

## **Supervisor-Supervisee Relations and Job Performance: Study of Healthcare Field Officers in Chongwe, Zambia**

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### **Abstract**

*The power of praise in the workplace can move employees from apathy or resentment to happiness and productivity. Reinforcement such as positive reinforcement makes people feel appreciated and encouraged, which can be motivating and rewarding. An observational study aimed at examining the relationship between motivation and employee performance using through the lens of the Reinforcement Theory of Motivation and The Law of Effect was conducted on a Team of Healthcare Field Workers. Purposive sampling of twenty (20) Healthcare Field Workers from Chongwe Rural District of Zambia was done with whom a series of both negative and positive reinforcement strategies were applied. The final outcome of the study revealed a significant positive change from 5% to 30% of the overall staff performance on the targets in just four (4) weeks. Such an outcome definitely demonstrated that by carefully and genuinely using a system of positive or negative reinforcements, individuals can learn the correct set of responses for any given stimulus especially in relation to their job performance. Research reveals that when managers are more supportive of autonomy, employees perceive the value of their work efforts and are able to perform as expected.*

**Keywords:** Behavior, Modification, Reinforcement.

### **Introduction**

Strategic management is the most effective means of organizational growth and productivity. The most daunting task of a manager of any organization is how best to put together human and material resources to achieve the mission, vision, and objectives of the organization. Human nature has a lot of roles to play in terms of how committed he will be in the organization he is part of the workforce. Furthermore, the human being is a conscious “homo-economicus” whose actions and inactions, more often, are driven by circumstances that benefit him. These benefits might be extrinsic or intrinsic in nature. The individual yields his energy to the organization

because of certain incentives that must not be compromised by management [1].

It is important to note that it is also a working strategy for the organization to see the problems of the employee as that of the organization as this will in turn encourage the employee to commit to the organization [2]. The study is therefore bent on investigating the relationship between motivation and employee performance among healthcare field workers in a rural District of Chongwe, Zambia.

Operant conditioning, also called instrumental conditioning by B.F Skinner, refers to where the outcome of a reaction determines the likelihood of a relapse [3]. Because of this operant conditioning; reinforced (rewarded) behaviors are more likely to be

repeated, while punished behaviors are less likely to be repeated. As humans, we are always determined to seek pleasure and always try to avoid uncomfortable situations. So you can use the conditional action to achieve the desired the action.

According to the Law of Effect Principle argues that behavior that is followed by pleasant consequences is likely to be repeated, and behavior followed by unpleasant consequences is less likely to be repeated [4]. This basically in-tells that certain actions in a situation are as a result of the available consequences; this is to say that all behavioral response is due to a particular stimulation and consequence.

Reinforcement motivation theory focuses on achieving the desired level of motivation in employees through reinforcement, punishment, and elimination. It is generally accepted that as a leader you receive rewards for encouraging desired behavior in the organization and penalties for discouraging undesirable behavior. It is also expected that erasure is done to avoid perpetuating behaviors learned on the job. This then implies that a manager can achieve the desired performance through reinforcement, punishment, or extinction, and the process is called the operant state. Reinforcement, which can be positive or negative, is used to reinforce a desired behavior. Punishment serves to discourage employee misconduct [5]. Eliminating of a specific behavior refers to reducing the possibility of unwanted behavior. The theory therefore revolves around the basic idea that consequences influence behavior and that rewarding consequences lead to punitive consequences that cause certain behaviors and reduce the occurrence of behaviors. Consequences that don't lead to reward or punishment also stop the behavior. It should be noted that this theory helps managers choose the right motivational methods to motivate employees depending on the situation.

In investigating the relationship between motivation and employee performance among

healthcare field workers in a rural District of Chongwe, the researcher observed the impact of motivation and employee performance using the theoretical principles of Reinforcement Theory of Motivation and The Law of Effect applied on employees for a period on six (6) consecutive weeks.

The objective of the study is to examine the relationship between motivation and employee performance among Healthcare Field Officers in Chongwe, Zambia.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts reinforcement theory and the law of action as a framework for analysis. Reinforcement theory is widely associated with B.F. Skinner, who proposed that all behavior is a function of its consequences. The theory is one of the process theories that explain how people are motivated and what they are motivated to do. There are basically three components (stimuli, response and resultant behavior) to reinforcement theory, and understanding these components would guide the manager in the most effective and strategic application of theory for the desired organizational outcome.

The principle of the law of effect, developed by Edward Thorndike (1898), suggests that responses followed by satisfaction become firmly attached to the situation and are therefore more likely to recur if the situation repeats itself. On the contrary, when the situation is associated with discomfort, the association with the situation is weakened, and if the situation is repeated, the reactive behavior is less likely. As a result, behaviors with adverse consequences are less likely to be repeated.

