understanding the motivation of employees, managers might be able to design plan actions to guide their staffs towards achieving the desired organizational objectives. Especially, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) is the place for talented faculty members and students that have the mission to train high-quality human resources and create key scientific researches. They are also pioneers in the reformation progress that has a significant contribution to the development of the nation and society (VNU-HCM, 2017). Staff's work motivation in VNU-HCM plays a very important role in the performance of the university missions and strategies. Bedrnová and Nový (2002) described that work motivation as the human-centered approach to work and to specific work tasks.

Baba Gana and Bababe (2011) explained that a lack of motivation could lead to low job performance among employees. Work motivation is an important factor which enables employees to work harder but still enjoy their work. Employees with higher job motivation are much more likely to achieve higher job performance, which is the target of any managers in the organizational settings. Other studies also indicated that motivation drives an employee to take actions. Moreover, a motivated person is much more likely to be devoted to accomplishing a task. Thus, establishing the relationship between motivation and job performance is very necessary for organizations.

Many studies have been delved into the research field of human motivation from the perspectives of social psychology and social behaviorism. However, different researchers and psychologists have provided very different definitions of this term. The research of Page (2008) defined that work motivation is "the process that accounts for an individual's intensity, direction and persistence of effort toward attaining a goal". According to Robbins and Judge (2016), work motivation is "the willingness to exert a persistent and high level of effort towards organizational goals, conditioned by the efforts' ability to satisfy some individual needs". In this study, we defined that work motivation is the desire and willingness of employees to achieve the best results in terms of nature of work, working conditions, job efficiency and reward, and work relationship.

Work motivation has been measured in several ways. Several researchers have adopted a facet-sum approach to measure work motivation by assuming that these aspects can be combined in a measure of work motivation. There are many instruments available for measuring facets of work motivation. The research of Zámečník (2014) employed seven factors to measure motivation with respect to different components of employee motivation including the work result recognition group, validation through the use of one's qualifications, working environment, the materialistic cluster, the organizational-career, the collaboration and cooperation, and the quality of inputs. Other research of Tremblay, Blanchard, Taylor and Villeneuve (2009) measured employee motivation in Canada using six general factors such as intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, identified regulation, external regulation, introjected regulation, and motivation. In this study, we used four factors to measure staff' work motivation in the VNU-HCM including: nature of work, working conditions, job efficiency and reward, and work relationship.

Staff' work motivation is influenced by a number of variables. Several previous studies shows that there are related personal factors influencing work motivation such as gender (Aremu & Adeyoju, 2003; Shrum, 2007; Ufuophu-Biri & Iwu, 2014), age groups (Stamov-Roßnagel, 2015), salary (Zhou & Volkwein, 2003; Kljajić-Dervić & Dervić, 2017) and or other factors including job performance (Ufuophu-Biri & Iwu, 2014), organizational culture (Towers, 2006), rewards (Khalid, Humera, Sajjad, & Syed, 2011), workload (Syed, Raza, Jabran, Ejaz, Ul-Haq & Syed, 2011). However, we only used personal factors in order to explore the relationship between staff's personal factor (such as gender, age groups, length of employment, academic qualification, and income per month) and their work motivation in this study.

Most of the researches conducted on work motivation have focused on business and industrial settings. Very few studies have been done on the faculty members' work motivation in the higher education institutions, especially, on university staffs' work motivation in the countries like Vietnam. Based on this premise, the major aim of this study is exploring the staff' perceptions of work motivation and the relationship between perceived personal factor and staff' work motivation. The findings of this study, therefore, contribute to filling in the literature gap of staff' work motivation in higher education. This study focuses on the following research questions: 1) what is the general level of staffs' work motivation in the VNU-HCM? and 2) Are there any significant differences in the level of university staffs' work motivation regarding personal factors?

