

# Workplace Motivation and Mental Development: Differences Between Foodservice Managers and Younger Workers

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**ABSTRACT.** The article presents the findings of an empirical study that identified self-reported motivational priorities among foodservice workers and management students over a period of five years. The authors present evidence that motivational priorities differ between younger and more mature individuals. Theoretical constructs from the disciplines of organizational behavior (OB), psychology, and neuroscience are presented to describe the foundation of the study. Additional theories in the areas of emotional labor and human development provided further support for the hypothesis of the study. The hypothesis of the study was that differences exist in perceived motivation needs between younger and older workers. The authors conclude with suggestions for practicing foodservice managers based on the findings of the study along with suggestions for further research. doi:10.1300/J369v08n04\_03 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

The article reports the findings of an empirical study that identified motivational priorities among a sample of respondents ( $n = 167$ ) over a period of five years. The sample consisted of individuals who worked within the foodservice sector of the hospitality industry. The purpose of the study was to identify and compare perceptions of motivational needs among categories of respondents. The article begins with a review of the literature from organizational behavior (OB) and other related disciplines to establish the theoretical foundation of the study. Next, it provides a description of the study and its findings. Finally, the authors provide suggestions for practicing foodservice managers based on the implications of the study.

### ***Worker Attitudes and Performance***

Human motivation concepts are important for understanding the dynamics of workers' attitudes. Attitudes have to do with the willingness of workers to perform tasks, duties, and responsibilities, which require them to expend energy (Tesone, 2005). Certain enterprises, such as the foodservices sector of the hospitality industry consist of workers who interact as hosts with visiting guests. These customers have come to expect employees to display certain hospitable behaviors that include positive emotional expressions during service encounters (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1994). The hospitality industry requires rigorous levels of positive emotional behaviors from all workers, particularly those who interact directly with visiting guests (Krebs, 2005). For this reason, emotional labor is an area of interest for foodservice managers.

### ***Emotional Labor***

Most positions in foodservice organizations require workers to expend both physical and emotional energy in the course of performing job functions. These employment scenarios led earlier scholars to engage in an area of research called "emotional labor" in order to investigate concepts related to the management of emotional displays through normative behavior in organizations (Hochschild, 1983). It has been

anecdotally noted that some hospitality industry managers believe in hiring for “attitude” and training for knowledge and skills. Researchers in the field of emotional labor seem to focus on attitudinal factors from the standpoint of employee recruitment, selection, organizational policies, and incentives (Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Goffman, 1959; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Certain investigations have placed emphasis on relationships between internal mental states and displayed emotional behaviors with mixed results, similar to earlier work in the field of cognitive consonance/dissonance (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Watson & Clark, 1984; Wharton, 1993). Other attitudinal studies presented findings concerning positive and negative “affective responses” to emotional labor expectations within organizations (Eisenberg, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberg et al., 2001; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Watson, Clark, & Telegen, 1988; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Still other investigations considered “coping” strategies that were reported by workers who experienced states of emotional dissonance within business enterprises (Aldwin, 1994; Lazarus & Launier, 1978; Moos & Billings, 1982; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Snyder & Dinoff, 1999). One major contribution of the emotional labor perspective is the acknowledgment that workers are emotive beings who are expected to display positive emotional states as part of performing work related functions.

Research in emotional labor preceded the development of studies in the area of emotional intelligence. Some time ago, the concept of emotional intelligence was introduced to the literature (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) with the notion becoming popularized just a few years later (Goleman, 1995, 1998). The new century brought forth numerous books and articles that applied the awareness of emotions and emotional intelligence to workplace behaviors (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Fisher & Ashansky, 2000; Lord, Klimoski, & Kanfer, 2002; Payne & Cooper, 2001). The premise of emotional intelligence is to measure levels of self-awareness and the awareness of emotional states experienced by others. The focus on awareness factors seems consistent with historical perspectives of motivational drivers.

### ***Historical Perspectives of Behavior and Awareness***

There seems to be a historical pattern that indicates behavior and motivation as being related to transpersonal experiences and awareness (Fontana & Slack, 1996). It is apparent that certain schools of philosophical thought ranging from reductionism to monism are somewhat consistent with developments in the field of psychology (Ajaya, 1997).

