

## **The Unsatisfying Wellbeing of the Local International Company Worker in the Third World**

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### **Abstract**

*Human resource has its challenges and sometimes those challenges are unique for each sector, however, the challenge of the local worker in an international company is unique, irrespective of the sector in which they find themselves.*

*The challenge of any local worker in an international organization is struggling with some sort of dissatisfaction, after the knowledge that two persons doing the same job, with the same level of qualification can be earning different salaries. The difference is, in most cases, so wide to impose a morale issue; simply because of where you were employed.*

*This article sorts to bring to the lamplight the various areas of dissatisfaction, for the local worker; be they multicultural realities, benefit package or the social factor. I have also reviewed the motivational factors behind the staff management systems; be they in relations to work life balance, willingness to make personal sacrifice at work, desire promotion to senior levels of management, agree more with the statement “work life is more fulfilling than my personal life”, do not feel they have a lot on their plate.*

*Recommendations have been made, that the cynical local worker who feels they are victims should be identified and asked to leave, communicate more the vision of management for the local staff and avoid gaps, branding the local worker the patriot of the nation and permit, promote and publicize example of local workforce where the other motivational needs have been met.*

*This article is a must read for all companies with a multinational and international nature. It is also important for anyone hoping to get an international job and it can assist the local staff representatives to find a common ground, in settling staff related issues in an international setting.*

### **Introduction**

With the outbreak of international business and the goodies that accompany it, such as; increase in technological advancement, cultural diversity, economic advancement for the nation and the immediate environmental population, better infrastructure and increase number of employment opportunities; international business remains a challenge to the local worker in all sectors, in terms of true satisfaction.

Most international companies begin as a serious attraction for local labor with their attractive environments, office and charming communities with an admirable diversity to races and talents. However, for the local worker, the highly competitive salary is the most attractive factor since these well-funded giants strive to make their workers relatively happier than the competition. Entry pay scale is truly attractive and benefits are charming which makes these setups the best place of work for the local worker. Though employment, world over, is attractive, depending on who is your employer, however, international organizations in a third world setting enjoy and enviable attraction.

For this article, the term third world is limited to those economies that are plagued by poverty, underdevelopment, has no ability to utilize resources, they generally cannot support their high population growth, where governments are unstable and communication is a hassle. Though expatriate contracts are an attraction all over the world, the cases of these third world nations attract a higher level of envy. Local workers who gain employment in international companies cannot hide their joy because of the attractiveness of the compensation, work conditions, work environment and the new-found community.

## The challenge

Nevertheless, countless cases show that this newfound haven is always in the short-term because the happy feelings at entry fade almost immediately, leaving the local worker with nowhere to turn to, other than supporting the status quo. Once the local international company worker settles in their new job and eventually gathers more information about policies, procedures and contract terms; they forget that they came-in so joyful. In some cases, old colleagues suffering the fate of the new worker, greet them with news of their dissatisfaction. The following factors turn the happiness at entry into premature happiness:

**Multicultural Reality:** When it becomes clear to the local worker that policies about workers are as varied as the cultural divide so that workers with the same qualification are rated differently and evaluated differently, morale begin to diminish. For some people this will not take long for this discovery, like those working under personnel or finance but for others it might take longer. Though, the local workers is still enjoying a higher rating based on local competition, his immediate work environment stifles this edge, making his new found job unsatisfying. Though multicultural variation demands that people be treated differently so they do not feel insulted, when it comes to how much we benefit from our daily sacrifices at work; people from all cultures know what they want.

**Benefits Package:** Most multinationals have lofty expatriate contracts (providing for flight benefit to country of record, free shipping, new language allowance, tuition allowance for all dependents under school going age, free 100% health insurance coverage, cost of living allowance, settling-in allowance, retirement allowance, free housing with gorgeously furnished homes, membership in recreational centers, free residency, free drivers' license, free security, free vehicle plus running and maintenance cost, free light and utilities etc.) to be able to attract the right kind of human resource to accept life in a third world economy. This is just right and understandable, nevertheless, their local counterparts feel left out in the distribution of system financial resources triggering a serious sense of dis-satisfaction in an opportunity that is comparatively attractive based on local market standards. In fact, the personnel cost including benefits for the expatriate staff compared to the local staff is strikingly wide. In some cases, it can be as much as 5 to 10 times.

