

# Exploring Self-Perceptions of Motivations in the Hospitality Industry

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# **Exploring Self-Perceptions of Motivations in the Hospitality Industry**

## **Key words**

Motivation, lodging, talent management, human resource management

## **Introduction**

In January 2016 at a university networking event, an undergraduate student asked a table full of professional hospitality operators what was the great challenge they currently face. Their responses were quick and consistent – finding and keeping talented employees. When Grant van Gameren, the executive chef and owner of Toronto's Bar Raval eatery, received his Gold Award from the Ontario Hospitality Institute in April 2016, he was clear about the challenges around talent that the hospitality industry continues to face, stating that "It's a little scary out there for hiring." Although anecdotal in nature, these comments reflect the real struggles that owners and operators in the hospitality industry continues to face (Watkins 2014). The pressure to both find and keep great employees is intense.

From a research perspective, the quest to gain insight into employees continues to be strong. A search of the ABI/Inform Tourism & Hospitality database uncovered 7,333 peer-reviewed, scholarly articles that pertain to both motivation and productivity issues published between 2013-2015, 433 of which are specifically focused around human resource management topics. Clearly, the quest to better understand employees and what motivates them, whether to maximize productivity and/or improve employee retention, is at the forefront of both industry and research interests. With labour shortages being predicted in the tourism industry (TIAC 2014) and high levels of turnover continuing to exist ("Hospitality Employee Turnover Rose in 2014" 2015), managing talent will continue to be a leading issue for years to come.

This paper focuses on one aspect of talent management, exploring the motivational issues of hospitality employees through the application of two different but complimentary measures: the Ten Factor Model of motivations (Hersey and Blanchard 1969; Kovach 1987) and Alderfer's ERG theory (Alderfer 1972). As the third study in a longitudinal body of work, this study will surface data collected between 2000 and 2016 within the Canadian lodging industry.

The value of this work is two-fold. First, it explores the theoretical gap in responses around motives, while maintaining the detailed characteristics of Ten Factor Model and associating it with an established needs-based motivational theory centred on basic human's realms of existence, social, and growth needs. Second, it attempts to unpack contextual issues by exploring shifts in self-ranked motivational needs over time and, more specifically, over varied economic circumstances.

## **Literature Review**

In North America, the quest to organize labour came to the forefront during the Industrial Revolution. Thinkers such as Frederick Taylor began working on the idea of operationalizing the management of people as a science, in which management needed to provide explicit directions to their workers in order to maximize efficiencies (Harrington 1999; Taylor 1911). Essentially, humans were seen as resources to be managed. Taylor's work became the cornerstone of classical management theory – managers needed to plan and control the work of others if the

work was to be accomplished well. The command and control idea inferred that the act of management was similar to the operation of a machine. Should the act of managing function as an efficient machine, it simultaneously discounted, even removed, the idea that human needs as consequential, as the core belief was that workers failed to have the ability to direct themselves and be productive in a working environment (Drucker 1992). Management as a machine was a metaphor that was “inherently paradoxical” (Morgan 1997, 5).

McGregor pivoted upon this binary idea held by management theorists, that either workers were naturally lazy and without ambition as it related to organizational outcomes (theory X) or that those who worked did so to satisfy certain internal needs and desired to perform as best as possible (theory Y) (McGregor 1960). The idea that workers have the volition to act within an environment, particularly a work environment, emerged within management theory expressed in a variety of ways. Some called it “the forces acting on or within a person that cause the person to behave in a specific, goal-directed manner” (Hellriegel et al. 1998, 149); others called it a choice, a “willingness to do something and is conditioned by this action’s ability to satisfy some need for the individual” (Robbins 2005, 48). This work focuses particularly on the content models of motivational behaviour, those factors that “energize, direct, or stop a person’s behaviour” (Hellriegel et al. 1998, 153). Maslow (1954) was also intrigued by content models, proposing that people are driven to achieve or maintain conditions that satisfy unmet needs, categorizing his need-areas into five distinct areas: physiology, security, relatedness, esteem and self-actualization.