The first prominent thinking in psychology was the school of psychoanalysis, which focused on unconscious drivers of behavior. The antithesis of psychoanalysis is the behaviorism model with exclusive focus on empirical observations of environmental influences. The commonality between both schools of thought lies in the therapeutic objective for individuals to control and regulate their own behaviors. Two more modern approaches focused on humanism (valuing the self) and transpersonalism (transcending the self; Strohl, 1998). Transpersonal psychology was first presented in the 1960s and was more precisely described in 1992 by Lajoie and Shapiro.

In the decade prior to the discovery of transpersonal psychology, Abraham Maslow was responsible for popularizing humanistic psychology, which became prominent in 1954. The *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* was established in 1958, resulting in the formulation of the American Association for Humanistic Psychology in 1964 (Boss, 1980). The *personal growth* and *potentiality* focus of humanistic psychology was a broad departure from previous paradigms (psychoanalysis and behaviorism) that were preoccupied with pathology. Humanism was based on the assumption that individuals possess a propensity toward self-actualization that could be achieved through experience and reflective practice, as opposed to therapies aimed at correcting pathological behaviors through logical analysis or behavior modification (Bugental, 1965). Humanistic thinking spawned numerous studies in the late 1960s that resulted in popularizing broad interests concerning states of human consciousness among behavioral scholars and practitioners for many years (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995). Recently, consciousness studies have been embraced by some researchers within the domains of neuroscience and physics (Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

Transpersonalists seem to have an interest in understanding consciousness from the viewpoints of both the intrinsic self (humanistic) and transcendent self (transpersonal). The concept of human transcendence was originally described as non-local information that exists in a state called the "collective unconscious" by psychoanalyst C. G. Jung (1953). It is important to note that Jung's views mirrored earlier philosophical constructs associated with Existentialism (Sartre, 1998) and concurrently developing critical thinking components of General Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Early philosophies manifested during the development of the Humanism movement, which was simultaneously embraced by the sciences through views on psychology and personality theories (Georgiou, 1999).



If it is true that Maslow could be recognized as the “father” of humanistic thinking, he and Jung should be considered to be the “forefathers” of transpersonalism. One reason the doctrine of humanism is only discussed from a historical perspective could be that transpersonal psychology encapsulates the concepts of self-actualization and human potentiality, as well as transcendental mental states as constituting the mind/body relationship (Strohl, 1998).

### ***Self-Actualization***

Most managers view self-actualization as the highest-order need within the context of Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” model, which is a broad generalization used to describe need-based motivation theory. It suggests that individuals possess an intrinsic propensity toward achieving their potential and that “healthy” work environments might assist in unleashing this tendency among workers within organizations (Schrage, 2000). It has even been reported that leaders possess the duty to create environments conducive for followers to self-actualize in the process of doing their jobs (Townsend & Gebhardt, 2002). Some suggest that self-actualization is closely related to ego or identity needs and that according to Maslow, neither one could ever be fully satisfied (Brenner, 1999). Others contend that individuals possess an innate and compelling drive to realize their own potential by directly quoting Maslow, who said, “What man [or woman] can be, he [or she] must be” (Chasse, 1997). It seems that all of these descriptions imply the intrinsic need for humans to grow or evolve on personal levels. Maslow further provided direct applications of fulfilling this need within workplace environments.

Maslow was mostly focused on humanistic psychology throughout his career. His experience with industrial psychology was limited to a summer of observation in a factory. This led to the publication of Maslow’s only book on workplace psychology, entitled *Eupsychian Management: A Journal*, in 1965 (Linstead, 2002). The book advised managers to treat workers as holistic human beings who possess varied emotional needs and levels of self-awareness. It further suggested the ultimate goal of management motivation as being the creation of workplace environments aimed at facilitating the self-esteem and self-actualization needs of individuals. Toward the end of his career, Maslow joined the faculty at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California to lecture and conduct research in the areas of self-actualization, peak experi-

ences, and states of consciousness. Many of his Esalen colleagues were leading scholars in the emerging transpersonal psychology movement.

### ***Consciousness and the Brain***

Previous behavioral researchers relied upon social sciences research methods to establish findings. Recent advances in technology have facilitated the capacity for researchers to observe brain functions during various states of consciousness (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Magnetoencephalography (MEG) machines are used to monitor brainwave activity, while functional magnetic resonance imaging (f-MRI) is used to view activated regions of the brain during responses to stimuli. These technologies have lured researchers from the field of neuroscience to conduct studies aimed at understanding brain activity that processes emotions and feelings (Damasio, 1994). Some suggest that feelings are states of emotional awareness (Damasio, 2003). Most researchers agree that emotional awareness is the result of synaptic connections between the emotional and cortical frontal regions of the brain (Damasio, 2003; LeDoux, 2002; Pert, 1999; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). It is suggested that the hypothalamus is the area where thoughts are transduced into actual physiological responses that can be measured (LeDoux, 2002). Some researchers would say that emotions are the result of how we evaluate, perceive, or analyze an event and that cultural programming and expectations play an important role in this process (Damasio, 2003).

