

Work Motivation in the Public and Non-Profit Sector in Central and Eastern Europe: Communist Heritage

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Abstract

Workforce in public services in Central and Eastern European countries is often characterized as low-motivated, shirking and passive. Consistent with Iglehar's (1990, 1997) 'scarcity' theory, which claims gradual change of values takes generations to pass by, two decades after the fall of the communism is not enough for public service providers to overcome communist heritage. The paper aims to gain more understanding about the historical context of work motivation in former communist countries, namely Belarus and Poland, which helps to find out to what extent the motivation in today's nonprofit and public organizations could still be explained by the context variables inherited from the past. The paper discusses work motivation within the communist context: from destroying old values during the establishment of the communist rule to setting the context for work motivation by propaganda and depersonalization of success. It analyses not only monetary rewards, but also non-monetary incentives, like moral obligation to work, professional call as well as prestige and recognition awards provided by the system. The paper concludes with analyses of the malfunctions of the rewards system and examines how they continue to influence employee motivation after the fall of the communism. It also suggests that the newly emerged nonprofit sector became an employment solution for highly motivated individuals.

Introduction

This study sets out to describe and explain the development of work motivation in public and nonprofit sectors of former communist countries, mainly Belarus and Poland. The purpose of the paper is to examine the major value changes in work motivation during the communist era and immediately after the fall of the regime and to determine what impact these changes have made on individual work behavior in the public and nonprofit organizations today.

This article takes an in-depth look at the transformation of work values and incentives by analyzing the range of the articles that described the work motivation and incentive systems at different decades of the previous century. The Western scholars have undertaken a number of initial analyses of the motivation in various organizations during the communist rule. However, the changes of motivation in time from the appearance of the communist states till their collapse are of a high interest. I discuss context variables determined by the regime that influenced work

motivation in public and nonprofit organizations at different moments of the communist state history.

The October Revolution in 1917 is an important benchmark, since a lot of policies related to work incentives (e.g. payroll) were changed. For Central and Eastern European countries the creation of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of the great transformation of work and motivation relations in the twentieth century. Thus, the first transformation came with the changes of motivation and values highly determined by the religion and traditions, which were substituted with communist visions of the world order. This period was characterized by breaking old value systems and changing it for the new one. Often, it took the form of enforcement: individuals would change their traditional values and denied the previous ways of life under the threat of deportation to Siberia, or even execution. The second transformation of work incentives started after the World War II and was embedded in the process of reforms aimed to maintain and strengthen the communist rule. It has been addressed not only by the enhanced propaganda, but also by implementation of changes in rewards systems and incentives. This period was characterized by the efforts to maintaining the values established before the war.

Focused on two former communist countries - Belarus and Poland - this paper tends to contribute to the literature on the different social, cultural, political and economic contexts influencing motivation of persons employed in not-for-profit sectors. Furthermore, it seeks to add to the broader discourse on the public origins of the service providing nonprofit sector in former Soviet countries. In the analyses of the work motivation in the past, by "organization" in this study I mean public organizations, since that was the major, or in case of some countries, the only sector that existed under the communist rule.

Why study the communist past

The culture in communist countries has been formed by the political and social environment for decades, and it is fair to assume that it will take decades to change it. Thus, the theoretical part of the paper is based on the Inglehart's (1990,1997) "scarcity hypothesis", which argues that changes of values does not come simultaneously with the changes of socio-economic conditions, but values change gradually when older generations die out and younger generations take their place. Thus, nonprofit and public organizations in Eastern Europe today exhibit the mix of characteristics that reflect the Soviet values, preserved by the older employees, and modern democratic values, brought in by individuals who grew up and studied after the fall of communism. Adults' advice is of a little help for the younger generation brought up in new socio-economic circumstances, not known by their parents and grandparents. Consequentially, younger generation has to internalize new values during their youth.

