

Motivation for Greek Special Education and Rehabilitation Staff

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Abstract

The present study examined the motivation of Greek employees in special education and in rehabilitation field. For the purpose of this study, three focus groups were set up to determine employees' motives for career choice. Additionally, the reasons that the same participants are presently doing the specific job were examined through the Motivation at Work Scale (MAWS). Regarding career choice motivation, the majority of the participants put the emphasis on their passion to help the needed and the conscious occupation with people with special needs. According to the MAWS results, the participants' motivation didn't prove to be strong. The most motivated employees were those who work in special education. Participants proved to be more intrinsically motivated, whereas external motivation proved to be less important for them. The usefulness of the results lies in the fact that the knowledge of the motives for career choice and of the present level of work motivation can be beneficial for the recruitment and the retention of motivated professionals. The study can, also, provide a perspective for future research on motivation of professionals occupied with people with special needs.

Keywords: motivation, career choice, special education staff, rehabilitation staff, special needs

Introduction

Motivation is one of the most usually studied subjects in organizational behavior. As reported in [1, p. 1] motivation is "an internal process that activates, guides and maintains behavior (especially goal - directed behavior)". According to [2] it is actually the process that explains the intensity, the direction and the persistence of an individual's effort towards a particular goal. Our motives are socially acquired needs activated by our desire for their fulfilment and are major determinants of our behavior [3]. Employee motivation is one of the most important issues of management because it is linked to human behavior. Work motivation is commonly defined as the psychological processes that determine the direction, intensity, and persistence of action within the continuing stream of experiences that characterize the person in relation to his or her work [4]. In [5, p. 486] work motivation is defined as "a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behavior and to determine its form, direction, intensity and duration". The "will", the "desire" and the "incentive" have identical meaning with motivation, since an organization can't force the worker to reach his maximum performance if he does not want it. Therefore, the organization should provide such working conditions in which the worker wishes and can perform his best [6]. The management may try to influence the efficiency and the effectiveness of employees through motivation [7].

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a dominant theory of motivation in social and education psychology which has yielded hundreds of empirical publications since the early 80's. SDT allows the assessment of level and type of motivation and proposes two overarching types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is doing something because it is interesting and enjoyable, for its own sake, whereas extrinsic is doing something for instrumental reasons [8].

SDT has been used as a theoretical framework in many studies on human motivation and MAWS has been widely used to assess work motivation in education, health and in other fields [8]–[25]. Self-determination has been also introduced in special education settings and the benefits of its implementation have been highlighted [26]–[32]. We can also find self-determination in rehabilitation settings [33]–[35].

The Study

Aims

The aims of this research were to investigate for special education (SE) and rehabilitation employees:

1. the motives for career choice
2. the present level of work motivation
3. their differences in terms of overall score at the MAWS and the score at each of the MAW's four subscales
4. the impact of individual characteristics on the overall score of the MAWS as well as on the score of each of the MAWS' s four subscales
5. the present level of work motivation in comparison to career choice motivation

Participants

For the purpose of this study, one focus group for SE staff and two for rehabilitation staff were set up.

The aim of the recruitment strategy was to include in each focus group from five to ten people and ideally each focus group to be composed of six to eight employees [36]–[37]. The participants of the focus groups should work with people with special needs, but should be differentiated as regards the structures (either in public SE in primary and secondary schools, or in rehabilitation field, public or private), the specialties (special educators and special teaching staff for SE and variety of specialties for rehabilitation), the work experience (years), the employment relations (permanent and temporary staff). The purpose of the above differentiation between the participants was to ensure that they could give a different view of the subject under study according to their structures, specialization, work experience and employment relationship.