## **Significance of the Study**

The Team of Healthcare Field Workers in Chongwe, Zambia had significantly reduced work productivity, at 5% from the overall set targets, lack of collaboration among its team members, and occasions of physical and verbal confrontations among themselves.

Implementing a behavior modification program on such a team would enhance work productivity and collaboration among them. The study emphasized the significance of teamwork and its effects on employees' performance in the workplace.

This study borders on the principle that operant conditioning can be used to produce extremely complex behavior if rewards and punishments are delivered in such a way as to encourage move an organism closer and closer to the desired behavior each time. In this case, it was believed that through behavior modification, the Healthcare Field Workers in Chongwe, would improve their work performance through the application of the Reinforcement Theory of Motivation as a Behavior Modification approach.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study was conducted on a Team of Field Workers working for the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIDRZ), an independent, local, non-governmental health Organization that has been an active partner of the Government of the Republic of Zambia through the Ministry of Health, and other Ministries since 2001, whose main focus area is taking care of People Living with HIV/AIDS, among the many other tasks the Organization does. The sample size of the participants was 20 team members, comprising of field workers of both gender-based in Chongwe District of Zambia, a remote District of Lusaka Province.

### **Methodology**

A purposive sampling method of 20 participants among Healthcare Field Workers that work with people living with HIV/AIDS was made. The demographics of the population was very similar, and this was to reduce on the

rate of study bias. A series of both positive and negative reinforcement strategies were used on the team that comprised of Peer workplace constructive feedback mechanism, interactive group sessions on team building, and threats of losing employment if performance was not improved. A structured questionnaire was administered to the Healthcare Field Workers to describe the characteristics of their team before and after the intervention to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The exercise was conducted for a period of six (6) weeks, after which data analysis with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was summarized.

### **Specific Intervention Strategies Applied**

Positive reinforcement through:

1. Mentorship to the group and individuals on teamwork (what it means, importance, and qualities of an effective team). Demonstration through Video Clips on the importance of teamwork.
2. Mentorship by the Organisation Management Team on the importance of setting work targets and working towards achieving them, the importance of teamwork, and skills' transfer among members.

Negative reinforcement through:

1. Threats by the Management Team on the possible termination of employment if targets are not met.

### **Presentation of Study Results**

The table below displays the tasks and findings targeted on modifying the behaviour of a team of twenty (20) healthcare field workers working with People Living with HIV/AIDS in Chongwe District of Zambia that were observed in the exercise after a period of six (6) weeks.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the Team before & after the Intervention & Specific Interventions

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Before the Intervention</b>	<b>After the Intervention</b>
Idea of Purpose and Vision of tasks	50% somewhat agreed that the team had clear goals (purpose and vision).	80% somewhat agreed that the team had clear goals (purpose and vision).
Defined job descriptions	64% agreed that the Team had defined job descriptions	80% agreed that the Team had defined job descriptions
Communication of tasks and updates	100% disagreed that the Team promoted open and clear communication of tasks and updates.	30% disagreed that the Team promoted open and clear communication of tasks and updates
Decision making	83% disagreed that there was an effective decision-making process	20% disagreed that there was an effective decision-making process.
Team Participation	67% somewhat agreed that the Team had balanced participation.	70% agreed that the Team had balanced participation.
Valuing of Team diversity	100% disagreed that the Team had value diversity (thinking, idea generation, problem-solving, and experience).	60% agreed that the Team had value diversity (thinking, idea generation, problem-solving, and experience).
Conflict Management	100% disagreed that the Team manages conflicts effectively (seeking common ground; incidences of Team members almost physically fighting during board meetings).	60% somewhat agreed that the Team manages conflicts effectively (seeking common ground).
Acceptance and Dependability	83% disagreed that the Team promote a positive atmosphere (acceptance, dependability).	75% agreed that the Team promote a positive atmosphere (acceptance, dependability).
Collaborative relationships	100% disagreed that the Team promote collaborative relationships.	20% disagreed that the Team promote collaborative relationships.
Participative leadership	83% disagreed that the Team had participative leadership.	35% disagreed that the Team had participative leadership.
Overall performance	Overall performance towards targets by the Team was 5%.	Overall performance towards targets by the Team increased to 30%.