In most cases the salary scales are different and it doesn't matter if the local worker had spent years studying abroad and has the same or even better input as far as the system service delivery is concern. This is very sad for a system that was expected to be structured on skills and talents and not where people come from or were employed. Benefits package is the primary cause if discontent in these settings.

**Social factor.** Most multinational systems, drill their expatriate staff on the much-needed security precautions, to live overseas. These security drills from their local embassies and other contracted services, turn to instill a great sense of fear in the expatriate colleagues which makes them even feel uncomfortable relating socially with their local colleagues thereby creating a social issue. The feeling of "them and us" is created in a workforce that was supposed to be a team for better cohesion and efficiency. That strength that comes along with diversity and cultural exchange amongst a team is easily absorbed by a sense of insecurity. With Maslow's hierarchy of needs in mind, the local worker who is focus on the life style of their expatriate colleague will always see themselves meeting just the physiological and safety needs while belonging/love needs, esteem and self-actualization needs remain a wild dream for many. The prospects of moving up the ladder of authority fade away each year, with the change of leadership team.

## Maslow's motivational theory as applied to the local International company worker

The general acceptance of the psychological principles advanced by the Abraham Maslow as appropriate tools to be exploited by managers for the workforce certainly helps bring to the lamplight the plight of the local international worker. The need-oriented motivation is as below:

1. Physiological needs, which are just survival needs like a salary and job safety. This is the expectation of the new local international company worker as they walk through a successful interview to a successful evaluation that eventually guarantee a place in a prestigious international organization. In some countries this period will vary from three months to one year. During this time the mover of the worker, I

mean, the local international company worker, is the salary that is higher than the market and the importance of securing it, month after month and year after year.

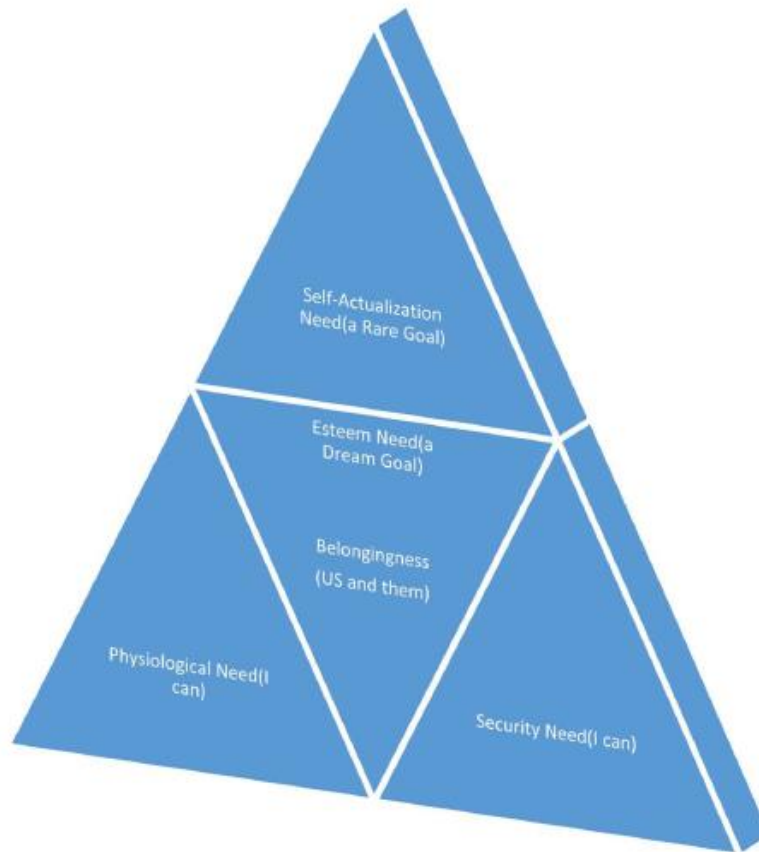
2. Security needs which are stable physical and emotional environment issues such as benefits, pension, safe work environment, and fair work practices. The local international company worker is motivated by the sustainability of the company or corporation, the associated benefits that are reviewed for their good year-in, year-out. Extra retirement or pension plan extended to local staff, which is a safe cushion on which the local worker can feel more blessed, compared to the peers in the purely local or government setups. Safety rules and work ethics that come along as common practice in international workplaces; the professional ethical conduct rules and policies are truly motivating too. The local worker immediately sees themselves completely cut-off from the sad local stories of corruption, bribery, names calling, stagnant or regressing pay scale. Common local climate is not the world of the local international company worker.