Methodology

Sample

Questionnaires were distributed to 74 staffs that were drawn from full-time working staff in the Vietnam National University of Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM). 71 questionnaires were returned which equaled 96% return rate. This rate exceeded the 30% response rate of most studies for analysis purpose (Dillman, 2000; Malaney, 2002). All data of respondents were self-reported information which was prevalently used in higher education research (Gonyea, 2005).

Broken down by gender, the sample of this study included 31% males and 69% females. In terms of marital status, 39.4% of respondents were single, and 60.6% were married. Staff belongs to different age groups, respondents' age distribution was 49.3% below 30 years old, 31% from 31 to 35 years old, 14.1% from 36 to 40 years old and over 41 years old accounting for 5.6%. Regarding the length of employment, 22.5% had been working from 1 to 5 years, 47.9% from 5 to 10 years and 12.7% from 10 to 15 years. In terms of respondents' educational attainment, 74.6% held bachelor's degrees, 23.9% had master's degrees.

Variables

Staff work motivation is identified as the dependent variable in this study. As demonstrated in Table 1, staff work motivation are composed of 24 items which were grouped into four factors such as nature of work, working conditions, job efficiency and reward, and work relationship. For each item, the respondents were asked to rate staff' level of faculty work motivation on a five-point Likert's scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree".

Factor analysis and internal consistency analysis (Cronbach's α) were conducted to assess the validity and reliability of this constructed measurement for staff in the VNU-HCM. Table 1 presents that factor loading values for items designed to measure each factor are consistently large from 0.67 to 0.91, which were greater than the threshold level of 0.5 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 2009). This result showed that the twenty-four items of four factors were all suitable for constructing work motivation. A cumulative explanation from 56.10 to 69.85 percent of this study was greater than the threshold level of 50 percent (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). The internal consistency analysis yielded Cronbach's α coefficient from 0.73 to 0.94 in this study was higher than the threshold level of 0.6 (Hair et al.,

Table 1. The construct validities and reliabilities of the staff' work motivation questionnaire

Factor	Items	Factorloadings	Variance explained (%)	Cronbach's α
Nature of work	Empowerment associated with job responsibilities	0.78		
	Assign and instruct specific work	0.78		
	Challenging and interesting in the work	0.73		
	Overall job satisfaction	0.75		
Working conditions	Provide sufficient information work	0.77		
	Facilities conditions are guaranteed	0.67		
	Reasonable working time	0.68		
	General satisfaction about working conditions	0.86		
Job efficiency and reward	Emulation is done objectively and fair	0.87		
	Reward corresponding to job performance	0.85		
	The criteria for the reward is reasonable	0.84		
	Form and result evaluation of job performance by fair	0.84		
Work relationship	Rewards and benefits are highly encouraged	0.71		
	Reward criteria are clearly announced	0.84		
	Overall satisfaction of job efficiency and reward	0.87		
	Be respected by leaders and colleagues	0.87		
	Recognize personal contributions	0.88		
	Assist in solving work	0.83		
	Atmosphere in the general activities	0.83		
	Be well informed and receptive	0.83		
	Fair treatment	0.81		
	Coordinate to complete the work	0.80		
	The help of colleagues	0.75		
	Overall satisfaction of work relationship	0.91		

Note: Data were analyzed with the principle component analysis

2009) and 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating satisfactory reliability for this work motivation measurement. Based on the validation of construct reliability, it can be concluded that research construct of work motivation was reliable.

The independent variable of this study was personal factors including gender, marital status, age groups, length of employment, academic qualification, and income per month (see Table 2).

Table 2. Coding schemes and proportions of the independent variable in this study

Personal factor
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender: 1 = male (31%); 0 = female (69%)• Marital status: 1 = single (39.4%); 2 = married (60.6%)• Age groups: 1 = under 30 years (49.3%); 2 = 31 to 35 years (31% %); 3 = 36 to 40 years (14.1%), 4 = over 41 years (5.6%)• Length of employment: 1 = below one year (14.1%); 2 = 1 to 5 years (22.5%); 3 = 5 to 10 years (47.9%); 4 = 10 to 15 years (12.7%); 5 = over 15 years (2.8%)• Academic qualification: 1 = masters' degree (MA: 23.9%); 2 = bachelor's degree (BA: 74.6%); 3 = associates degrees (AD: 1.4%)• Income per month: 1 = 260 USD (19.7%); 2 = 261 to 435 USD (74.6%); 3 = over 435 USD (5.6%)

Data Analysis

Analysis consisted of the computation of descriptive statistics in order to examine the work motivation levels. An independent *t*-test was used to explore the impact of gender, marital status factors on staff work motivation. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test the mean differences in work motivation scores across staff's type of age groups, length of employment, academic qualification, and income per month.

Results and Discussion

The Level of Staff Work Motivation in the VNU-HCM

Table 3 presents the statistical means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of the level of staff's work motivation toward four factors in the VNU-HCM. In this study, the survey used a 5-point scale with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Results indicated that most of the staff most of the staff have moderately high work motivation ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.51$). These results are consistent with those in the studies of Boriban and Chaiyabut (2013), Re'em (2010), and Tran (2016). The findings of Boriban and Chaiyabut showed that the aspects of job promotion and salary were at the moderate levels of staff work motivation in Thai universities. The research of Tran indicated that the respondents rated their work motivation in the following criteria: nature of work ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.57$), promotion and reward ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.62$), work relationship ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.67$), and working conditions ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.55$). However, his research focused on the staff of the Department of Labor Invalids and Social Affairs in Nam Dinh Province, Vietnam.

Table 3. The results of Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) of the staff's work motivation in the VNU-HCM

Factors	M	SD	Rank
Nature of work	3.47	0.62	3
Working conditions	3.74	0.55	1
Job efficiency and reward	3.20	0.69	4
Work relationship	3.64	0.64	2
Total	3.51	0.51	

Researches used different methods, approaches and instruments to measure work motivation for staffs in higher education, thus, they have different results. Most of the researches conducted on work motivation has focused on business and industrial settings. There are few studies which have been done on work motivation among university faculty members (Kwapong, Opoku, & Donyina, 2015; Shaheen, Sajid & Batoon, 2013; Sylvestre, He, Zhao & Shan, 2017; Victor & Babatunde, 2014). Unfortunately, there is yet no empirical research done on staff' work motivation in Vietnamese higher education or even in other countries. The results of this study, thus, cannot be compared to results of others.

Comparison Among Staff Work Motivation and Their Personal Factor

Gender and work motivation. Regarding the relationship in work motivation between male and female staff in the VNU-HCM, Table 4 indicates that there were significant differences between the level of work motivation of male and female faculty members. The ranges of scores were between $M (SD) = 3.51 (0.75)$, $3.61 (0.63)$, $3.25 (0.86)$, and $3.68 (0.68)$ for male staff and $3.45 (0.56)$, $3.80 (0.50)$, $3.18 (0.61)$, and $3.62 (0.63)$ for their female colleagues in nature of work, working conditions, job efficiency and reward, and work relationship, respectively. The findings demonstrated that there were no significant differences between these two groups in their work motivation ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4. The results of the independent t -test between gender and staff work motivation

	Male	Female	t
	$M (SD)$	$M (SD)$	
Nature of work	3.51 (0.75)	3.45 (0.56)	0.358
Working conditions	3.61 (0.63)	3.80 (0.50)	-1.305
Job efficiency and reward	3.25 (0.86)	3.18 (0.61)	0.389
Work relationship	3.68 (0.68)	3.62 (0.63)	0.351

The findings of this study are not consistent with the results of Aremu and Adeyoju (2003), and Shrum (2007). Their research indicated that male staff are more likely to work harder than their female colleagues and gender plays a significant role in work motivation among staff in current position organizations, especially in developing countries like Vietnam.

Marital status and work motivation. The work motivation levels between the married and single respondents are not significantly different. As shown in Table 5, the t values did not indicate any significant difference between the two groups ($p > 0.05$).

Table 5. The results of independent *t*-test between marital status and staff work motivation

	Single	Married	<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Nature of work	3.51 (0.57)	3.44 (0.65)	0.502
Working conditions	3.66 (0.50)	3.79 (0.57)	-0.979
Job efficiency and reward	3.34 (0.68)	3.12 (0.69)	1.297
Work relationship	3.64 (0.61)	3.64 (0.67)	-0.029

Age groups and work motivation. Staff in the VNU-HCM belong to different age groups, the results of Table 6 shows that there were no significant differences among different age groups and working conditions. The findings of post hoc test explained that staffs below 30 year-old ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.57$ and $M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.55$) had higher score in nature of work and work relationship ($p < 0.05$) than their colleagues from 36 to 40 year-old ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.53$) and 31 to 35 year-old ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.65$), respectively. In addition, staff from 36 to 40 year-old ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.79$) had lower scores in job efficiency and reward ($p < 0.05$) than other groups. The finding of Stamov-Roßnagel (2015) indicated that work motivation does not linearly decline with age which means the age groups had no effect on employees work motivation.

Table 6. The results of ANOVA between age groups and staff work motivation

Factors	Below 30	31-35 (G2)	36-40	Over 41	<i>F</i>	Post hoc
	(G1) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	(G2) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	(G3) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	(G4) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)		
Nature of work	3.62 (0.57)	3.40 (0.64)	3.00 (0.53)	3.75 (0.61)	3.269*	G1>G3
Working conditions	3.83 (0.6)	3.67 (0.43)	3.50 (0.63)	3.93 (0.24)	1.254	
Job efficiency and reward	3.36 (0.68)	3.01 (0.61)	2.85 (0.79)	3.75 (0.36)	3.094*	G3<all
Work relationship	3.84 (0.54)	3.34 (0.65)	3.49 (0.74)	3.91 (0.64)	3.461*	G1>G2

Note. The mean difference is significant at the * $p < .05$

Length of employment and work motivation. As shown in Table 7, there were no statistical difference between staff' length of employment at the current position in the VNU-HCM and their work motivation of work relationship, as well as job efficiency and reward factors ($p > 0.05$). However, factors of nature of work and working conditions were significantly different with staff's length of employment. The findings of post hoc test also explained that staff who have been working below 1 year ($M = 4.10, SD = 0.59$) were markedly higher in terms of nature of work than their peers who have been working from 5 to 10 years ($M = 3.36, SD = 0.57$) and 10 to 15 years ($M = 3.08, SD = 0.70$). Similarly, in terms of working conditions factor, staff whose length of employment is below 1 year ($M = 4.25, SD = 0.59$) had higher motivation than staff who had length of employment from 1 to 5 years ($M = 3.62, SD = 0.46$) and 5 to 10 years ($M = 3.65, SD = 0.56$).

Table 7. The results of ANOVA between the length of employment and staff work motivation

Factors	Below	1-5	5-10	10-15	Over 15	F	Post hoc
	1 year	year	year	year	years		
	(G1)	(G2)	(G3)	(G4)	(G6)		
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)			
Nature of work	4.10 (0.59)	3.53 (0.47)	3.36 (0.57)	3.08 (0.70)	3.50 (0.35)	4.512*	G1>G3,4
Working conditions	4.25 (0.59)	3.62 (0.46)	3.65 (0.56)	3.72 (0.36)	3.62 (0.18)	2.859*	G1>G2,3
Job efficiency and reward	3.78 (0.77)	3.39 (0.53)	3.06 (0.53)	2.87 (0.97)	2.78 (1,11)	3.595	
Work relationship	4.08 (0.63)	3.58 (0.48)	3.61 (0.65)	3.31 (0.76)	3.89 (0)	1.985	

Note. The mean difference is significant at the * $p < .05$

Academic qualification and work motivation. Most of the respondents in this study hold upper bachelors' degree, thus, the study findings showed no significant difference between these respondents with those who have an associate degree. Table 8 shows that there were no significant differences between staff' academic qualification and their work motivation in terms of working conditions and work relationship factors. In addition, the findings indicated that participants holding bachelor's degrees ($M = 3.41, SD = 0.54$) had lower motivation in nature of work than those holding masters' degrees ($M = 3.57, SD = 0.73$). However, this is not the case for job efficiency and reward factor. Staff holding only bachelor's degrees ($M = 3.26, SD = 0.57$) had higher motivation than those holding masters' degrees ($M = 2.93, SD = 0.88$).