In order to understand work motivation in nonprofit and public organizations today, we need to understand what has been driving individuals under the communist rule in the Soviet countries and dependent territories. These countries operated under a planned command economy, which also entailed a guaranteed full employment. Work was considered the most honored activity (Ardichvili 2009), while unemployment was labelled as 'parasitism' (Aslund 2007). The cross-country study shows that work ethic with the time became stronger in former communist countries as compared to the western ones (Stam, Verbakel and De Graaf, 2013). In this work, the authors apply modernization theory to explain that the former communist countries share traditional conformity values, one of which is the feeling of the necessity to work, as compared to socio-economically developed countries that rather emphasize post-modern values,

for instance, self-expression. At the same time, it should be taken into account that believing that everyone should work is not the same as working hard yourself. Thus, on the other hand, several authors (e.g. Lipset 1992, Neimanis 1997, Pucetaite and Lamsa 2008) claimed that personal work effort, motivation, and productivity were deteriorated by the communist ideology.

The studies undertaken so far do not provide with a straight answer regarding individual working motivation in the communist countries. Richman (1963a) notifies that few studies were made about the impact of the human motivation on the enterprise environment. The questions of employee motivation in public organizations were insufficiently explored in the middle of the twentieth century. Since the national culture plays an important role in determining what motivates people (Fey 2005), the goal of this study is to broaden the knowledge of the environment context in which communist work mentality was shaped.

Work motivation within the communist context

1. Destroying old values or establishment of the communist rule

Contrary to Russian rural and urban work force conditioned by a traditional collectivist mentality even before the Soviet revolution (Tidmarsh, 1993), Belarus and Polish people enjoyed more freedoms and had a longer history of running individual farms and businesses. People from that region were accustomed to individual decision-making and personal responsibility for centuries. The new social order brought with the October Revolution in 1917 generated many problems for the new regime to solve, especially related to work motivation. The main motivational issue was related to the boundaries of adaptability of human nature to the new environmental settings. At the earlier stages of the establishment of the communist system, 'economic man's adherents were convinced that the profit motive could be redirected, that individual competition could be substituted by the group one, that the feelings of class, racial and individual differences and superiority could be suppressed, that religious concepts could give way to the beliefs in social betterment and certainty (Schultz and McFarland, 1935).

Thus, the period of the communist rule before the World War II was characterized by struggles of the government to change deeply rooted individualistic values. The value-change enforcement took various forms from liquidation of successful individual farming ("razkulachvanie") to deportation of highly-educated individuals to Siberia, or in the worst case scenario, their execution. During the establishment of the communist system, scientists and politicians were already aware of the importance of the cultural surroundings, realizing that the social context molds greatly an individual personality. The communists believed in the basic educational theory stating that the new ideology could be indoctrinated into the child from the birth, which was actively practiced (Schultz and McFarland, 1935).

The Communist party also systematically destroyed horizontal links among professionals and other groups. Nongovernmental organizations - for instance, independent trade unions - became highly dependent on the party and re-obtained their autonomous status only after the fall of the regime. Individuals alike as institutions occurred in a constant competition for limited facilities and resources, shirking any nobler goal or motivation (Tidmarsh, 1993).

2. Setting the context for work motivation by propaganda

Richman (1963a) mentions ideology indoctrination as one of three of the most important motivational devices widely used in communist countries. The ideology would penetrate every moment of an employee's life through the education, mass media, the party and trade union

channels. Work ethic as a moral duty for all persons in society was strongly propagandized by the communist regime (Stam, Verbakel and De Graaf 2013). The ubiquity of propaganda spread by government agencies sustained popular enthusiasm in the face of hardships.

The paradoxical conflict of incentives is that group motivation was supposed to substitute individual motivation. Propaganda would constantly encourage people to work for the “common betterment of the society” rather than for the personal enrichment. It was against the party’s ideology to openly advertise individual monetary benefits as a reward for the hard work. While in western countries, capitalism emphasized individual competition and profit system with individual rewards, in Soviet systems, salary could not be claimed as a main motivator to work. From childhood, through the propaganda, people were taught that “profit is a sin and to be rich is anti-social” (Schultz and McFarland, 1935, p.289).