3. “Belongingness” needs which are social acceptance issues such as friendship or cooperation on the job. This is the challenge need of the local international company worker. Though, this might not be true for all multinationals, the effort to be accepted and befriended by your foreign colleagues is that need area that is unending and in some cases unattainable for the local international company worker. Farewell parties and gifts are celebrated and offered to others and you have to attend simply. Peer visits are made to lofty homes and apartments provided to the expat worker while the local peers struggle and depletes hard earn resources over long years of service to dream of a well-off place for themselves and the family. The level of social interaction a worker might expect is a function of whether they are an introvert or extrovert. Nevertheless, employees hope to work in environments where they are accepted and have some social interaction with others. Job settings that strive to make everyone feel like family are very motivational settings too.

4. Esteem Needs, which is positive self-image and respect and recognition such as job titles, nice workspaces, and prestigious job assignments. The local international company worker struggles to get the reciprocal sincere respect from the foreign colleagues. Certainly, you will find some respect based on the hierarchical organogram, however, peer-to-peer respect is a challenge. Sometimes decisions, core decision that relate to the direct line of management are taken and forced down from above without any consultation, compared with an expatriate peer in the same position. This accounts for the worker turnover of local international workers at the senior levels of management. This is even more common for the shop floor worker whose job description is constantly changing each time another foreign worker shows up on the scene. The achievement of goals from one executive head to another is usually closely linked to this need, especially in a case where local international company worker holds key responsibilities and heads a department.

5. Self-Actualization needs, which is achievement issues such as workplace autonomy, challenging work, and subject matter expert status on the job. Country leadership positions for most multi-nationals or international companies in the third world are held by expatriate personnel and so overall goal achievement praises and benefits are showered on the expert leader leaving the local international company worker in an assistant position, even if, the celebrated achievement was brought about by the latter.

