



RESEARCH ARTICLE

MOTIVATING FACTORS AT WORK: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS OF BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the motivational and demotivation factors and of public and private employees from the city of João Pessoa – Paraíba - Brazil. It was developed with a sample of 201 participants, in which 121 were private servers and 80 public servers. The instruments used for data collection were: Motivation Multifactor Scale at Work, complementary issues related to work motivation and the socio-demographic questionnaire. The results showed no differences between the two sectors regarding questions of stability and recognition at work. As for the factors that motivated and demotivate at work, compensation was the most cited by both sectors, followed by other relevant, as recognition and growth opportunity. In addition, employees from public sector indicated a greater motivation to work over the private. In short, it is considered that this study may contribute to the development of motivational policies that take into account the particularities of each sector and to each employee.

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INTRODUCTION

The interest in the human motivation theme is not a recent one; arguments about it can be traced to ancient times (Batista, Vieira, Cardoso & Carvalho, 2005). Nevertheless, only in the 70s this topic was considered relevant in the context of organizations (Bueno, 2002). Thus, we can highlight the contributions the studies about motivation carried out by Work and Organizational Psychology, and its accordance with the areas for People Management, taking into consideration that one of the aims of this areas is to motivate the associates in order to achieve high levels of satisfaction, performance and productivity (Ferreira, Diogo, Ferreira & Valente, 2006; Fowler, 2001; Ribeiro & Oliveira, 2016; Silva, 2014; Viseu, Jesus, Quevedo-Blasco, Rus & Canavarro, 2015). All of these studies have an impact on work relationships, not only by improving the organizational productivity process, but also turning satisfaction into an aspect of the workers' physical and mental health, focusing on the improvement of quality of life for work (Kugori, 2008; Martinez & Paraguay, 2003). Studies indicate that amongst the positive aspects to motivate the worker, we can draw our attention to the following: self-realization, satisfaction, well-being and self-esteem. On the

other hand, demotivation or dissatisfaction has the workers unwilling to dispend any effort, knowledge and personal skills to work (Tamayo & Paschoal, 2003), it also contributes for their having a negative perception of their work environment (Thomas Skitmore, Chi Lam & Poon., 2004), they display low performance and uncertainty (Silva & Costa, 2008). Taking into account the aforementioned information, we verify that a study on motivation is relevant in any work environment in which it is intended the establishment of productivity and efficiency standards, as both public and private organizations have been challenged to value the human capital and propose strategies to motivate the worker. However, according to Houston (2000) civil servants have different values from those that come from a private organization. Hence, it is necessary to understand how work relationships go about for both environments, and what sets them apart (Bueno, 2002). One aspect is clear, as unlike other countries, in Brazil; the employee that earns the job applying for a public organization has, in accordance with the law, stability until their retirement, also these jobs often offer better salaries than private ones and greater prestige. Such attributes do not correspond to the ones in the private sector, which is why the former is so attractive to Brazilians, having them long for such job. In spite of the advantages, stagnation, dissatisfaction, frustration, and lack of motivation in the work environment may still be brought about. The same happens in the private sector where the

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benefits do not correlate with the ones in the public sector, thus demotivation negative effects arise.

In face of this, it is verified that even if the relevance of the topic is accentuated, there are not many studies that make the comparison between the two sectors, which justifies the interest for the topic. Thus, the current study has as its objective to recognize motivational and demotivational factors from the public and private sectors of the city of João Pessoa, in the state of Paraíba – Brazil. In order to do so, the initial hypothesis was developed: that there are motivational differences between the private and the public sector. Therefore, it was utilized a quantitative approach as methodology by filling out self-applied questionnaires, which contained multiple-choice questions about the topic in study for each public.