SE focus group participants. The candidate participants were SE employees who worked in public mainstream and special schools in Thessaloniki, either in primary or in secondary education. Fifteen candidates who did not know each other were individually interviewed by telephone. Seven people were chosen to participate according to the criteria of the recruitment strategy for SE. Of the employees that participated, six were females and one was male, while three married with children and four were single. All of them had qualifications

in SE studies, one of them also had a two-year reeducation in SE and two had a Master's degree and a PhD in addition. There were three participants who belonged to the age group of 45–54, three that belonged to the 25–34 age group, and one who was in her 40s. Four special educators, one kindergarten teacher of special education and two special teaching staff participated in the focus group. In relation to work experience, for five of the participants this varied between 8 and 16 years, one of the them had two-year work experience in SE, while one had 21 years in education, 8 of which were in special and 13 in general education. With regards to their current position, six were in primary education (one was in a special hospital school) and one was in secondary. With respect to the school type, four were in general education and three in special. Finally, four participants had a temporary employment relationship and three were permanent.

Rehabilitation focus groups participants. As far as concerns the two focus groups for rehabilitation, these were set up in two rehabilitation centers in Thessaloniki, one in the public and one in the private sector with nonprofit action. Telephone contact with six rehabilitation centers preceded the focus groups and invitations for participation in the focus groups on work motivation were also sent. We received positive answers for participation from one private and one public rehabilitation center. Prior to the focus groups, ad hoc visits, first contacts with interested employees and guided tours were made. In total, 14 rehabilitation center employees participated in the two focus groups that were implemented.

Public rehabilitation center focus group participants. Of the nine participants one was male and eight females, six were single and three were married with children. Four belonged to the age group of 25–34, two belonged to the age group of 45–54, and one that belonged to each of the three age groups 35–44, 55 and more, and under 25 years old. Seven of them had a bachelor (BA) and two a Master's degree (MA). The specialties that participated were psychologist (1), physiotherapist (1), nurse (1), fitness specialist (1), special educator (1), care worker (1), speech therapist (1), occupational therapist (1), music therapist (1). With respect to their work experience, the work experience of five of them varied from 1 to 3 years, two had spent 20 years working in rehabilitation, one had almost 25 and one 30 years' work experience. Finally, five participants had temporary employment relationship and four were permanent.

Private rehabilitation center focus group participants. Of the five participants one was male and four females, two were single and three were married with children. Three belonged to the age group of 25–34, one belonged to the age group of 35–44, and one was under 25 years old. Three of them had a bachelor (BA), one had an Institution of Vocational Training (IVT) degree and one a Master's degree (MA). The specialties that participated were psychologist (1), physiotherapist (1), nurse (1), fitness specialist (1), carer of people with special needs (1). With respect to their work experience, the work experience of three of them varied from 1 to 3 years, and two had spent 10 years working in rehabilitation. Finally, five participants three temporary employment relationship and two were permanent.

Procedures and instruments

Focus groups. The focus groups were organized, in terms of the day, the time and the location, so as to be convenient for the participants and the research team. Each focus group lasted no more than one hour. Focus groups were recorded in three ways: with written notes;

by a tape recorder; and additionally, an electronic pen with audio-recording capability for the rehabilitation groups and a camera for the SE group. The camera and the electronic pen were used to ensure that everything was recorded and to determine who was speaking and to whom. During the focus groups, the research team's involvement was moderate. The questions that were mainly used were clear, simple, easy to understand, and open-ended. Furthermore, "think-back" questions were preferred to encourage participants to share personal experiences. The objective was to create a comfortable and permissive environment that encouraged participants to share perceptions and points of view and interact with one another, without pressuring participants to reach consensus. Finally, the interviewer was an active listener, careful not to make judgements about the responses and to control body language that might communicate approval or disapproval.