Direct individual benefits became detached from the work completed, which caused natural indifference to work. The communists attacked this lethargy with another wave of propaganda. Numerous schemes were established to motivate the employed. For example, one of them was to create a competition atmosphere and to bring social attention to those who fell back: “There is a great deal of propaganda in the press, on posters in the factories or parks relative to individual or group improvement whatever subject. In factories and even in scientific institutes the workers’ names may be posted on a bulletin board opposite to a bird, deer, rabbit, tortoise, or snail relative to the speed with which they turn out their work” (Schultz and McFarland, 1935, p.289).

Yet, the effectiveness of propaganda was undermined by the fact that it was designed by politicians, not psychologists, which put some limitations (Schultz and McFarland, 1935). For example, communist propaganda was not planned to appeal to basic traits of human nature. The party found it easier to scare employees of the negative consequences of shirking rather than to motivate them to work for the equivocal “common good”. At the same time, despite the constant ideology work utilized in communist countries in order to bring employee behavior in line with the wishes of the state, material incentives remained the most prominent motivational force that will be discussed in the later sections (Richman, 1963b).

3. Depersonalization of success

Richman (1963a) notifies that few studies were made about the impact of the human motivation on the enterprise environment. The lack of interest in the topic is not surprising, since, during the communist era, attention to the human side of an organization was usually neglected (Luthans et.al, 2000). Organizational performance was superior to individual performance. The only question addressed by managers regarding personal motivation was how it was related to improved organizational performance. As a result, the communist system got characterized by the depersonalization of success: individual competition of public service employees was substituted by the competition “between hospitals as to the efficiency and effectiveness of their work, and between schools as to the quality of their art, sculpturing, or handicrafts” (Schultz and McFarland, 1935, p.289).

The research of Tidmarsh (1993) also confirms that the Soviet system required depersonalized work and shows that in the consequence, depersonalization provoked distrust to government policies, which would punish ambitious employees: "Not only were individual efforts virtually unrewarded but any display of initiative could be dangerous. Forced labor camps nurtured a universal revolution for work among prisoners and guards alike. This "Gulag complex" eventually spilled over to grip the entire country (p.70)." The latter example with the

labor camp guards show that working for the government did not necessarily mean sharing its ideology.

4. Educational Paradox

A labor policy depending on low-wage, low-productivity employment tends to require low skills and low education. In reality, learning was promoted as crucial part of the building of communism. Corresponding to a famous Lenin's motto in Soviet countries -- "Eat, sleep and breathe studying" -- higher education establishments would admit more students than the labor required at job sites. Thus, the paradox is that the well developed and structured education system in the communist countries was producing larger number of skilled workers than needed. As a result, as studies show, just before the fall of the communist system, more than half of unskilled jobs were filled by workers with more than obligatory primary schooling (Tirmarsh, 1993).

The paradox directly affected individual attitudes towards work. Once out of school, they would have to accept positions well below their professional capabilities, which could have had a strong demotivating effect. Overqualified workforce was discouraged with the perspectives of performance of the low grade tasks till the end of their career. Tirmarsh (1993) points out that the absurd mismatch in number of professionals educated and positions available was particularly striking in the medical service provision, where the costs for the government to educate an employee were particularly high.

5. System of work incentives

5.1. Monetary reward systems in communist countries

Why people worked in the communist countries? Even though the study of Richman (1963a) is devoted to motivation of the industrial labor, his findings reflect the over-industrial communist approach of how to force employees to act in accordance with the regime. He mentions that, surprisingly for the capitalist observer, foremost, the communist administration widely used monetary incentive to encourage greater effort. The high level of performance, as communists believed, should have been rewarded by more pay. The importance of capitalist techniques was especially recognized, after the World War II, when the communist countries encountered severe difficulties in structuring their economies to provide managers the proper incentives to obtain desired results. Adherence to Communist ideology and the difficulties encountered in developing an integrated and workable plan have led to serious operational problems, which were caused not by the undesirable managerial behaviour, but the framework in which the manager had to operate.