### Motivation theories

According to Robbins (2002), work motivation is about the process that rules over intensity, direction and persistence of efforts in order for a person to achieve a goal. In turn, Maslow (1996) describes motivation as the result of the interaction between the individual and the situation that surrounds them, generating various concepts about motivation according to each situation of a specific organization. The concept of motivation may be best comprehended through two groups of existing theories: (1) content theories, which are mainly related to the intrinsic or environmental factors impacting their behavior; and (2) process theories, which offer comprehension over cognitive and thought processes and influence the theories that are described as follows. Human motivation to work could be studied based on a number of theories; however we will base the study on the following: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory; McClelland's Theory of Needs; Locke's Goal-Setting Theory; Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model and Meyer and Allen's Model of Organizational Commitment (Brunelli, 2008; Duarte, 2012).

*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory*, created in the decade of 1940, describes a hierarchical pyramid in which basic needs are comprised at the bottom, whereas the more complex ones are at the top. Following this line of thought, Maslow identifies five levels of human basic needs that are sorted out in an ascending manner, and they are: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-realization (Chiavenato, 2011; Maslow, 2000).

The first layer (physiological needs) is about survival and species preservation. They are innate necessities, such as: feeding, shelter, sleep, and rest (Chiavenato, 2000; Silva, 2013). Following that, there is the second layer (safety needs), which refers to stability, protection or fleeing from danger. These two levels are thought to be primary or low-level (Vieira, Vilas Boas, Andrade & Oliveira, 2011). When it comes to the third level, we find necessities related to association, participation, peer acceptance, and friendship buildup (social needs). Then, we follow with the fourth layer (esteem needs), which include needs of recognition, esteem and others' respect. At the top of the pyramid, there is the last level (self-realization needs), where the highest human needs are considered, and the individual seeks realization and development of their potential.

*McClelland's Theory of Needs* (1989), which talks about three needs: (1) need for realization, which is characterized by the

fact that efficiency and excellence are stimulants when it comes to motivation; (2) need for power which corresponds to the will to have control; and (3) needs for affiliation which are characterized by interpersonal and social relationships (McClelland, 1982; Chianenatto, 2004).

Another theory that is relevant for the study of motivation is denominated *Goal-Setting Theory*, developed by Edwin Locke during the late 60s. This theory stresses that the intention of the employee is to work for a predetermined aim/goal, which contributes for the improvement of the worker's performance. When it comes to difficulty, the authors agree that goals must be difficult but achievable, implying that a certain effort from the associates is necessary, that results in the increase of the performances and motivation. Lastly, as a conclusion, the feedback is clearly connected to determination of goals, as its presence leads to a better performance in comparison to its absence.

*Job Characteristics Model* developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980) proposes five characteristics associated with better yield, personal satisfaction and motivation in a work environment, which are: (1) *skillvariety* that is related to the importance of each task as well as the variety of procedures that are performed; (2) *autonomy*, decision-making power when faced with the activities developed and the idea of responsibility growth for the worker; (3) *taskidentity and task significance*, they are connected to structuration and knowledge about work and; (4) *feedback*, it must be used to inform the employee the result of their work. According to the authors, these elements are known as core dimensions and may bring about direct implications in the psychological conditions connected to motivation.

Allen and Meyers, with their *Model of Organizational Commitment* (1990), highlight three dimensions that are part of theoretical-conceptual discussions about organizational commitment, which are: (1) *affective*, commitment is connected to the attachment to the institution; (2) *instrumental*, commitment relates to cost-benefit associated with leaving the institution and; (3) *normative*, commitment correlates with the behavioral pattern established by the company. Thus, according to the authors, commitment and continuity of the employees in the company will only be possible if there is a strong affective and emotional bond.

### Work motivation: public and private sectors

Studies for the private sector point to some fundamental motivational factors, such as: environment and relationships at work, value of the employee, chance for professional growth, salary and company and coworkers' acknowledgement (Braga Júnior, Santos, Carvalho, Silva & Silva, 2013; Marques, 2008; Munch, 2007; Silva, Mousquer, Schadeck & Rodrigues, 2015). For instance, in the study carried out by Vasconcelos (2014) for a company in Paraíba, it was identified that the workers' motivation was linked to social levels in Maslow's pyramid. According to Silva and Machado (2007), in order to motivate associates, it is essential to have investment in training, decrease in turnover, and a motivating leadership. Also, other strategies that may be utilized are: goal stipulation, awards, presentation of feedback and a reward system (Silva & Machado, 2007; Marques, 2008). Along these lines, Bond (2007, p.55) brings attention to the fact that motivation for a civil servant, to the detriment of privates officials, is in an

underprivileged position, keeping in mind that a great part of public service does not offer a reward system based on the performance. Besides, Rodrigues, Neto and Filho (2014) point out that goals and awards are already being used in the sector, albeit, more recently and not as discussed in the literature.