Certain scholars suggest that self-actualization is a state of cognitive and emotional awareness of the self in relation to an individual's perception of the world (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). The brain process for self-actualization involves synaptic connections to bring stored memories and emotions from the hippocampus and amygdale into the frontal cortices to generate cognitive awareness of the self. The physical process involves some form of contemplation (reflection, meditation, or biofeedback, for example) used to access and process thoughts and feelings of an individual relative to worldly experiences (Pert, 1999). An individual who uses this information for the purpose of evolving toward potentiality would be considered to possess a high need for self-actualization.

Anecdotal observation might suggest that individuals mentally and emotionally evolve more rapidly with each successive generation over time. If this were true, it could be suggested that individuals self-actualize at younger ages than those of previous generations. Earlier brain researchers might have supported this notion based on the belief that the human brain becomes fully developed by the age of 18 years or so.

However, recent research has arrived at different conclusions. The last region of the brain to develop is the frontal cortex, which does not complete its growth until the mid- to late twenties, or so (Pert, 1999; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Decision-making centers reside in this area of the brain. The need for self-actualization is a personal decision that is made in this region of forebrain in response to emotional needs that are emitted from limbic system synaptic transmissions. Since self-actualization requires processing through the frontal cortices, it would seem unlikely that younger individuals would report a high need in this category, even though they may have evolved more rapidly than prior generations in other ways. For instance, neuroscientists seem to agree that one of the primary functions of childhood brain development is in the area of socialization (Damasio, 1994; LeDoux, 2002). Perhaps, young adults experience more rapid social maturation relative to previous generations.

### ***THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE STUDY***

The recent findings from the neurosciences provide empirical evidence that human frontal cortex brain development continues into a person's late twenties. The brain processing required for the awareness of self-actualizing needs is directly related to the connection between the frontal cortex and emotional centers of the brain. The neuroscientists provide evidence to support the contentions of behavioral scholars concerning the development of emotions, awareness, and the need for self-actualization.

Reports from behavioral scholars in the areas of emotional labor and emotional intelligence are supported by the brain research findings; as are the contentions from the humanistic and transpersonal psychology literature. The entire body of the literature supports the notion that foundations of emotions, awareness, evolution and self-actualization exist within the human mind. These all seem to be motivational factors that influence the need for human achievement. However, there may be a difference in the perceived motivational needs of younger and older workers, according to the brain research findings. This became the hypothesis of the study.

There are no known studies reported in the literature that have attempted to use brain research to explain socialization and self-actualization needs within individuals.

Anecdotally, it seems as though the perceived need for social belonging declines with age, whereas self-esteem and self-actualization needs

appear to increase with age. It is possible that these perceptions of needs could be influenced by frontal cortex brain development that impacts levels of self-awareness (Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

### ***THE STUDY***

The purpose of the study was to identify self-reported motivational priorities based upon the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs model over a period of five years. The targeted group consisted of foodservice workers who were culled out of a larger population consisting of hospitality and health care workers who were also students in hospitality and business management programs. The objectives of the study are listed below:

### ***OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY***

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Investigate motivational factors that were perceived to provide prioritized influence for current foodservice workers who were also students at three universities located in various regions of the United States.
2. Identify relationships of self-reported motivational priorities among members of diverse groups (gender, age, graduate standing, work experience, workplace positional status) over a five-year time-frame.

### ***Methodology***

#### ***The Sample***

The target population for this exploratory study included 167 full-time and part-time students at three universities in various regions of the United States who were current employees in foodservice organizations. This particular group was chosen because the researchers were interested in investigating motivational preferences among individuals in specific service-based industry sectors. The aggregate sample was an accumulation of 167 respondents, with just over 30 separate new respondents who participated in the study each year over a period of five



years. The reason for this approach was to compare patterns of score similarity/difference from year to year over a specific timeframe.