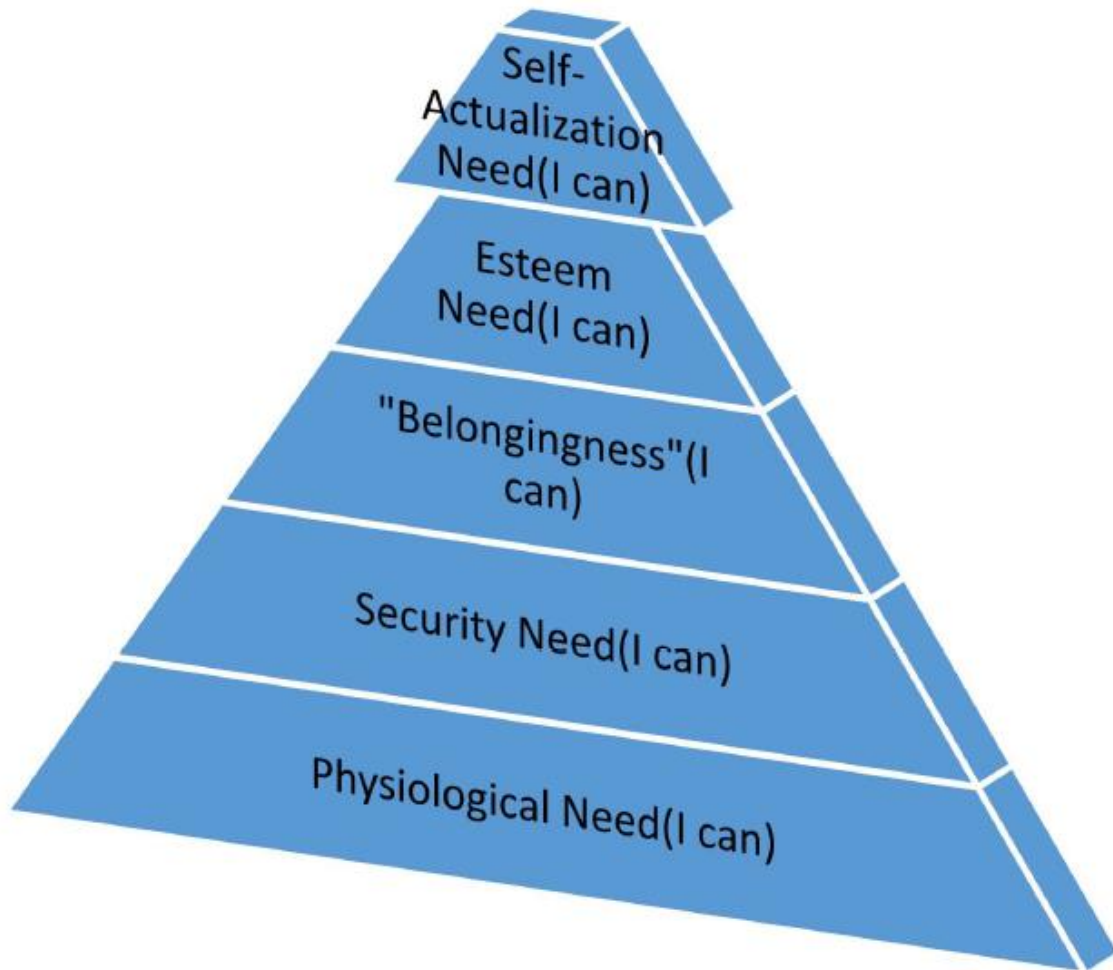
Though many multi-nationals and international companies are exploiting Maslow’s motivational theories to keep well talented workers, be they expatriate of local, there is still much left to be done to keep the local international worker motivated to live their full potentials in a workplace where central management is not located in the same country as its operations country. The aforementioned discussion can be appropriately represented in Maslow’s motivational theory as outlined below. It is challenging to note that, based on Figure1 Maslow Motivational Theory for the local international worker; only the physiological and security needs are easily attainable. This leaves the worker with a more challenging work environment than his expatriate peers and even, his local industry peers. The benefit of being the base and institutional memory of the company do not accrue as they should have, elsewhere.



**Figure 1.** Maslow's motivational theory for the local international company worker

It is very important to highlight that in comparison to his peers in the local industrial setting, the latter, like the expatriate work can move up the ladder of power and self-actualization, have a more fulfilling career, be happier at work and eventually retire with better conditions. These folks might have started off their career in the local setting with smaller packages, for the smart and achieving ones, they eventually end up better off and happier. In industry, they may partake in profit sharing and/or set own their packages and benefits after years of great performance. If they are in government, they might become the political decision makers managing larger budgets than their peers in a multi-national setting. They might be the man or woman behind the picture that is aggressive pasted on the fence of your house scrambling for popular votes.

The local industry worker eventually ends up capping their career as the boss while the local international company worker, irrespective of their input, except under rare conditions, remain a subordinate. This has been appropriately represented in Figure2-Maslow's Motivational Theory for Expatriate/Local Industry worker.



**Figure 1.** Maslow's motivational theory for expatriate/local industrial worker

### **Perspectives and recommendations**

It was disheartening to read a bizarre letter from some staff representatives of an international company addressed, not to the management of the company but rather to the embassy, most represented in the expatriate workforce. The management was copied, though, outlining the gap in living conditions of its members compared to the others. Though, they ended up with some review of their situation, it significantly portrayed the plight of many who find themselves in international work environments where disparity in workforce living condition trigger sentiments that did not exist when they took the job.