In order to encourage employees, the Soviets started to ubiquitously utilize monetary incentives as a key motivation device. Thus, in 1959, the Soviet Union introduced "success indicator" reform. Monetary compensation for the work took two basic forms: (1) wages and bonuses linked to performance, (2) remuneration linked to the profits derived from implemented employee's suggestion. The premiums were now awarded not solely for the gross output, but, for instance, for the assortment indices, quality, product and service delivery schedules. The remuneration based on employees' suggestions allowed employees to participate in planning and decision making, and partly balanced the dysfunctions of general monetary based incentive schemes, since this bonus it encouraged employees through the public recognition of their work and the prestige that came with it. Even though, after the introduction of those reforms Richman (1963b) anticipated that in the long run the communist and capitalist systems might become

more similar that considered, in the absence of a market-price mechanism, capitalistic profit motivators only blocked efficient resource utilization, the satisfaction of citizens' needs and demands.

While other than monetary forms of incentives had little impact on managerial motivation (Richman, 1963b), the discord of the Communist ideology and the Soviet reality shaped a universal social contract - behavior pattern - "they pretend to pay us, we pretend to work". The worker suffered a low standard of living but in return gained the right to have a sloppy work accepted (Tidmarsh, 1993). An acceptance of low salaries due to the above reason could be noticed in Belarus public sector today, which was not drastically reformed since the collapse of the communism.

Even though equalitarianism in wages was recognized as dangerous movement already in the 1930ies (Schultz and McFarland, 1935), it has been practicing till the fall of the regime. After the World War II, narrowing of pay differentials regardless of skill and output wiped out the last remains of the professionalism. "Probably no factor was more destructive of working-class professionalism that the leveling of the wages" (Tidmarsh, 1993). In the USSR in the late 1950-ies - early 1960ies, the difference between the highest and the lowest paid fell to 1.5 times from 3.5 previously. In such situation, wages lose their ability to be a material incentive.

5.2. Non-monetary incentives in communist countries

a. Moral obligation to work

Did personal organization fit matter in the communist regime? Was a fit between an individual and values of the larger systems a necessary requirement to get a job in the country with no unemployment? Richman (1963a) agrees that we cannot conclude that employees in the communist countries had no sense of moral obligation to the state. Not without the strong influence of propaganda, they took considerable pride in their country and progress. Yet, the system of incorrect work indices based on the plan fulfillment caused the conflict between morality and material incentives related to performance standards, openly acknowledged by the state mass media (e.g. Izvestia, November 22, 1961 as quoted by Richman, 1963a, p.558).

Very often, employees would not articulate their personal beliefs and values publicly, but in private conversations, they showed their hesitations about the properness of the party values. The doubts were especially strong in countries "occupied by Russians", like Belarus or Poland. The doubt were not openly expressed not only because of the fear to be sent to Siberia or executed, but also due to a certain regime loyalty as one of the public values "in the constellation of values associated with the behavior of a public servant" (Jorgensen and Bozeman 2007).

b. Professionalism

A statement that "there were no PSM in the communist countries" equals to the statement that "there were no professionals". Tidmarsh (1993) claims, that the communist countries exhibited a breach of professional traditions. Does it mean absolute absence of no professionals devoted to the code of values that comes with their job? Where professionals in social work or education serving the regime or the public? Professional is someone who does a job that requires special training, education, or skill and who is guided by specific knowledge and set of values related to that particular job. A professional attorney is supposed to defend a client, a professional doctor is supposed to provide medical help to a suffering person (as a part of Hippocratic oath, at least) and etc.