Still in the context of the public sector, in the study carried out by Brunelli (2008) with 414 civil servants, work motivation was heavily associated to factors such as: relationship with the management, interpersonal relationship and stability. Moreover, studies also highlight, career plan, work environment, challenge, and relevant activities at work as positive aspects to motivate workers (Duarte, 2012; Klein & Mascarenhas, 2016).

Moving onto demotivational factors in the public sector, studies bring attention to the following: poor work conditions, authoritarian power relations, lack of recognition, actions to reduce autonomy, low income, lack of training, unavailability of superiors, and unstructured personnel in sectors (Caldeira, 2013; Gonçalves, 2008; Klein & Mascarenhas, 2016; Romio, 2013). Thus, Caldeira (2013) suggests as motivational strategies activities that contribute to learning and task enhancement. With the differentiation between the public and private sectors made, Carneiro, Ferraz, Roberto, Ribeiro e Costa (2014) recently carried out a study that took into account the two different sectors and compared them according to the motivation of the associates. The main results that were found point to stability as a motivational factor for both sectors; also, there is a greater number of dissatisfied employees from the private sector in comparison to the public.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sample was composed of 201 participants who took an online questionnaire that was available in social networks. From the total number of the sample, 121 were employees from the private sector 60.2%, and 80 were civil servants 39.8% from the city of João Pessoa (PB, Brazil), with ages varying between 17 and 65 years old ( $A = 31.86$ ;  $SD = 9.67$ ). Most of the participants were female (54.7%); single (50.2%); who had finished high school (53.7%) and active in the provision of services sector (44.3%). To collect information, the participants answered a questionnaire composed of three tools, described as it follows:

Further questions referring to work motivation: if the employee felt acknowledged at work; if they felt motivated; what motivated them the most as well as what demotivated them in a work environment; if they considered stability a motivating factor; and if their own job was stable. Socio-demographic questionnaire: Data to characterize the sample was obtained: sex, age, sector of activity, marital status, monthly income, social class and education. Data was analyzed through IBM SPSS predictive analytics software (version 20). Descriptive analyses were made (central and dispersion tendencies) and t-test analyses for independent samples. Microsoft Excel was also used in order to build the graphs.

## RESULTS

At first, a comparison of the averages was made (t-test for independent samples) to verify if there were differences between civil servants and officials when it comes to the following variables: work acknowledgement (if it is considered a motivating factor for the employee), work stability (if it is considered a motivating factor for the employee) and motivation scale at work. Table 2 depicts the results for the average and standard deviation, as well as the t-test for independent samples. Results revealed no statistically significant differences between civil servants and officials when it comes to *Work Motivation* [ $t(194) = -0.15$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ]. However, when it comes to the variable *Work Acknowledgement* [ $t(199) = -1.65$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ], and *Work Stability* [ $t(196) = -1.45$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ], statistically significant differences were detected when comparing the two sectors in a way that officials had higher averages in both stability, and work acknowledgement, in comparison to their civil counterparts. Following that, with the use of the questions “*What’s the main motivating factor at your work?*” and “*What does not motivate you at work?*” an assessment from the perspectives of civil servants and officials was made of the main motivating factors as well as the demotivating ones in each area of operation.