Herzberg’s (1968) exploration into this field bifurcated job factors into two classifications. Factors that were intrinsic to the work, including recognition and achievement, were categorized as ‘motivators’, while those factors extrinsic to the job, such as salary, status and interpersonal relationships, were deemed ‘hygiene’ factors. Building on Maslow’s heuristic model as well as groupings envisioned by Herzberg’s, Alderfer (1972) condensed Maslow’s five need-areas into three broader categories: existence needs, relatedness needs, and growth needs. Existence combines the basic physical and survival needs along with the activities people might undertake to satisfy them, such as earning money to pay for food and shelter. Social interactions and connections come together under the category of relatedness, while status, personal improvement and development are captured under growth needs.

As many of the process theories of motivation were being developed, Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard (1969) administered a employee motivational survey that had been designed by The Labour Relations Institute in New York in 1945. Employees were asked to rank 10 various items, such as wages, working conditions, and opportunities for growth, by level of importance to themselves. Supervisors of these employees were asked to rank the same items, but as they perceived the value of each item for their employees. Results showed a large disconnect between what employees valued and what their supervisors believed those employees valued. Kovach used the LRI model to build a body of research, applying this model numerous times (1987; 1995) to explore employee motivational issues, so much so that the original LRI survey has occasionally been credited as Kovach’s Ten Factor Model (Breiter et al. 2002). This model has also been applied across various geographical and demographical areas (Hersey and Blanchard 1969; Kovach 1987), in the food service industry (Mercurio 2006), and with hotel employees in China (Siu, Tsang, and Wong 1997), the Caribbean (Charles and Marshall 1992), and North America (Simons and Enz 1995).

Yet, results from employees have varied over the last 20 years (see Table 1). Some studies have shown that employees more strongly value wages and job security (existence level needs), while other results demonstrate a preference for appreciation of good work and the potential for upward movement in the organization (growth related needs). These shifting results, over time and location, infers that something beyond unmet needs are at play and that contextual factors could strongly influence the motivational preferences that employees self-report. These factors have only been minimally explored to date around culture (Silverthorne 1992). This study begins to explore the relationship between expressed motives and the contextual environment, focusing specifically on economic conditions, through a longitudinal examination of three Canadian studies carried out in 2000, 2007, and 2016.

Based on prior studies, the author believes that the satisfaction of growth needs will continue to be the primary influencing factor for employees, that economic conditions were impact to importance of existence needs, and that there will be a disconnection between the preferred motives that employees self-report and those the supervisors believe are important to their employees.

**Table 1-** Selection of Historical Results using the Ten Factor Model

	Hersey & Blanchard, 1946	Kovach, 1980	Charles & Marshall, 1992	Siu, Twang & Wong, 1999	Brieter et al, 2002	Murray, 2007	DiPietro et al, 2014
Full appreciation of work done	1	8	3	6	6	2	1
Good wages	2	1	1	3	9	1	7
Good working conditions	3	4	2	5	10	5	10
Job security	4	2	7	4	2	6	4
Promotion and growth in the organization	5	3	5	1	1	3	2
Interesting work	6	5	4	7	5	4	6
Feeling of being in on things	7	10	6	8	4	9	5
Personal loyalty to employees	8	7	8	2	7	7	8
Tactful discipline	9	6	10	9	3	8	3
Sympathetic help with personal problems	10	9	9	10	8	10	9

## Methodology

As a longitudinal examination, this study has been conducted twice already in 2000 and 2007, and is now being replicated a third time in 2016. This spring, the survey on motivational issues was distributed to a small number of hotel properties in Canada, with the data from a small number of testing sites being included in this analysis. The same survey was used in all three instances and only Canadian hotels were examined. The survey had two parts; respondents

presented with the Ten Factor Model to self-rank their preferred motivational factors within the context of their current job, and then they asked to complete a short-form ERG motivational survey (Robbins 1999). Front line employees were asked to answer both surveys from their personal perspective; supervisors and managers were asked to answer the surveys first from their perspective then from that of their employees. In addition, respondents were asked a series of demographic and workplace questions, including age, gender, income level, and position within the company. Each hotel distributed the electronic link to the Qualtrics survey to their employees through their internal email system; results remain confidential, with only an aggregated report of results returned to the hotel.

## Limitations

As an ongoing research project, the volume of responses is small at this time but continues to grow. However, the data will be sufficient to make some early inferences as to the direction of the results.

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