The communist countries were not the ideal place for the professionals, since they were not properly highly valued by the government system. Yet, the country would not function without them. Previous research shows that the communist countries had competent individuals, but those individuals were not able to perform effectively within the framework established by the government (Richman, 1963b). The professionals were overused and underpaid, sometimes performing the imposed duties that go against their individual moral beliefs, usually under the pressure of threats. In the context of limited freedoms, talented individuals were not able to refuse the party's requests. For example, the fact that a famous Belarus sculptor Zair Azgur created hundreds of Lenins and Stalins, and even was invited to make a sculpture of Mao, does not necessarily mean he would be fascinated by the ideas of these leaders. Sculpting them, however, was the only way to stay in the profession, to have access to the work materials, to have an art studio and etc. (Belsat, 2010).

c. Prestige and recognition

Soviet psychologists propagandized that social motivation is impossible in capitalist countries: "Under the guise of "social motivation" capitalist economy will never intentionally arrive at anything beyond some new form of "opiate for the masses" (Schultz and McFarland, 1935, p.300). Social motivation is defined here as an expression of appropriate forms of public approval or a public reprimand of professional activities. The communist system ubiquitously applied social motivation when employee's affirmative actions were a subject to the approval, while negative ones were openly reproved.

The party and unions organized different social motivation techniques to make employees reveal their reserves. Thus, besides monetary incentives, the work in the enterprise would give an employee prestige and recognition, if he initiated an exceptionally worthy proposal of an enterprise improvement. His picture would be put on the enterprise bulletin board or even in the newspaper. The employee might also receive medals and other rewards (Richman, 1963a).

Motivation after the fall of communism

After the fall of the communism, not only the production industries, but also public service providing organizations had to make the transformation to a market economy. In addition to the internal organization problems like lack of capital, resources shortages, prohibitive costs of needed technology and equipment, employees of public and newly established nonprofits faced the necessity to change work values. Luthans et al (2000) shows, that the legacy of communist ideology per se was not a problem. The work motivation rather suffered from the ways communist ideology was implemented in practice. The impact of the Soviet regime on the public servants was to a large extent destructive (Tidmarsh, 1993, p.67). Soviet communism has left a demoralized and low motivated work force.

Trompensaars (1995,1998) notices that after the fall of the regime, individual culture started to move towards achievement dimension, given the fact that the capitalistic novelties made individuals value individualism. Their work motivation reflected a new-found entrepreneurial spirit (Luthans et.all, 2000). In the mid 1990-ies, the studies of the former soviet countries showed that individuals in general are depicted as being high in collectivism (value group membership) and femininity (care for others, low stress) (Puffer 1994). Contrary, Trompensaars (1995,1998) found that the former soviet countries are high on individualism,

meaning that people in these countries tend to look after themselves and their immediate family and expect others to do the same. They do not feel responsible for the welfare of the group, like in case of communitarians.

Contextual factors of communist environment shaped motivation of public service providers in public and nonprofit sectors. For example, it is still considered socially acceptable not to work, but being paid. This state of values that came as a communist heritage is shared with the younger generation, which was raised after the fall of the regime. In everyday conversation, young employees like to emphasize how little they work, how many breaks they could take and mention different possibilities to shrink from performing their duties. A popular expression "rabotka ne pylnaja" (literary, "the job is not dusty" meaning it does not require a lot of effort) is a good description of the "ideal" job place.

Another communist characteristic inherited by the current job market is superiority of "protégé" over the proper qualifications. The system of "making connections" or "networking" is equally suitable to the Western world. The main difference of the soviet style "protégé" is that a person might not possess any proper qualifications, but would be anyway recommended. The fact of who gives recommendations overshadows the held qualifications, which, as commonly believed, could be obtained at the work place.

Luthans et al (2000) claim that individual motivation in former soviet countries still has to be changed. The Soviet framework of labor-management relations was not eliminated by the collapse of the communist system: "it is [was] not easy for these people to grasp that the market mechanism does not function by the planners' fiat and that new methods of consultation and remuneration are needed to motivate an inert labor force" (Tirmarsh, 1993, p.75). For instance, in Belarus, a lot of jobs in public sector services still apply a lavish bonus system not related to the performance as a main motivator to perform the duties. Monthly salary bonus in health, education or the militia in Belarus often equals the amount of a basic salary itself. This misbalance between salary and bonuses negatively influence the system of work values of an employee. They have the feeling that their work costs little, but due to the generosity of the supervisors/ or the president (e.g. special presidential bonuses) an employee could survive.

Public services suffer from the lack of working culture, soviet attitude to work and undeveloped human relations, which take generations to nurture. The process of changes slows down by the employees' inertness caused by the decades of Soviet rules: the employees got used to the responsibility taken from them and delegated to the administration of the state. As survey among 120 workers in industrial establishments shows, they perceive that their material improvement would not come due to any change in their own motivation but rather as the result of some administrative action taken by the state: "The institutional change alone will not suffice to extricate millions of ... workers from the mind-set created by many years of subordination to communalist and command systems (Tidmarsh, 1993, pp.76-77)."

Nonprofits as a new formation for highly motivated individuals

Liberalization of the 1990-ies allowed not only for buying and selling state property. The creation of organizations that would provide self-employment from scratch was a new type of unknown activity for workers with initiative. For those highly motivated to help others and society, the new political system offered a special sector: nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofit organizations in modern Poland and Belarus have originated from the public sector. While in the 1990-ies some public service providers became privatized, some newly

emerged nonprofits gathered people willing to help others or to fight a particular social problem, especially if it has not been addressed in the communist system (e.g. special assistance for the individuals with the down syndrome, elderly care, educational courses for entrepreneurial, adjustment to the job market, requalification and etc.).

While for the new generation nonprofits became their first job, an elder generation experienced "work transition" from public organization to newly created nonprofits. Both voluntary and nonvoluntary transitions from the public into the nonprofit sector took place in the former communist countries (Fouad and Bynner 2008). As for voluntary transition, individuals felt that nonprofits fit better individual motivation, whereas, nonvoluntary transitions occurred when public employees were kicked out from the public service sector, for instance, due political believes.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to gain more understanding about the historical context of work motivation in former communist countries, namely Belarus and Poland, which helps to find out to what extent the motivation in today's nonprofit and public organizations still to a certain extent could be explained by the context variables inherited from the past. Inglehart's (1990, 1997) 'scarcity' theory that claims gradual change of values that takes time for generations pass. After the collapse of the communism, the working class got a belief that within a "tangible time span" with the help from Washington or Brussels, they can acquire the level of life what the democracies took centuries to achieve (Tidmarsh, 1993). They could get demotivated by the fact that the changes do not come fast enough, yet, in accordance with Inglehart's theory establishment of democratic values should take more than one generation. Tidmarsh (1993) shares the similar approach stating that: "Revival of a healthy, skilled and motivated work force will require prolonged exposure to an enterprise culture in which pay and position are tied directly to effort and the quality of work (p.77)".

This paper focused on historical determinants of working motivation in public and nonprofit sector in the Central and Eastern Europe. Individuals in Central and Eastern Europe cannot reach the level of prosperity and well-being of the Western democratic countries, if they continue to approach the work obligations as during the Soviet times (Tidmarsh, 1993). Research on the inherited communist work motivation may show, for example, that the reforming of an organization that provides public services should take place on the individual rather than organizational level.

Modern literature names a lot of high performance work practices, which were successfully implemented in developed countries, such as pay-for-performance, self-managed work teams or employee involvement. However, they cannot be directly applied towards work incentives in public and nonprofit organizations from the former Soviet bloc, without the consideration of external environment and culture (Luthans et.al, 2000). Working force of the public service organizations today - whether governmental or nonprofit - consists of employees that used to work in the communist system and youngsters that grew up during regime changes and their first jobs were already in the independent states. Tidmarsh (1993) argues that "while technology can be imported, the essential human element cannot". Elder generation of the employees is too accustomed to orders from above, fixed holidays and miserable social benefits that they might be unwilling to undertake nonprofits start-ups. Young generation, however, gets an exposure to both Western (abroad) and post-communist (home) ways of running an

organization that shapes their values. In order to be effective, public and nonprofit service provision organizations should to be run by younger generation.

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