### *The Instrument*

This study employed a two-part questionnaire. The first section asked respondents to report demographic information to include age, gender, workplace position level, industry sector and years of full-time equivalent (FTE) work experience. The second section consisted of an off-the-shelf instrument entitled the *Managing by Motivation (MbM) Questionnaire* (Sashkin, 1991). The instrument is based on the classic motivation theories of both Maslow and Herzberg that measure motivational factors of safety/security, social/belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs importance, as perceived by individuals' self-reports. The instrument has been proven to be globally valid and reliable over many years of testing (Sashkin, 1991). The 20-item questionnaire that is self-scored took respondents approximately 20 minutes to complete. It measures self-reported personal importance in each of the four motivational need categories listed earlier, resulting in a minimum score of 5 and a maximum of 25 points in each section. The point value ranges equate to a Likert-type scale of importance for each section. A need area with a score of 20-25 points is considered a high priority to the individual. Scores of 15-19 indicate moderate perceived importance and scores between 10 and 14 points are considered to indicate low levels importance to the respondent. Scores below 10 points suggest the motives measured by that scale are not at all important to an individual.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

The researchers visited students registered for Principles of Management courses at one western U.S. and one eastern U.S. university during fall semesters from 2000 to 2004 for data collection. The researchers also visited with students registered for the same course at a university located in the southeast section of the country during the summer semester of each year. Registered students with declared majors or minors in hospitality management were invited to volunteer for participation. Slightly more than 30 (year 1-33, year 2-35, year 3-32, year 4-34, year 5-33) useable completed surveys from foodservice employees were collected from participants during each year of the five-year study for an aggregate sample of 167 respondents.

### DATA ANALYSIS

The data were coded and recorded using spreadsheet software and transferred to statistical software files. The data were analyzed immediately after each survey administration. The aggregate data were categorized and reviewed during each year of the study. The assumptions of Analysis of variance were met and then an ANOVA and independent t-tests were performed to investigate differences in reported responses to the Likert-type scale questions (1 = Not true for me, 5 = Completely true for me) among demographic variables (gender, age, position status, years of experience). Means and standard deviations were also calculated.

Scores were plotted for each of the four sections of the survey that included safety/security (SS), social/belonging (SB), self-esteem (SE), and self-actualization (SA) categories. Demographic variables (age, gender, position, experience) were plotted next to the scores reported by each respondent. The scores were surprisingly similar over each of the five years contained within the study period indicating a consistent pattern of responses over time. Respondents were then placed in comparison groups to test for differences based on age (10-year cohorts), gender (male and female), years of work experience (FTE), and job titles in order to examine whether any statistically significant differences were present.

It is important to note that only slight differences between scores for the 10-year age cohorts were evident. However, when respondents were separated into two independent groups comparing those *Under 21 Years of Age* (n = 80) and those *Greater than 30 Years in Age* (n = 57), statistically significant differences were found to exist among three of the scores across the items tested. These findings were discovered by conducting independent samples t-tests to determine whether significant differences existed between the two groups. All assumptions required of the independent-samples t-test were met according to Green and Salkind (2003). Differences were found among reported scores for social/belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization between the groups. Calculations for score differences are listed in Table 1.

### DISCUSSION, CROSS-VALIDATION, AND IMPLICATIONS

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TABLE 1. Motivational Scores by Age

Group	Mean	SD	Equal Variance (EV) Assumptions	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
SS U-21 years	19.38	3.173	EV-assumed-SS	.633	.527	.28
SS >30 years	19.10	3.206	EV-not assumed-SS	.629	.531	.28
SB U-21 years	17.59	2.802	EV-assumed-SB	4.139	.001	1.67
SB >30 years	15.92	3.224	EV-not assumed-SB	3.794	.001	1.67
SE U-21 years	17.97	2.674	EV-assumed-SE	-2.229	.026	-.84
SE >30 years	18.81	2.752	EV-not assumed-SE	-2.190	.031	-.84
SA U-21 years	20.13	2.632	EV-assumed-SA	-2.876	.004	-1.02
SA >30 years	21.16	2.127	EV-not assumed-SA	-3.278	.001	-1.02

$\alpha = .95$

Note: SS = Safety and security, SB = Social belonging, SE = Self-esteem, SA = Self-actualization.

category, which were reported as comparatively lower for the older group ( $p = .001$ ) and the self-actualization category in which the older group scored higher than the younger group ( $p = .004$ ).