## Discussion of Study Results

After the implementation of a series of both negative and positive reinforcement strategies, there was a significant observable change in the characteristics of the Team. In the exercise to observe what happens to a Team when different Behavioural Modification Strategies were

implemented, the following approaches were used:

### Impact of Behaviour Modification on Work Performance and Productivity

#### Characteristics before the Interventions

Behaviour was measured before the intervention and after. Before the interventions (reinforcements) were implemented, the Team

was characterised by overall performance of the Team at 5% in most of the targets, despite 50% of the respondents somewhat agreeing that the team had clear goals (purpose and vision), and 64% agreeing that the Team had defined job descriptions. 100% of the respondents disagreed that the Team promoted an open and clear communication of tasks and updates, 83% disagreed that there was an effective decision-making process, and 100% disagreed that the Team had value diversity (thinking, idea generation, problem-solving, and experience), 100% disagreed that the Team manages conflicts effectively (seeking common ground; incidences of Team members almost physically fighting during board meetings), 100% disagreed that the Team promotes collaborative relationships, and 85% disagreed that the Team had participative leadership.

### **Characteristics after the Interventions**

After the interventions were made for a period of 4 weeks, it was noted that there was a significant positive change among the Team members and job performance. The following were the observed behaviours among the Team members after the interventions: the overall performance towards the given targets had increased from 5% to 30%, 80% from 50% somewhat agreeing that the team had clear goals (purpose and vision), and 80% from 64% agreeing that the Team had defined job descriptions. Only 30% from 100% disagreed that the Team promoted open and clear communication of tasks and updates, 20% from 83% disagreed that there was an effective decision-making process, and 60% from 100% agreed that the Team had value diversity (thinking, idea generation, problem-solving, and experience), 60% from 100% somewhat agreed that the Team manages conflicts effectively (seeking common ground), 20% from 100% disagreed that the Team promotes collaborative relationships, and 35% from 85% disagreed that the Team had participative leadership.

Traditional theories of behavior change rely mostly on influencing higher-order mental processes as a route to altering deliberate responses.<sup>(5)</sup> Reinforcement theory has inspired many types of human resource development (HRD) initiatives. Despite their widespread use, reinforcement-focused programs designed to control the outcome of behavior through external rewards have their own limitations and organizational costs [6]. It is very critical to understand motivation in work environments as well as to explore more efficacious forms of motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, simultaneously. The study findings demonstrated that through the Principle of Self-determination theory (SDT) and Capacity building, healthcare workers were concerned with forwarding influence, independent choice, and the degree to which behavior was internalized as self-determined [7]. This is to say that their source of motivation was influenced by their perceptions of the work environment as well as their behavioral outcomes.

It is argued that the most optimal forms of motivation are believed to originate from internal regulation of basic psychological needs rather than external forms of motivation such as those central to reinforcement-focused theory and practice [8]. In this regard, the healthcare field workers were more concerned with job losses if their job performance did not improve. Work is perhaps the most dominant domain in most adults' lives, yet employees have highly varied experiences. Some find work engaging and fulfilling. Others see it as a time to be endured. In the study, it was observed that before the intervention, 100% disagreed that the work environment promoted open and clear communication of tasks and updates within the Team, with 67% somewhat agreeing that the Team had balanced participation. After the invention it was observed that there was a shift on mindset among the team in that 30% disagreed that the Team promoted open and clear communication of tasks and updates, and

70% agreed that the Team had balanced participation, respectively. This demonstrated that after the intervention, the healthcare field workers internalized the value of their work efforts, became more autonomously motivated, and thus performed better and displayed higher job satisfaction and well-being. As is argued that having workers be more self-motivated turns out to be better not just for employees but for organizational profitability and effectiveness as well [9].

It was also proven that by empowering workers rather than overpowering the healthcare field workers through mentorship on teamwork (what it means, importance, qualities of an effective team), demonstration through Video the importance of teamwork, and mentorship by the Organization Management Team on importance of setting work targets and working towards achieving them, the importance of teamwork and skills' transfer among members, the best motivational outcomes were achieved. The majority demonstrated this, 75% agreeing that the Team promoted a positive atmosphere (acceptance, dependability), and a drastic reduction of those disagreeing disagreed that the Team promoted collaborative relationships, and disagreed that the Team had participative leadership, at 20% and 35% respectively.

This supported the notion that Management approaches in organizations, both large and small, were thus being transformed from trying to control people from the outside with carrots and sticks to actively cultivating the work conditions and supervision styles that lead to motivation from within, that is to more autonomous work motivation and job commitment [10-12] Around the world, organizations are finding that, by supporting autonomy rather than applying controls, they not only help employees flourish, they also benefit their own bottom line.