Initially, it can be observed that the factor *pay* was the one most cited by the participants, both in a private and a public context, although in the private sector, the value reaches a higher percentage. For the factors *stability*, *liking the job* and *customer service*, public service had much higher numbers

**Table 1. Comparison of averages for motivation scale, work acknowledgement variables, and stability at work depending if the worker is from the public or private sector**

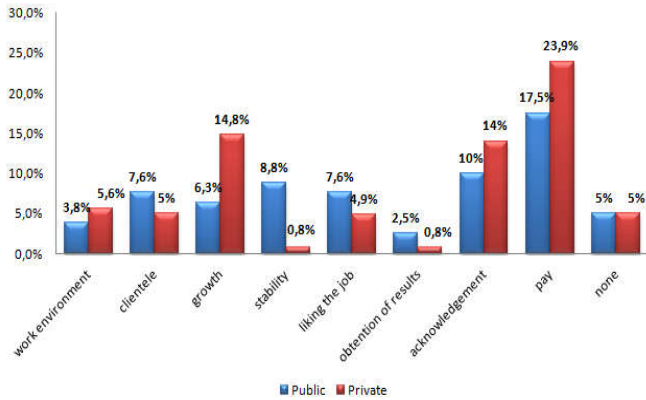
Variable	Work Acknowledgement		Work Stability		Work Motivation Scale	
	A	SD	A	SD	A	SD
Public	1,34	0,47	1,16	0,37	3,78	0,45
Private	1,45	0,50	1,25	0,43	3,79	0,48
T		-1,67		-1,45		-0,15
GL		199		196		194
p		0,00		0,00		0,51

*Multifactorial Scale for Work Motivation.* It was proposed by Ferreira *et al.* (2006) in Portugal and comprises 28 items, which are grouped into four factors: work organization (for instance, “This Company has satisfactory working conditions.”); performance (for instance, “I would like to be evaluated on my performance periodically.”); accomplishment/power (for instance, “I feel motivated when my work is complimented by my superiors); and involvement (for instance, “I consider my work tedious”). The items were answered on a five-point scale, which varies from 1 = Completely disagree to 5 = Completely agree.

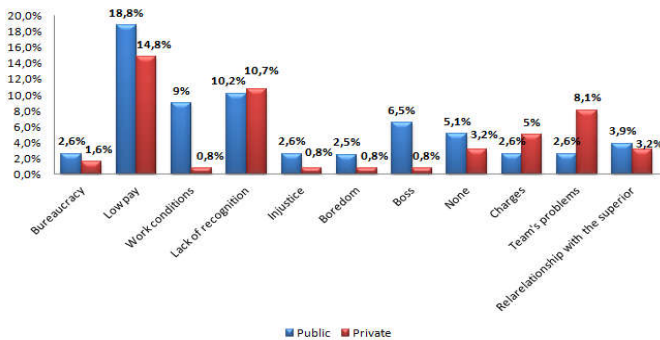
than private. On the other hand, for the factors *growth opportunity*, *work environment* and *work acknowledgement*, the participants from the private sector showed higher motivational numbers to work. Lastly, we highlight that 5% of the group stated that there is nothing that motivates them in their work environment.

As done before for Graph 1, *pay* was the most significant factor in both cases that were studied here as a demotivational factor, however, the public sector had bigger issues with it. Likewise, the public sector had greater percentages for *work*

conditions, boredom, bureaucracy, problems with superiors. When it comes to higher demotivational numbers for the private sector, the following can be highlighted: *lack of recognition, charges and problems with the team*. In general, we call attention to the fact that from the eleven factors listed by the employees as demotivational, seven of those had higher percentages in the public sector than in the private.



**Figure 1. Comparison between public and private sectors according to motivational factors**



**Figure 2. Comparison between public and private sectors according to demotivational factors**

## DISCUSSION

Concerning the thought that there were no differences between public servants and officials according to the *Work Motivation* scale, the results go against what was stated by Tamayo and Pascal (2003) when they attest that the public context has changed in the past decades, with investment on the workers, and, ergo, on their motivation, stating the same for the private sector. Moreover, it is important to bring attention to the fact that the finding does not implicate that both sectors do not have their own particularities and factors which are different from each other. Thus, it is necessary that other studies recreate these results to confirm the data. For the aspect *Work Acknowledgement*, significant differences are found, for which the private sector had a higher average. The data may be explained by the fact that work acknowledgement, more often, include awards and a reward system, strategies more present in the private sector in order to stimulate production (Marques, 2008; Silva & Machado, 2007). Accordingly, differences when it comes to stability were also observed, private servants had higher averages, indicating this particular factor as an important motivating factor to work. As stability is a known reality for public service, workers from the private sector are the ones who endorse such factor. Based on that, we can

comprehend that numerous officials aim for stability either by entering the public service, or by earning greater incumbencies that would safeguard their job position. To Vroom (1997), stability is a fundamental factor to motivate any individual at work.

