Research Methodology for Staff Motivation & Values-Based Framework Within Educational Institutions

Revised November 2024

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ABSTRACT

This paper defines the need and methodology for research necessary to better understand the real and practical aspects of what motivates university-based employees and what are the underlying values of those employees that affect their performance. How those values coincide with the values of the institution are also relevant in the way the performance of the employees enhance the performance of the institution. The final dissertation will result in a relevant (and usable) menu of performance incentives to match with each employee or set of employees that will then also enhance the values and performance of the institution.

The research methodology has been revised in 2024 to recognize and reflect trends in higher education, evident in Georgia and globally, of the inclusion of Undergraduate Medical Schools in university programs. Further, societal changes must be considered that affect employee motivation and values due to the re-prioritization of health concerns, remote work options and work life integration/balance stemming from the Covid Pandemic. Similarly, and especially within the education sphere, has the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) influenced staff motivation and values?

An overarching phrase that has become more common and is at the core of this research is that of "Inclusive Workplace", which in my definition in the context of this project, means that each employee, regardless of any differences in role, level, gender, orientation, etc., is recognized as a valued member of the institution, by themselves and the university. This has always been the ultimate goal of a menu of performance incentives for each employee that also enhances the value and performance of the institution.

These revisions are explained in more detail at the end of this paper.

Although much literature and research exist on what motivates employees, there is little information specific to institutions of higher learning, especially universities. Further, even less information exists that ties motivation to the key performance indicators of the universities [1]. The goal of this dissertation is to better understand what motivates employees and how their values coincide with those of the university in order to develop a menu of performance incentives for individual employees that also enhance the value(s) of the institution (university). Management (employers) will then have a set (or menu) of performance incentives to match with each employee or set of employees that will then also enhance the values and performance of the institution.

Survey Participants

Ideally, a multi-university sample would be used, including various sizes of universities and types (public and private). However, this is practically very difficult to do. As such, I have opted to use only employees of the Georgian American University (GAU) and Georgian American Medical University (GAMU) where I am President.

As such, I will try to encourage as wide a response throughout GAU's staff and lecturers as possible. By keeping the survey respondents anonymous, I hope to minimize any bias in the responses, i.e., "let's keep the boss happy with positive responses".

Respondents will be identified and aggregated only through the following criteria:

- Age (<20, 20-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, >60), specifically to determine if there are any age-related or generational differences;
- Gender (male, female), which should also determine any existing issues of gender inequality; and
- Job category (management, administrative staff, support staff, lecturer).

These groupings should provide the necessary specificity when analyzing the results and developing a usable and practical menu of incentive measures for a wide variety of employees. From my experience, there are sufficient similarities in sizes and types of universities so that the results are reasonably transferable and can be used with a high degree of compatibility.

The key criterion for grouping the survey respondents will be by <u>job category</u> as one would expect those categories to be more similar in both values and motivating factors. Further, this would be the logical place to apply the set of incentives when negotiating with individual employees.

Survey Development

Employees will be given the survey as one document, containing 2 parts, 1) Motivation Section and 2) Values Section.

1) <u>Motivation Section</u>

The survey methodology is based on Nuttin's survey design [2] where employees complete simple open sentences about what they like/love/want or on the flip side, what they don't like/love/want in order to better understand what motivates them.

The genius and complexity of Nuttin's approach is in the analysis of the answers to the survey and will be described in more detail as part of the analysis of the results.

It was important for me that the survey captured many of the concepts I have observed in almost 50 years of working in every type of organization and more specifically in 20 years of running a private university.

Employees of educational institutions, especially universities, exhibit a relatively complex variety of motivating factors. A private university such as GAU is run like a business with a strict profit motive, but still has the research and public interest characteristics. So, what are the motivating factors for staff in educational institutions (universities)?

<u>Financial</u> – similar to every other organizational staff member. There are numerous studies which define this characteristic, including "how much is enough" and methods, timing and forms of payment. Equal pay for equal work based on gender is also relevant here.