Motivation at Work Scale (MAWS). The same participants were asked to complete the Motivation at Work Scale (MAWS). The Motivation at Work Scale (MAWS) was developed with the multidimensional conceptualization of motivation postulated in self-determination theory (SDT)[8]. According to the MAWS, motivation is consistently organized into four types: intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, introjected regulation and external regulation [8]. As [8] refer to the four types of motivation:

Intrinsic motivation is defined as doing something for its own sake because it is interesting and enjoyable. *External regulation* refers to doing an activity to obtain rewards or avoid punishments. *Introjected regulation* refers to the regulation of behavior through self-worth contingencies such as ego-involvement and guilt. *Identified regulation* refers to doing an activity because one identifies with its value or meaning, and accepts it as one's own, which means that is autonomously regulated. (p. 629)

The participants of the three focus groups were asked to indicate for each of the 12 statements of MAWS to what degree they presently correspond to the reasons they are doing this specific job, in a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (exactly). The first three statements of the MAWS concerned intrinsic motivation (intrinsic 1-3), the next three statements concerned identified regulation (identified 1-3), the three succeeding statements concerned introjected regulation (introjected 1-3), and the last three the external regulation (external 1-3) [8].

Results

The findings from the focus groups with SE and rehabilitation staff can be summarized under three major headings which are: a) Career choice motivation, b) Work motivation, and c) Career choice motivation VS MAWS.

Focus groups meetings were followed by the video and recording transcription and the data analysis. Data analysis included qualitative data retrieval of focus groups (thematic/ topic coding, indexing in categories), quantitative data analysis of scores at MAWS, focus groups data analysis (data reduction, data display, conclusions) [38].

Career choice motivation

Regarding career choice motivation participants were asked to talk about what had motivated them to choose the specific profession and work with people with special needs. In the majority of the comments (14 out of 21 participants) the emphasis was on their passion to help the needed and the conscious choice of the profession and occupation with people with special needs. Of the above 14 participants 6 (out of 7) were SE staff and 8 (out of 14) were

rehabilitation staff. Prior life and personal experience influenced the career choice for some of rehabilitation employees. The following examples illustrate SE participants' motives for professional occupation with people with special needs:

"SE was a very romantic choice. I did not regret it"

"I entered SE which always had some appeal for me...after 11 years in general education"

"It was my first choice...after a visit to an institution with people with disabilities"

"I entered SE very consciously. It was my first choice ...I vividly wanted it"

"My big love was the learning difficulties, the dyslexia ... so it was a one-way street for me, the SE and the area of learning difficulties"

"It was something I really liked. I felt like contributing and I could change things through this process"

The following illustrations show rehabilitation participants' motives for professional occupation with people with special needs:

"Prior life has played a very important role in following this field ...I wanted to work with children with special needs "

"I consciously chose this profession...so I went to institutions, I went to schools, to see if I could do it...so I knew the field before I came here"

"I chose my profession because I like to help people...the weak people...to help them handle with their problems. During my internship I worked in a special school...I saw how the staff work there, what activities they do. I was interested in the field and I followed it".

"I chose the profession because I like to help people who do not have the same skills with me. And because of a personal experience I realized how easy it is to get from the side of a healthy life to the opposite ... this of the special"

"I chose the profession because of a personal experience. I had such people in my environment ... and I wanted to work in this profession very much"

"I always wanted to work as an educator. Being a simple teacher did not please me ... I wanted to do something different, to offer something more. And I chose SE ... and as I read about it and I learned more, I liked it more"

"Probably for me it was created from my very early age. Because I was going to a kindergarten, where there were many problems with abandoned children. And then I went to a school that had an integration department, had kids deaf... so I was probably influenced by my experiences and I wanted to follow the SE"

Five participants (1 from SE and 4 from rehabilitation), apart from the conscious choice of the main profession, admitted that they did not know the area of people with disabilities and that wasn't their primary goal. Although SE and rehabilitation area were chosen by chance, they admitted that it was a challenge for them and they were satisfied with their choice.

"To tell the truth, I get into this field by chance. Generally, I have chosen to do a profession, which anyway deals with the pain and interest shown to any group that has a problem. But when I first came here and saw the joy and strength that these children have, I was touched and wanted to get involved"

"It was not my primary goal to work with children with special needs ... it happened ... but in the meantime I loved it"

Financial incentives were also included by two rehabilitation employees of the public sector to the motives for career choice.