As for the percentages on the factors that most motivate civil and private employees, it was verified that pay was the most influential factor for both sectors which confirms what was cited by Silva (2013) when it comes to the role that remuneration plays not only for the most basic needs and safety, described by Maslow, but also for the fulfillment of social, esteem and self-realization needs. Although such importance was observed for both sectors, employees from the private sector had higher percentages, this agrees with what was proposed by Carneiro *et al.* (2014), who associated a greater satisfaction with salaries to civil servants. Not only that, according to the theoretical focus by Allen and Meyer (1990) on retirement plans and investments done by the employees, they are important indicators linked to the cost-benefit evaluation or possible job change.

For *stability*, public service had higher numbers than the private and it is possible to consider that this difference has implications for the factors that motivate the worker. This result corroborates Diniz, Cruz, Silva and Fontanillas (2012) when it indicates that the idea of guaranteed stability associated with public service is a motivational source and is strongly attached to the idea of safety from political harassment, overwhelming pressure at work and dismissal. Not only that, in Brazil, this scenery has gone through changes and has been constantly associated to lack of credibility, low productivity, poor service, and apathy. Such fact has led to the privatization of a slew of services, and it is currently one of the most debated topics in the country (SoaresFilho, 2002).

Contrary to the aforementioned, *growth opportunity* and *work acknowledgement* had the participants from the private sector more vocal about. From this perspective, Chiavenatto (2000) points to a level of interest that the individual has over the reward the company may give out (example: recognition) as a source for motivation. Likewise, different theoretical contributions about motivation include these two aspects as fundamental stages or components in order to obtain a better performance and professional realization as well (Braga Junior *et al.*, 2013; Marques, 2008; Munch, 2007; Silva *et al.*, 2015). Finally, moving onto the 5% of the group that stated that there were *no* factors that motivated them in the work environment, this affirmation confirms the need of a better investigation to find out which aspects shall bring about some change for this minority's perspective on the work environment, and thus, strategies that aim to improve work conditions, productivity and well-being must be developed. When it comes to the factors that most demotivated the both types of employees for each respective field, it was verified again that pay was a factor of greater prominence for both, reaching higher grounds on the public sector. The public sector also brought to attention work conditions, boredom, bureaucracy, and problems with superiors. These are ubiquitous aspects for the sector, which confirms previous studies (Brunelli, 2008; Duarte, 2012; Caldeira, 2013; Romio, 2013). The high demotivational index has already been singled out by an array of studies (Caldeira, 2013; Klein & Mascarenhas, 2016; Romio, 2013). To Bond (2007, p.55) one of the reasons for the demotivation of the civil servant in comparison to the officials, the formers being

at an underprivileged position, is that these individuals are not offered a reward system for their performance.

Comparing demotivational and motivational factors, this study identifies that demotivation and motivation are connected. It is understood that the presence or absence of certain factor may cause motivation or demotivation depending upon a reference framework on an individual level. It is inferred that this is one of the reasons that it was not possible to spot many statistically meaningful differences between the two groups in the study. However, with the analysis of the graphs it was possible to identify a few subtle differences. We highlight the importance of other studies that turn their attention to the factors that were identified to explain such differences, in order to diminish the barriers that may affect the mental and physical health of the employees.

## Conclusion

In summary, the current study may contribute to the development of researches in the field, as well as collaborate in creating motivational programs that would take into consideration specificities from each organizational sector, and the individualities of each worker. It should also be noted that, from the data that comes from this study, we suggest new researches be carried out which would seek to know how motivation works in different sectors of activities, such as: commerce, industry, provision of services and so on, in order to compare results.

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