Self-esteem mean for the older group was also significantly higher for the over 30 year old group ( $p = .026$ ), which seems to make sense in retrospect, in that this need is likely to be perceived as more important for older employees who may be considered to be more stable than younger workers in terms of job security. Also, it might be assumed that individuals in the age cohort ranging from 22 to 30 years ( $n = 30$ ) could have collectively reported mixed responses, which precluded the existence of statistically significant differences. This might support the contention from neuroscience that would suggest individuals in this age range are at varying levels of frontal cortex development, which could create huge differences. However, for the older employees the scores were more consistent which would be again consistent with more similar levels of frontal cortex development (Pert, 1999; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

### ***Cross Validation***

For cross-validation purposes, a recent study on restaurant workers showed differences in motivating factors for foodservice employees (Dermody, Young, & Taylor, 2004). However, the study was more focused on extrinsic motivators, which did not provide direct comparisons to this intrinsic motivation study. Another study conducted in Hong Kong examined age differences between workers and found that young



workers were more likely than older counterparts to be ambitious and career-oriented (Wang, Siu, & Tsang, 1999). However, for foodservice workers, no study had been found to examine the specific age ranges reported in this study.

### ***Implications for Management Practitioners***

The key implication for practicing foodservice managers falls within the domain of motivational awareness. There may be a tendency for some managers to project their own motivating factors onto subordinates in the process of encouraging peak performance levels. In fact, an ad hoc follow-up questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of management students who worked in foodservice organizations ( $n = 32$ ) that asked them to identify best workplace practices in the areas of recognition and incentives. As might be expected, those in the twenty-something age range identified pizza parties, picnics, and social gatherings most frequently; while older respondents noted promotions, bonuses and raises most often. It may be argued that the reports from the latter group indicate a preference for extrinsic rewards that satisfy safety/security needs; however, these same incentives might be intrinsically interpreted as indicators of achievement in the minds of more mature workers. It might be an appropriate practice for managers to identify the patterns of prioritized needs among workers in foodservice organizations and to reward employees based on these preselected intrinsic or extrinsic motivators.

It would be likely that mid-to-large size foodservice organizations would enlist the practitioners from the human resource management office to take the lead on employee motivation initiatives, since they usually possess training in this area of management. However, as is the case with all human resource management functions, collaborative motivational management in every area of the foodservice organization would seem appropriate.

Human resources practitioners may choose to include the administration of motivational profiles as part of the employee recruitment and selection processes. There are valid and reliable instruments that take little time to complete and are self scoring available for purchase. It is not suggested that the profiles be used as selection criteria, but rather as information that may be translated into strategies and policies aimed at improving employee retention rates through the recognition that employee needs and unmet needs will vary based on age. Anecdotal evidence suggests large numbers of younger workers are employed in

certain service sector industries such as foodservice organizations. It seems reasonable that the motivational priorities of these workers and more mature employees within an organization could provide useful information for formulating human resource strategies.

Motivational strategies aimed at improving worker performance could directly improve the profit margins of the firm because of enhanced productivity levels. Managers may choose to blend systems engineering procedures along with motivational incentives to improve resource utilization, streamline transformation processes, and increase the output of goods and services. One bold suggestion would be for foodservice organizations to empower managers to customize productivity enhancement incentives at the work unit level based on their awareness of needs priorities among specific staff members. Specifically, management may try practical applications once they have surveyed employees by forming a motivational template and typology of all workers represented so that reward systems may be matched more specifically to the intrinsic type of reward that is most important to the employee recipient. In any case, the awareness of employee motivational priorities alone could enhance a foodservice manager's ability to positively influence members of the workforce thus hopefully enhancing organizational performance.

### **CONCLUSION**

From a broad perspective, the findings of the study reported in the article suggest that individuals evolve throughout their working lives. The empirical evidence suggests that socialization needs are a priority with younger workers, only to be replaced by more self-actualizing and self-esteem needs with age. If the systems scholars are correct, individuals continue on a path of individual intrinsic growth over time. Foodservice managers may use this knowledge of human intrinsic needs to develop effective strategies in the areas of employee recruitment, selection, and retention, as well as performance management. OB academics may find solace in the suggestion that humanistic psychology was not historically abandoned. Instead, humanism evolved into transpersonal psychology, which is alive and well today. The application of these tenets could help managers improve performance and employee satisfaction based on the understanding that motivational differences vary by age.

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