Work motivation

The descriptive statistics (minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation) for each subscale of MAWS can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Minimum (Min), Maximum (Max), Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (SD) for Motivation at Work Scale (MAWS)

	SE staff				Rehabilitation-private				Rehabilitation-public			
	min	max	M	SD	min	max	M	SD	min	max	M	SD
Intrinsic motivation	5.33	6.67	5.90	0.50	5.00	7.00	5.67	0.85	3.00	6.00	4.55	1.00
Identified regulation	3.67	6.33	5.38	0.85	2.67	6.00	4.67	1.55	1.67	6.67	4.37	1.54
Introjected regulation	2.00	5.00	3.43	1.18	1.00	5.00	2.93	1.86	1.00	4.33	2.96	1.24
External regulation	2.33	4.00	3.48	0.72	2.33	5.00	3.33	1.11	2.00	5.33	3.96	0.99
Total	3.50	5.25	4.55	0.61	3.08	4.75	4.08	0.78	2.75	5.00	3.96	0.71

Intrinsic motivation. This was the strongest subscale of MAWS for the three staff categories, ranging from 4.55 (for rehabilitation-public staff) to 5.9 (for SE staff). The answers for SE staff varied from strongly (5) to exactly (7). The first statement (intrinsic 1: Because I enjoy this work very much) has scored higher for SE staff ($M= 6.28$) than the other 2 statements of the subscale. The answers for rehabilitation staff of private sector varied from moderately (4) to exactly (7). Specifically, intrinsic motivation of the participants proved to be almost very strong ($M= 5.67$). There was a bigger variation in this subscale among the answers for rehabilitation staff of public sector as their answers varied from not at all (1) to exactly (7). For rehabilitation staff of private and public sector, the third statement (intrinsic 3: For the moments of pleasure that this job brings me) has scored higher than the other 2 statements of the subscale.

Identified regulation. This was the second most strong subscale of MAWS for the three staff categories, ranging from 4.37 (for rehabilitation-public staff) to 5.38 (for SE staff). Answers in this subscale for SE staff varied from very little (2) to exactly (7). The answers for rehabilitation staff of public sector varied from not at all (1) to exactly (7). The sixth statement (identified 3: Because this job fits my personal values) has scored higher for the participants of the public sector ($M= 6.14$ and $M= 5.23$ for SE staff and rehabilitation-public staff, respectively) than the other 2 statements of the subscale. The answers for rehabilitation staff of private sector also varied from very low (2) to exactly (7). Specifically, identified regulation proved to be between moderate and strong ($M= 4.67$).

Introjected regulation. This subscale proved to have the least importance for all the participants and ranged from 2.93 (for rehabilitation-private staff) to 3.43 (for SE staff). The eighth statement (introjected 2: Because my work is my life and I don't want to fail) has scored higher for the three groups ($M= 4.00$, $M= 3.40$, and $M= 3.89$, for SE staff, rehabilitation of the private sector staff and rehabilitation of the public sector staff, respectively) than the other 2 statements of the subscale.

External regulation. This was the third most strong subscale of MAWS for the three staff categories, ranging from 3.33 (for rehabilitation-private staff) to 3.96 for rehabilitation-public staff). The external regulation was the only subscale that SE staff didn't have the highest score. In this subscale likewise, a great dispersion is found in the degree that the statements presently correspond to the reasons all the participants are doing this specific job. The answers for SE staff varied from not at all (1) to strongly (5), whereas no very strongly (6) and no exactly (7) answer were given. The answers for rehabilitation staff of private sector varied from not at all (1) to strong (5). The answers for rehabilitation staff of public sector varied from not at all (1) to exactly (7). The tenth statement (external 1: Because this job affords me a certain standard of living) has scored higher for the three focus groups ($M=4.43$, $M=4.4$, and $M=4.89$, for SE staff, rehabilitation of the private sector staff and rehabilitation of the public sector staff, respectively) than the other 2 statements of the subscale.