<u>Benefits</u> – both formal and informal - including vacation, holidays, sick leave, maternity/paternity leave, insurance, pension/retirement, sabbaticals, training, access to courses, discounts for family members, etc. Is a menu approach to benefits better for motivating staff? Similar to the financial characteristic, there is a plethora of research on this subject. What now needs to be considered in additional survey questions is the following: are there any changes due to the re-prioritization of health concerns stemming from the Covid Pandemic.

<u>Status & title, including "trappings" and Flexibility</u> – including public notoriety, facilities, office space, equipment, etc, remote work options, work-life integration/balance.

<u>Organizational & managerial characteristics</u> – being involved in a complex organizational structure.

<u>Leadership role</u> – being and "being considered" as a leader within the organization, with the students, and outside the institution

<u>Societal aspects</u>

- Imparting knowledge and developing minds and character of students – a combination of assuming one has something which is of value to the students and a truly altruistic concept of wanting to see students grow in knowledge and maturity.
- Improving society in general and a sense of "giving back" – where there is a realization that education is a key aspect in the growth and success of society. Also, many involved in education feel a responsibility to give something back to the same society that gave them whatever measure of success they feel.
- Being associated with a younger generation – there is definitely a motivating factor of being associated with a dynamic younger generation.

- Learning from students – with some similarities to being associated with a younger generation, it can be very motivating to actually learn from the students, especially when there are international and adult students' programs.
- Social interaction – this motivation for social interaction can be manifested with other staff and/or with students. Further, this is inversely related to remote work options.

Generally, the motivating factors listed above are considered positive. I have chosen to avoid any factors that could be construed as negative, although they do exist, as they would not clearly be related to enhancing performance of the institutions. However, some negative characteristics are addressed in the values section.

2) <u>Values Section based on a modified Schwartz Values Survey (SVS)</u> [3]

<u>GAU Corporate Values</u> - To better understand GAU's corporate values, a brief history of GAU is necessary. The original concept of GAU was to create a Doctor of Juris Prudence (JD) program in law to fill the gap in Georgia's legal education. In the early 2000's, Georgia still had an 11-year school program. The academic requirement to become a lawyer was a 4-year bachelor program (LLB degree where the legal subjects were combined with all other general education subjects) and further, there was no bar exam necessary to become a practicing attorney. As such, most of the graduates (some only 20 years old) were lacking both the maturity, full legal education and testing to be effective practicing lawyers. This was the scenario that precipitated the original creation of the new university, which was to be named, Caucasus American University.

When this concept and original business plan for the university was introduced to me, I understood that for financial viability, the university also needed to include a business school. Although Georgia had 2 other private universities focusing on business, I believed that there were also improvements that could be made to the general business education also. As the business plan was reworked, I agreed to serve as the President of the new university. During that time the Rose Revolution happened in Georgia in 2003, so to emphasize the renewed focus on Georgia, we changed the name of the university to

Georgian American University (GAU). After an unsuccessful search for an individual investor to provide startup capital for GAU, I also agreed to be the major investor, secured a private loan and then collected other shareholders that provided a broad range of necessary skills.

My primary reason for involvement in the development of GAU was to give back something to a society that was in transition from Soviet to post-Soviet to reformer and performer, and one in which I had grown to love and call home. As such, and to be a part of the success story for Georgia, GAU had to provide the highest quality, demand-driven, practical programs that were useful to the private, public and NGO sectors. Programs had to be based on successful best Western practices. Students and lecturers had to have academic freedom and excellent communications skills. GAU needed to have ethical practices as its core value, to lead by example and make socially responsible decisions. The university had to be run like a business using Western management principles, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of the organizations that would hire the students and graduates. With a loan to pay off and other shareholders expecting a return on their investment, profitability was also a necessary motive. And further, to ensure its continuing academic excellence and essential to post-graduate degrees, research had to be a key part of the academic programs.

In 2018, an undergraduate Medical Program (GAMU) was developed and added within the GAU family. Medical Schools have been added within many Universities in Georgia and beyond. This global trend then required the survey to be expanded to include responses from relevant staff members within the Medical School to check if there are any differences in the motivation and values of their staff relative to other faculties.

The values survey is based on the following GAU corporate values described within the statements and intends to understand how those values coincide or differ from those of the individual employees. These are critical in developing individual performance incentives that are in sync with the values of both the university and the employee. These include:

- Performance; effective fiscal management; profitability

- Western standards, programs and management principles

- Value to society; corporate social responsibility (doing the right thing)

- Academic quality; demand driven courses and programs; combination of practical and theoretical knowledge; emphasis on job readiness/communications skills – clients are those organizations that hire students/graduates

- Academic freedom; personal student attention

- Ethical behavior, including Code of Ethics and Conduct

- Inclusive workplace concepts

- Research which contributes to advancing scientific knowledge and enhances the brand of GAU.

- Has the introduction of AI had an effect on GAU values vs. those of the employees?

The next phase of this research is the most interesting for me. To analyze the survey responses of "my" employees and see if they conform to my perceptions.

Revision Description:

The original research methodology was developed before the Covid Pandemic and before Artificial Intelligence (AI) permeated society, including within the university sphere. Also, although Medical Schools were in existence (GAU's Medical School began started in 2018), the proliferation of these Medical Schools within university structures had not taken hold. That has changed, and at this writing, Georgia itself has over 16 Medical Schools.

1) Covid Pandemic – Suffice it to say that the Covid Pandemic turned the world upside down, from workplace issues, health concerns to travel and supply chain disruptions. What is most important for this research is to answer the question of how did the pandemic affect staff and employees' priorities within the work environment.

   The most common element affecting employees is that of their health. I know that I have reprioritized my personal health issues near to the top of my concerns: avoiding unhealthy situations, ensuring my sleep regime is maintained, diet (eating

and drinking), exercise, etc. How important is personal safety within the work environment? Is a remote work option an added incentive? How does an employee now see the benefit of health insurance? Do employees value more the work-life balance, and their quality of life, especially outside the workplace now after Covid? The question is then – do these changes influence motivation and what is valued by an employee such that these can be identified and offered as an option by the employer.

2) Artificial Intelligence (AI) – The full effects and ramifications of AI on society and Universities are still being evaluated. I wanted to see if there are any, at least preliminary, observations of whether the emergence of AI has changed the motivations and value systems both within the University and of course the employees themselves. For example, in the same way that "Google" type search engines have changed the way research is conducted, we recognize that AI has changed the basic concept of "knowledge transfer" from lecturers to students. Does this then have an effect on how Universities deliver classes, on the performance indicators of the Universities, and naturally on the motivations and values of the employees.

I recognize that a much larger and in-depth research study is required to properly flush out all the issues surrounding AI in the University spheres. However, I wanted to understand at this point in time, if there are at least some indicators of the initial effects on university performance and values, and the motivations of employees.

3) Medical Schools – Simply, there needs to be an additional survey conducted amongst the staff and employees of the Medical School at GAU to create a separate menu of options, assuming there are statistical differences in their responses compared to the other faculties (schools) at GAU.

4) Survey Modifications – Values & Original Motivation Survey will be modified to include references to: Health Insurance; Safe and Healthy Work Environment; Remote Work Options; and Work/life Balance (Quality of Life). It will then be submitted to random employees in each statistically relevant group: Age; Gender; Job Category. The revised survey results will then be analyzed to determine if based on the changes, there are any statistically relevant changes for the menu options.

The Medical School staff will be surveyed with the revised survey to create its own unique menu options.

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References:

1. "Specificity of Staff Motivation & Values-Based Framework Within Educational Institutions", by R. Michael Cowgill, presented at Georgia Ministry of Education & Science Festival of Tbilisi Sciences & Innovations 2017

2. "Future Time Perspective and Motivation: Theory and Research Method", 1st Edition by Joseph Nuttin

3. "Basic Human Values: An Overview" Shalom H. Schwartz The Hebrew University of Jerusalem Basic Human Values: Theory, Methods, and Applications