These findings were in line with the study findings focused on the effect of motivation on employees' performance using Alvan Ikoku

Federal College of Education (AIFCE) as a study area in Nigeria, where it was found that there was a significant relationship between staff motivation and staff performance. The study further recommended that organizations should consider staff motivation as a cardinal responsibility and that unless staff motivation is properly executed, organizations and their managers would always suffer from employees' negative attitudes to work [13].

### **Limitations of the Study**

The sample size for the exercise was too small (20) and limited to employees engaged in fieldwork in the health care industry. It is possible that the approaches to be used would be different if the exercise was to be implemented among other Teams of different industries. The sample size could not conclusively depict the desired outcome when it came to approaches of behavioural change with respect to the use of threats (negative reinforcement) as a motivator. The study also failed to take into account the role of inherited and cognitive factors in learning and thus is an incomplete explanation of the behavioral changes that occurred that eventually influenced job performance in the study.

### **Summary and Implication of the Study**

The study aimed to investigate the impact of the supervisor-supervisee relationship on job performance, and the findings demonstrated that there is a great impact that this dynamic relationship has on job performance and behavior modification. The study demonstrated that the adopted theoretical framework of the reinforcement theory and the law of action as a framework for analysis showed how behavior was a function of its consequences among the healthcare field workers, and how they were motivated, on what they are motivated to do, and by whom (supervisor). Basically the three components (stimuli-positive or negative, response-commitment to duty and resultant behavior-performance outcome) of the

reinforcement theory helped the supervisor (Mr. Chalachew Alemu Tiruneh) in effectively understanding and correctly guiding his team of healthcare field workers through strategic application of theory for the desired organizational outcome.

The strategic approach applied created certain awareness in the workplace for the team members that ensured certain behavioral responses exhibited after interfacing with the stimuli in the environment, and the outcome component was that of improved general performance towards set objectives and targets. This showed that the teams' response to the stimuli used was a function of what was expected, that is to say that if a supervisor can have a good management-strategy, they would retain their workforce; employees would certainly see themselves as stakeholder in the organization and most likely protect their interests by improving performance. The principle of the law of effect was demonstrated by the team's continued determination to achieve set objectives as good performance was often followed by satisfaction, while poor performance was associated with discomfort and disapproval.

In application of the two theories, a supervisor must identify elements that are incompatible with positive stimuli and eliminate them so that they do not evoke negative responses that ultimately lead to negative outcomes. If the supervisor is accurate (positive) on choosing the "stimulus" component of the theory, the response and outcome components would at least be fairly consistent. This means that employees will be fair enough to respond accordingly to positive impulses from the work environment. It is probably more likely that the supervisor would succeed in influencing positively the employee performance if the "stimulus" component of the theory and the parts of the theory relating to the "response" and influence are handled cautiously and correctly. This is so because getting the stimulus component right (positively) would

ensure the desired response and influence components will take place sequentially.

The two theoretical applications are consistent with Agris (1964) who states that "discontinuance, turnover, slowness, alienation and bad behavior occur where the organization is managed in such a way that the needs and goals of the individuals do not match their organizational needs. In extreme cases, non-commitment and malpractice/falsification of performance is most likely to occur.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The study was an individual observation of the performance of the local Healthcare Field workers in Chongwe District, Zambia. The study was not funded by any Organizations or Individuals.

### **Acknowledgement**

I acknowledge the input from Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia, Mr. Chalachew Alemu Tiruneh (Former Chief of Party – ACHIEVE Project and USAID ECAP III), and the Chongwe Healthcare Field Workers for accepting to participate in the study.

### **Conclusion**

Behavior modification techniques work in many situations, it is an approach that yields positive and almost the desired results, especially when the objectives are set beforehand so as to know what is expected after the intervention. In the exercise conducted it was observed that there was tremendous positive behavioural change among the team which led to the improved overall job performance. The change was also characterised by a more unified and goal-determined group that promoted an open and clear communication of tasks and updates. Before the implementation of the strategies the Team could not even be described as a Team due to its lack of collaboration. Supervisors attempting to motivate their team members must ensure that they do not reward all team members

simultaneously. They must tell them what they are not doing correct and how they can achieve positive reinforcement.

Research reveals that when managers are more supportive of autonomy, employees perceive the value of their work efforts, become more autonomously motivated, perform better, and show greater job satisfaction and well-being. There is a direct relationship between the employee and the company. Employee behavior is very important for any organization, and its

culture strongly influences the behavior of the former. Behavioral change strategies should be used to improve productivity and efficiency in organizations.

Finally, because knowledge alone does not equal behavior change, understanding how to improve behavior is essential for successful therapy and other behavioral interventions. That is what every behavioral therapist must always remember at all times.

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