In today's business, staff engagement, where workers are ready to go out of their normal job description to give customers that product and service which the competition cannot afford; remain critical to ensuring customer loyalty. The power of the employee has significantly grown in the same direction as the power of the customer and any company that strive, as a matter of culture to improve both will drastically improve productivity and profits. Staff engagement is not only an issue of the western economies. All organizations have to do more if they have to recruit and retain the best workers. This is inevitable for the westerner where there exist many employment options. In addition to the employment options, because of a well-developed service sector, there are greater possibilities to build a portfolio of skills. The traditional view of "job for life" has changed and people can live conveniently on part-time or temporary job contracts. Apart from the salaries, there are other very important factors that drive the worker's job demand. The following are critically important to a westerner making a job choice:

- The level of work-life balance.
- The level of personal sacrifice required by the job.
- The willingness to be promoted to senior levels of management.
- Whether they believe that “work is more fulfilling than my personal life”.
- And, if they feel they have too much work to do.

Organizations have to work hard to win the loyalty of the foreign worker and manage the retention issues that come along with work far from home, under circumstances that are strenuous to live. This is especially true for those who begin work life abroad. To get these workers engaged, international employers must do more for these folks.

Actively engaged employees will have one of the following characteristics:

1. Cognitive engagement-where the work is focused hard on the job, is not distracted, is one minded with the job and exercise high energy.
2. Emotional engagement- where the worker is engrossed in his job, are “in the zone”, cannot be distracted to the extent that they live in the “here and now” while at work.
3. Physical engagement- where the employee is willing to go the extra mile, not just with the customer service but with themselves, like career advancement, learning better ways of doing their job and putting in discretionary effort at work.
4. Advocacy. The extent to which the worker is willing to recommend the organization to family and friends for employment and business. A key determinant is how the employee portray the organization to others when they are not at work. Do they take pride in the organization and when they talk about it, do they refer to it as “we” or “they”?

It can be conveniently said that where you have engaged employees, you find engagement customers as well and there is a direct correlation between the two. Does it matter where you were employed to exercise true engagement, in your job? Is it possible to say that the foreign or expatriate employee is more engaged in the job more than the local worker? Certainly, many factors point to the former being more engaged; no many friends or family to distract, not historical choices or decisions hunting them in the new environment, not political or ethnic influences challenging their right to work freely and the last, most important, they have everything provided to keep them engaged. For the local worker who is truly engaged, though is a stifling environment, much more is expected from the organization. Apart from the salaries, some organizations are moving into providing a career advancement or professional development budget, succession planning, profit sharing and all those benefits that make the engaged work feel their work is highly valued. They should be able to visualize the great potentials of moving up the management ladder and also have a sense of ownership. Almost all international accounting and audit firms I have worked with, in the last 15 years have this great structure enshrined in their management plan and policy.

The staff management system should motivate the work force based on cultural labor strengths. Workforce from emerging economies and the third world will be more satisfied with their work-life balance, more willing to make personal sacrifices at work, desire promotion to senior levels more, agree more with the statement “work is more fulfilling than my personal life”, do not feel they have a lot on their plate.

Cynical employees who feel more that they are victims should be identified; those with negative feelings should be gauged and replaced by more engaged and positive minded workers who are committed to making a difference and standing out from the crowd. Get more promoters than distractors!

Better communication channels be developed to formalize the good intentions of management and not abandon the workforce to cynical individuals who will take advantage of communication vacuum to sell those bad feelings to the uninformed workers.

Branding the local worker, the patriot of the nation in an internationally diverse workforce gives them a responsibility that is bigger than themselves, that of propagating the great positive values of their nation and culture which is better exhibited in a multicultural environment, like the one they find themselves.

Permit, promote and publicize good examples of local workforce where belonging/love needs, esteem and self-actualization needs have been significantly attained; at least locally and comparatively to build confidence and ignite hope in the workforce culture, as supported by the organization.

## **Conclusion**

The local international company worker, might be unsatisfied in a more satisfying job compared with its local peers, however, that does not stop the local on-looker from their dreams and hopes of one day finding themselves in those international work circles. It remains one of the best option in an economy where everyone is looking more unto the government for a source of livelihood and sustenance.

Organizations should do more, in terms of opening opportunities for continuous learning and training, planned succession, and profit sharing if they should keep a talented and engaged workforce and win more loyal customers. The great essence of a plan that works and makes people happy, in a workplace, cannot be overemphasized, and the challenge of recruiting and retention of an engaged workforce is as important to the expatriate worker as it is to the local international company worker.

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