Regarding the total score of the 12 statements of MAWS, for SE staff the mean score was 4.55 (between moderate and strong), for the rehabilitation staff of private sector the mean score was 4.08 (moderate), and for rehabilitation staff of public sector, the mean score was 3.92 (moderate).

In addition to descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA was used to investigate whether there were statistically significant differences between the three groups of participants in terms of total score on the MAWS and the score on each of the four subscales. The analysis revealed significant differences only for the first subscale of MAWS concerning "intrinsic motivation" ($F=5.961$, $p<0.05$). The SE staff showed higher intrinsic motivation than the public sector rehabilitation staff (Bonferroni post hoc test, $p<0.05$).

Moreover, correlation analyses and *T-tests* were applied to investigate the impact of individual characteristics on the overall score of the MAWS as well as on the score of each of the MAWS' s four subscales. These analyses were implemented throughout the total sample and not for each group separately, since the small number of participants in each group did not permitted a different kind of analyses. These analyses did not reveal any statistically significant impact of age, educational level, work experience, employment relationship, and family status. The initial subgroups for the variables "age" and "educational level" were merged into two groups (in each case) of a larger number of participants to enable the implementation of T-tests. Specifically, two age groups (a. up to 34 years and b. 35 years and above) and two educational groups (a. post-secondary non-tertiary education or technological oriented tertiary education and b. tertiary education and post-graduates) were created. The analysis did not include the "gender" variable because the male participants were only 3.

Career choice motivation VS MAWS. Comparing what motivated SE and rehabilitation employees to choose the specific profession at first place and what now motivates them to do the job they are doing (present level of work motivation) significant similarities can be found. These similarities can be identified between the majority of the participants' answers about the motives of profession choice (their will/ passion to help the needed, the conscious choice of the profession and occupation with people with special needs and additionally prior life and personal experiences for some rehabilitation employees) and their answers in the intrinsic motivation subscale. According to the MAWS results, intrinsic motivation, which has to do

with a likeable and entertaining job with moments of joy, was between strong and very strong for SE staff and rehabilitation staff of private sector even for those that the area of people with disabilities wasn't their primary goal ($M= 5.90$ and $M= 5.66$ respectively), whereas for rehabilitation participants of public sector proved to be between moderate and strong ($M= 4.55$) and the lower among the three staff groups. Additionally, likeness can be identified between participants answers in the identified regulation subscale (life goals, personal values and career plans), the second most strong subscale of MAWS for the three staff categories (M from 4.37 to 5.39), and their motives of profession choice (life experiences, passion to help the needed, conscious choice of the profession). Almost all the SE participants (6 from 7) consciously chose the profession and this is confirmed by their highest score ($M= 5.39$) in identified regulation in comparison with rehabilitation staff. The not so strong identified regulation for rehabilitation staff of the private and the public sector ($M=4.37$ and $M=4.668$ respectively) is verified by the fact that almost the half of the participants (6 from 14) actually got into the field of rehabilitation by chance and the career choice wasn't a conscious choice. With reference to external regulation, which had to do with money and standard of living, this ranged for the three staff categories from 3.33 (rehabilitation- private staff) to 3.96 (rehabilitation- public staff). The low mean scores in this subscale are confirmed by the fact that financial incentives were not included to the factors that affected SE staff' and rehabilitation staff' of private sector career choice motivation. Although financial incentives were included by two rehabilitation employees of the public sector (the only ones among all the participants) to the motives for career choice, their mean scores to external regulation were low to moderate ($M= 3.67$ and $M= 4.00$). Moreover, even though rehabilitation staff of the public sector had the highest score in this subscale compared with the other focus groups ($M= 3.96$), their score remained low. The introjected regulation proved to have the least importance for all the participants (M ranged from 2.93 to 3.42) and this makes match with the fact that no one participant mentioned incentives for career choice connected with this subscale.