Table 8. The results of ANOVA between academic qualification and staff work motivation

Factors	AD	BA	MA	F
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	
Nature of work	-	3.41(0.54)	3.57(0.73)	3.804*
Working conditions	-	3.70(0.51)	3.80 (0.63)	1.231
Job efficiency and reward	-	3.26(0.57)	2.93 (0.88)	4.805*
Work relationship	-	3.62(0.56)	3.61(0.82)	1.961

Note. The mean difference is significant at the * $p < .05$

Income per month and work motivation. The findings shown in Table 9 illustrated that there are statistical differences in work motivation regarding average income per month of staff in almost four factors, except for work relationship factor. Especially, staff who had an average monthly income of 260 USD had higher scores in nature of work, working conditions, job efficiency and reward than other groups. Previous studies found that differences in salary had different impacts on their intentions to do the work with sincere efforts (Zhou & Volkwein, 2003). The research of Kljajić-Dervić and Dervić (2017) discussed that salary plays an important role in the motivational structure of the organization settings, and employees cannot ignore non-material rewards (such as promotion at the workplace) – these rewards, in fact, can motivate workers more effectively than material rewards. It depends on the effort of each individual to receive the honorable reward which motivates better or less.

Table 9. The results of ANOVA between income per month and staff work motivation

Factors	260 USD (G1)	261 to 435 USD (G2)	over 435 USD (G3)	F	Post hoc
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Nature of work	3.96(0.65)	3.32(0.57)	3.75(0.20)	6.996**	
Working conditions	4.03(0.62)	3.65(0.50)	3.86(0.63)	3.039*	G1>G2
Job efficiency and reward	3.71(0.70)	3.07(0.64)	3.21(0.64)	5.392**	
Work relationship	3.94(0.62)	3.55(0.64)	3.78(0.56)	2.124	

Note. The mean difference is significant at the * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Unfortunately, few studies have been done about university staff' work motivation in the countries like Vietnam. In addition, the studies of the relationship between staff's work motivation and their personal factor such as academic qualification, length of employment, and marital status are very few. Therefore, we do not have sufficient information to compare and discuss these results. Further research about the relationship between staff' work motivation in higher education and those factors will contribute to fill in the literature gap.

Conclusion

This study explored the staff' perceptions of work motivation in the VNU-HCM, and the relationship between perceived personal factor and staffs' work motivation. The empirical results revealed that the most of the respondents have moderately high motivation for their work motivation. The findings of this study also indicated that personal factors such as age groups, length of employment, academic qualification, and income per month had significant differences in staff's work motivation levels. Thus, there is still much room for university administrators and specialists to improve the level of work motivation of the VNU-HCM staff in terms of designing training programs, reward or promotion for their work. In addition, policymakers and university administrators in the VNU-HCM should focus on improving these factors rather than other factors in the process of constructing a holistic intervention to enhance staff' work motivation.

Although this study provides results that have both theoretical and pedagogical implications, it still has some limitations. The main limitation is that the sample of this study includes only VNU-HCM staff, and thus, the results and implications should be applied with caution to staff from different levels of higher education institutes. Further researches should collect the sample from various higher education to provide broader empirical information. Then, results from this study can be used to compare with those conducting in different type of universities as well as using other personal factors (such as number of children, residence, hometown, concurrent employment...) which have effects on work motivation. It is hoped that the barriers to the work motivation are found in this study might be useful for university managers in the VNU-HCM to develop work environment and culture organization that would result in higher levels of staff work motivation.

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