

## **Employee Motivation at Amazon**

Name

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### **Introduction**

Employee motivation describes the kind of commitment, effort, energy, and creativity that employees within an organization bring into their work. Whether an organization operates in a shrinking or a growing economy, the management has a responsibility of finding ways to motivate employees with the purpose of creating a positive attitude towards their work or retaining them for their services. Various theories define motivation as the performance of particular works within the organization because the employee is comfortable and wants to do so (Sanjeev & Surya, 2016). When employees are motivated, their morale to put in more effort at the workplace is boosted, and the desire to retain their workplace or organization is also enhanced. Employee motivation can be distinguished in intrinsic and extrinsic forms, which in turn determine employee performance. According to Herzberg and Maslow's two-factor motivation theory, intrinsic motivational factors include recognition, responsibility, and challenging work, while extrinsic factors include salaries, promotion, status, job security, work condition, supervision, relationship with other workers, policies among others (Sanjeev & Surya, 2016). Based on the Amazon case study, this paper identifies various problems that employees face at work, that reduce the level of employee motivation. The paper categorizes external and internal causes of employee demotivation and provides various recommendations that can help resolve some, if not all the problems that Amazon employees face.

### **Definition of Problems**

According to the case study provided, the main problem that Amazon faces with its workers is poor employee motivation, characterized by various factors at the individual, group,

and organizational levels. Despite the level of customer satisfaction that Amazon provides and enjoys, many employees at the company's fulfillment centers are not happy with the kind of work they are required to do in order to meet that level of customer satisfaction. In retrospect, the outcomes at the company have been boycotts, high employee turnover, public outcry, poor or negative attitudes from workers, and poor health. These outcomes have been as a result of various aspects at the workplace. Poor working conditions and states are the leading problem at Amazon and have led to a poor organizational climate. According to the case study, employees have not been given time and the opportunity to work freely and deliver services with minimal or no supervision. First, employees are monitored for productivity and have very high productivity expectations put on their shoulders, as the company seeks to fill as many orders as possible to meet and exceed daily orders. This kind of tracking has resulted in fear among employees who overwork and even forgo necessary breaks, urinating in bottles to save time and meet their quotas, since failure to do so may lead to termination of their contracts. Furthermore, the company restricts interaction among workers during their shifts.

The restriction hinders proper relationship among the workers hence poor group performance since workers cannot learn from or help one another (Shahzadi et al., 2014). Secondly, workers are monitored for security purposes, instilling a poor attitude among workers towards their workplaces. Even though it is necessary for the organization to keep its security in check, Amazon having its workplaces seem like prisons for employees, and customers shaming employees publicly does not present a good picture of an organization's trust in its employees. Poor and unnecessarily strict company policies also form part of the problem at Amazon. Employees are reportedly attending work even in poor health conditions due to fear of being fired is an example of poor motivation. The company focuses more on productivity and

profitability at the expense of employees' wellbeing. Another problem resulting from poor motivation at Amazon is low compensation and pay. According to the case study, employees are reportedly complaining that the compensation they receive from the management is not relevant or equivalent to the kind of work they do, the demand from the company, and the extreme working conditions. Worker retention at the company is not as a result of employee motivation, but a function of lack of better work alternatives from the employees, since the company normally set up its fulfillment centers on the outskirts of major towns, where job opportunities are few, and offers from Amazon is seen as the best option to go by.

Therefore, the company treats its employees in any way, since the employees are vulnerable and desperate (Kopelman et al., 2008). Also, the company has very poor incentive policies, where they only provide small gifts like cookies, water bottles, and T-shirts to best-performing employees, while it awards its managers with pay bonuses, even though it is the low-level employees who put in more effort at work. Given the high employee turnover rate at Amazon, and fear of retaliation from the company, employees have failed to establish a union for themselves that can advocate for better working conditions, policies, and better compensation for their work (Shahzadi et al., 2014). According to the discussed problems from the case study, the main problem identified at Amazon is poor motivation, from the perspective of employees. This is because most of the problems discussed are a result of failure on the part of Amazon management to create and offer a conducive environment for its workers, and instead imposes policies and strategies that derail employee motivation, leading to poor attitude from the workers towards the company.

### **Causes of the Problems**

All the problems faced by employees and Amazon organizations are affected by various factors. Poor employee motivation at Amazon is enhanced by both external and internal aspects, both personal and environmental factors. Organizational behavior concepts and theories define the nature of people and organization, and their relationship towards the productivity level of a given organization (Pawar, 2009). The first possible cause of problems faced by employees and the organization as a whole is related to leadership. Organizational leadership defines the approach that leaders and managers use to set goals and objectives for the organization and for the employees by motivating them to successfully attend to their duties and ensure customer satisfaction (Bratton, 2020). However, at Amazon, managers do very little to motivate their employees. Despite setting high standards of employee satisfaction and objectives, the managers do not provide a conducive environment for the workers to carry out their duties. According to the case study, employees have complained of the workplace being more like a prison, where they are monitored for security, attendance, and productivity. Managers focus more on levels of productivity and customer satisfaction at the expense of the workers' wellbeing. According to Douglas McGregor's X&Y Management theory, managers are usually categorized into two (Kopelman et al., 2008). At Amazon, managers can be under the X category of this theory, where employees receive negative views from their leaders. Managers feel and believe that they should use force to get employees to task, and that is why they track the employees for productivity, scan them for theft and have them attend to work even if they are injured or experiencing poor health.

At the individual and group level, another factor that diminishes employee motivation at Amazon is minimal employee voice. At workplaces, employee voice defines the channels through which employees communicate to their employers, issues that affect their views on the

working condition that they are in. Enhanced employee voice helps to build trust and openness between the employees and the organization, and can promote organizational success. According to Elton Mayo's human relations management theory, earlier management theories only focused on money and its effect on employee performance. Although other factors like employee voice and interaction among employees and management have a huge effect on employee attitude and performance (Bratton & Gold, 2017). Employees who are provided with a platform to air their views and frustrations, and who have the capability to share and learn from each other, may have the desire to be more productive and retain one workplace for a longer time. At Amazon, however, employees do not have a platform that they can use to communicate their views to the managers on how poor and uncomfortable their working conditions are. First, employees are not allowed to interact with each other during their shifts, which limits their chances of sharing their experiences and learning from each other. Furthermore, an attempt by employees to form a union representation to air their grievances has previously failed due to high employee turnover that means minimal time for employees to meet and share as a group. Also, employees do not risk talking out due to fear of being retaliated against by the company.

### **Recommendations**

Within organizations, it is normal to have problems related to employee motivation. Approaches that an organization uses to address such problems are vital. At Amazon, one approach would be to formulate an organizational change plan that focuses on building a proper relationship between employees and the managers. Change within the organization defines the actions and strategies that an organization applies in altering its major components and operations (Conrad et al., 2015). At Amazon, the change should be focused on various aspects that promote better working conditions and enhance employee motivation. First, the company

should create an interactive forum where employees share their grievances and experiences.

According to McGregor's X&Y theories, managers in the Y category believe that organizations should inherently motivate their employees to be productive by providing them with opportunities to develop and learn within their respective institutions (Kopelman et al., 2008).

With an interactive forum, the company will be able to listen to what affects their employees and actually find out areas where some of their managers have been treating their employees unfairly. For example, the company may create working shifts for the employees such that those who are injured or are ill-health find time off to recuperate.

At the group and organizational level, Amazon should create a climate for justice for their employees, and allow them to form employee unions that can foster the airing and presentation of their opinions, frustrations, and grievances to the company for review. It could be that most grievances that employees have and poor working conditions they experienced are as a result of just part of the managers and specific fulfillment centers, and a union for the employees can help to address such grievances through the right channels and present such issues to the head offices (Conrad et al., 2015).

Secondly, Amazon can use pay as a factor of motivation. In many organizations, money has been considered as a simple but powerful and effective factor of motivation. As mentioned in the case study, many employees experience poor conditions as well as little pay at Amazon. Therefore, money as a factor can help in encouraging employees to work extra. It is reasonable to set high customer satisfaction objectives for employees but compensate them well for the much effort they put in enhancing that kind of satisfaction. Furthermore, other factors of motivation like incentives could help to boost the morale of workers and create a positive attitude in them towards their workplaces (Sanjeev & Surya, 2016). Other-on-monetary

motivation incentives like recognition, training, advancements, responsibility, and promotions can work to the advantage of the organization in fostering team spirit and the proper relationship between the company and the employees. The company can also work towards protecting their employees, especially during tough economic times, and against insensitive customers who shame the employees in public. This can be done by creating private customer platforms where every customer can air and present his or her opinion and views regarding the services at the stores. Other company regulations that derail employee motivation can also be done away with. At Amazon, tracking employees for production, theft or security, and attendance has been reported to reduce the self-esteem of the employees. Such regulations can be replaced by regularly training the employees on the benefits of good performance outcomes and building trust between employees and the workplace.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has analyzed problems that employees face within their working environment based on the Amazon case study. Employees' levels of motivation reduce given various negative factors within the organization. Such factors include high objectives set for employees in terms of customer satisfaction, although managers do not offer or provide conducive environments for employees to meet such objectives. Other factors that derail employee motivation include little compensation and incentives offered for the employees despite the effort they put in to ensure customer satisfaction (Conrad et al., 2015). Furthermore, employees do not interact and learn from each other due to restrictions, and that reduces their chances of forming workers' unions to help air their grievances. Those and other factors have contributed to public outcry and boycotts among the employees. However, it is possible to address such issues by employing different strategies such as better pay and incentives, employee



training among other practices to enhance better relationships among the employees and the organization. Different theories and concepts help in explaining the importance of employee motivation to enhance better working environments and improve employee productivity.

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