Conclusions

This study shed light on the SE and rehabilitation staff' perspectives on work motivation. More specifically, it examined their motives for career choice and their present level of work motivation. Regarding career choice motivation, the majority of the participants put the emphasis on the passion to help the needed and the conscious choice of the career and occupation with people with special needs, while some rehabilitation employees were influenced by their personal experiences and financial incentives. Additionally, there were some participants (mainly from rehabilitation field) for whom the area of people with disabilities was chosen by chance and wasn't their primary goal. In one study in Greek SE teachers, the personal sensitivity, the personal experiences, the financial bonuses (no longer exist), and the studies in the particular subject were the reasons for employment in SE field [39]. Teachers of another study appeared to demonstrate a high degree of resilience across their careers and exhibited a huge commitment to working with children with special educational needs [40]. In one study in 302 teachers in Tel Aviv (62 SE) it is showed that teachers start out of a sense of idealism and a belief in their willingness and ability to work

hard for the profession [41]. According to the findings of a study in students of SE programs, the “caring for others” and “being of use”, the working with people with special needs and finding a rewarding job, were the three dominated responses pertaining to professional goals and expectations [42]. Findings of one study in rehabilitation indicated three major factors that influenced employees’ decision to pursue this career: a) they wanted to pursue a health-care related career, b) they entered the profession by chance and it wasn’t their first choice c) another person (family, friends, counselors, exposure to rehabilitation professionals) encouraged them to follow this profession [43]. In another study in disability workers in rehabilitation field, among the factors that influenced the participants’ career choices were the exposure to disability (the participants encountered people with disabilities within their own families and in their communities) and their passion to help others and work with people with disabilities. Many of the participants did not choose this profession as their first career choice but joined it by chance, and also had lack of knowledge of disability field [44].

In line with the results, participants proved to be more intrinsically motivated, whereas external motivation proved to be less important for them. This is in agreement with previous empirical studies. In a study in public sector teachers, most participants cited intrinsic motivators as the reasons for joining the teaching profession [45]. Additionally, as stated in [46] there is no direct connection between pay and motivation and as reported in [47] teachers don’t take so much satisfaction from the extrinsic rewards such as compensation and position. According to the findings of another study, extrinsic factors, such as pay, proved to be weak in predicting rehabilitation staff’s desire to stay on the job, while intrinsic factors, such as having a work environment in line with personal values, are more significant in predicting career satisfaction [48]. Moreover, in one study in health workers, financial incentives were among the factors that had the least effects on job motivation [49]. On the contrary, from the findings of a study to school teachers the good salary was among the factors that affect motivation [50]. Likewise, salary was among the most frequently rated as highly important in deciding to leave the rehabilitation field [51]. Similarly, in a review of the literature that was conducted to identify recruitment and retention strategies for rehabilitation professionals, among the selected strategies many were classified under financial incentives [52].

According also to the analysis, significant differences between the three focus groups revealed only for the first subscale of MAWS concerning “intrinsic motivation” ($F = 5.961$, $p < 0.05$). Precisely, the SE staff showed higher intrinsic motivation than the public sector rehabilitation staff. From the investigation of the impact of individual characteristics on the overall score of the MAWS, as well as on the score of each of the MAWS’ s four subscales, no statistically significant impact of age, educational level, work experience, employment relationship, and family status was found.

The usefulness of the results lies in the fact the knowledge of the reasons of career choice for SE and rehabilitation staff and the reasons for presently doing the specific job, can be beneficial for the recruitment and the retention of motivated professionals. Maintaining a team of staff who are motivated is a major challenge for SE and rehabilitation fields. In addition, the study can provide a perspective for future research on motivation of professionals occupied with people with special needs.

The MAWS proved to be appropriate and useful in measuring their work motivation and understanding the perspectives of SE and rehabilitation staff on the reasons they are presently doing this specific job. