

Covid-19 pandemic and the employees experience: motivation of the staff within an event organizing company

~ Ph. D. Student Ec. **Andreea Stoica** (*The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania*)

E-mail: andreeastoica314@gmail.com

~ Ph. D. Student Ec. **Aurora Cosma** (*The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania*)

E-mail: preda_auro@yahoo.com

~ Ph. D. Student Ec. **Andreea Tudor** (*The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania*)

E-mail: tudorandreead@yahoo.com

~ Ph. D. Student Ec. **Laura Agata Țoc** (*The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania*)

E-mail: toclaura@yahoo.com

~ Ph. D. Student Ec. **Alina Petre** (*The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania*)

E-mail: alina.petre1010@gmail.com

Abstract: *Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, everyone must respect the rules of social distancing. During this time, most of the people have felt trapped in a continuous loop in which the concept of time and space was just a distant dream. Even if the economic situation during this pandemic is not so dramatic many people have been unmotivated to work, most of them, currently working remotely. Switching to on-line is more difficult to keep up with everyday work activities. However, many jobs can be successfully done remotely. Unfortunately, while working from home, the employees can be easily distracted, which lowers their productivity. Reaching a minimum level of motivation and productivity, we decided to include in this research paper a case study on the motivation of the artistic staff within an event organizing company*

during the pandemic. By reviewing the results of the case study we want to analyze the specific factors of the human resources management that have an impact on the events organizing companies including the evolution of the motivation and introduce some ways that can grow the motivation and make employees feel comfortable while working from home.

Keywords: Motivation, Pandemic, COVID - 19, Crisis, Productivity, Human Resource Management.

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1. Introduction

Abraham Maslow, a remarkable American psychologist, stated that all basic human needs can be classified as a hierarchy of needs. This ranking has five categories of basic needs: physiological, safety and security, social, self-esteem and self-actualization, which is another way to characterize self-fulfillment. Motivation results from people’s desire to meet basic human and psychological needs. It drives all human behavior and is the degree of initiative, persistence and intensity of the effort spent by a person to achieve a specific result (Anon., 2014). Also, employees’ motivation is not only intrinsic to talent management (Marinescu, Toma and Constantin, 2016) but also a prerequisite for any organization aiming at achieving business excellence (Toma and Naruo, 2017; Toma and Marinescu, 2018; Tohanean and Toma, 2018).

Figure 1: Workplace incentives - Employee workplace motivation factors



The coronavirus pandemic has led to social distancing and travel bans, fact that also affects the artists who are now forced to work remotely. The importance and effectiveness of virtual meetings should be emphasized, and employees will undoubtedly be more productive and happier at work, no matter how far away they may be. This must be done having in mind that clear information and instructions must always be provided (Southward, 2020).

UNESCO alarmed the fact that this COVID – 19 pandemic exacerbates education inequalities everywhere across the world. The current healthcare crisis has highlighted more than ever all these issues. “Responses to the Covid-19 crisis, which affected 1.6 billion children. That means 90% of the learners were affected by school closures globally” - UNESCO report entitled “Inclusion and education - All without exception”. The lack of technology devices and individual internet access has further highlighted the inequalities. Distance learning has not been possible for everyone. For example, in the poorest countries, only 12% of families have access to the Internet at home. Even where cutting-edge technologies were not required, pedagogical continuity could not be guaranteed. In Ethiopia, for example, among the poorest 20% of families, only 7 percent have a radio and none have a TV (Damian, 2020).

2. Literature review

Fun Science Romania is a franchise specialized in organizing educational - fun events for children between 4 and 14 years old. This franchise has been operating in Romania since 2005 and it's one of the many companies that are radically affected by the COVID 19 pandemic crisis and the bans that closed the events market.

“The crazy teachers” from Fun Science Romania are committed actors, who put their imagination, talent and creativity in the service of popularizing science, respecting a complete and complex methodology specific to the franchise. So their options for creativity and improvisation normally takes place between the requirements and constraints of the methodology imposed by the franchise.

the time of writing this research paper, we are already over 9 months away from the point where the whole world and everything that was known to us has changed major. 2020 is the year in which the pandemic caused by COVID-19 changed the paradigm of the evolution of the event organizing industry, literally, overnight. Considering this context, in which all the initial landmarks were dissipated under the new conditions established and imposed by the safety and health norms the functionality options of an event organizing company such as Fun Science Romania, have known new requirements and new constraints. Creative thinking, innovation and motivation of artists are resulting from the support, ability and empathy of those who see the artists perform.

At the initial moment of lockdown, not only the professional life of the employed artists was hit by a wave of confusion, but the entire management system of the organization was losing its orientation in its habitat of existence and action. According to the SWOT analysis, among the immediate threats to which the organization can be exposed, were identified: lack of demand in the events market, collapse of an entire market sector caused by the law prohibiting the type

of activities carried out by Fun Science Romania. In response to this situation, in an attempt to reduce the threats, the organization’s management selected during the lockdown the Maxi-Min strategy (Strengths-Threats). Some of the strengths that were listed are a strong presence on social media, well-trained staff qualified and an extremely well-defined brand identity (Stoica, 2020).

A concern that was raised in the beginning was related to what motivational strategy can be approached in order to mobilize and involve artistic staff in the immediate action plan of the organization given the full economic, health and psychological instability created by the pandemic.

Starting from the Maxi-Min approach, as a result of an already existing presence on social media (a YouTube channel called “Crazy Teachers” with over 80,000 subscribers at that time), a brand very well perceived in the market, along with a staff well qualified. In the context of a total closure and the prohibition of any type of event, it was decided to carry out the full lockdown of daily video content in the form of live shows for children watching from home. The challenge came from the fact that all the action was carried out by Fun Science Romania staff without remuneration. There were 45 daily live shows (Monday-Friday) lasting 30-40 min. The results obtained can be seen in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1 Fun Science Romania, comparative table

From year to year (March - October)	Subscribers	Views	Hours spent watching “Profesorii trasniti”
(Crazy teachers) YouTube channel			
2019	2105	217.348	7387
2020	3617	445.510	18948

Source: YouTube analytics

In response to the concern raised above, the conceptual framework SDT (Self Determination Theory) was approached, which revealed from the research developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard Ryan (Deci, 1985) on the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on human behavior.

Among the influencing factors of human resource management, employee motivation is one of the most representative factors of the event organizing companies, but also for other types of companies and systems. The main feature of motivation is the existence of a goal that needs to be achieved. Self-determination consists in the free choice to do an action. It is a way of exercising self-control. In a context of free choice, the person chooses his task and the type of approach. Spontaneity, curiosity and interest are both basic features of the actors and characteristics of the model of self-determined behavior as an intrinsically motivating action.

3. Research methodology

Different publications and scientific articles were consulted for this study which show the importance of motivation for employees during a crisis. The method approached in this paper is the case study and bibliographic research in databases. We searched into many sources like articles, books and reports. Other sources were the archives of different journals.

The method used is a descriptive and quantitative one, using information provided by direct observation and by internet tools.

4. Results and discussions

People feel motivated not only when they have the freedom to choose an activity, but also when they consider themselves competent and accepted.

The social environment pushes human resources management to offer support by self-determination (intrinsic action) when it supports the fulfillment of three psychological needs:

- The need for autonomy (the person decides what and how to do);
- The need for performance (the person's tendency to do something efficiently, his need to feel able to influence the environment).
- The need for relationships (the need to build and maintain relationships, secure and satisfying connections in the social environment) (Deci, 2000)

Table 2: Motivation for Fun Science Romania employees during the pandemic crisis

The need for intrinsic motivation	Motivation of the Fun Science Romania employees during the lockdown period	The need for extrinsic motivation	Motivation of the Fun Science Romania employees during the lockdown period
The need for autonomy	The actors performed the tasks separately from home, at their own pace, according to their own program.	External regulation	The enthusiasm with which they were received, daily by the following audience, was a strong motivational stimulus.
The need for performance	The artists were asked to personalize the video content.	Introjection	The routine and the expectations created among the following audience created the feeling of obligation to keep their promise and do more live shows.

The need for relationships	Throughout the isolation period, the team of actors was in constant online interaction both with the audience of Fun Science Romania and with each other. This ensured a continuous relationship in the work environment, diminishing the feeling of loneliness caused by the constraints of the lockdown.	Identification	The lockdown created a context of unity and community. The Fun Science Romania audience represented by children was affected by the pandemic and their need for natural continuity of their lives led to the feeling of a personal mission. Fun Science Romania employees are aware of the future positive consequences of their direct involvement during this pandemic crisis.
		Integration	Each employee felt that he was having a direct contribution using his talent, skills and training in overcoming an exceptional situation in which the children suffered the most.

Source: Authors' contribution

Regarding the extrinsic motivation during which there is a tendency to gradually approach the intrinsic motivation:

- External regulation: the person is completely motivated by external stimuli (does not perform his tasks because of the fear of punishment) and does not self-discipline;
- Introjection: the source of control still remains external, gradually becoming internalized, although the connections are not in accordance with the person's desire (motivated to perform the assigned tasks because otherwise he would feel guilty for not fulfilling the duties);
- Identification: the person does a task because he estimates important outcome in the future. By doing the task the motivation increases. Identification is an internal regulation based on the need for a behavior (for example, the human performs additional tasks to gain greater notoriety);
- Integration: the humans engage in activities because they fit their goals and aspirations. Motivation is very close to the intrinsic one, but it is not actually identified with it.

5. Conclusions

The results of this research paper showed that, in the absence of an intervention plan in case of a crisis, an alternative of rapid adaptation to a new context arises from a deep knowledge of the internal and external environment of the organization. Giving the current status of the pandemic the best action plan is to take decisions step by step, week by week until the exit from the crisis.

Employees are always the basic resource of an organization. The relation between human resource management and employee satisfaction, accomplishment of companies or systems objectives is based on keeping high motivation during critical periods, and is a key to the adaptation, continuity and even survival of the organizations. This could be adapted to the health sector.

Internal motivation like choosing their one schedule, creativity, communication with colleagues and audience, and, in the same matter, external motivation such as good feedback from children watching the online shows, willing to perform without remuneration, a sense of responsibility for the children and their education are the key to continue the activity despite all the lockdown measures taken by the authorities.

In this game, both parts are winning, employees on one part, by improving their skills and keeping in touch with the audience, and on the other part children who were used to live shows, but have to adapt to new ways of learning and entertainment.

We would like to emphasize that the need for intrinsic motivation has become a lifeline for both the organization and the staff involved in such a turbulent and uncertain period as the isolation of the entire planet at home.

The involvement of "Self-Determination" in this crisis situation that took the company by surprise was a choice that mobilized and united the team around overcoming the toughest obstacle in the company's history.

We notice that the organization appealed to the type of moral motivation from the perspective of serving a superior cause, that of offering children moments to help them adapt to the new conditions of existence during a pandemic.

We add as recommendations two directions of interest for the organization's staff, from a professional perspective, such as continuous staff training, educating them in the spirit of the new requirements arising from online interaction and from the perspective of material reward and safety at work

In terms of continuing education, the organization could offer training courses in order to accumulate new technological skills: the use of equipment necessary for online activities (how to organize a mini video studio at home), the use of several types of programs online interaction software and applications, introduction to video editing and editing.

Given the extremely vulnerable period from an economic and health perspective, a direction that should not be neglected and that we are advancing with confidence, is the one in which the organization must be concerned with recognizing and rewarding the most involved in the team.

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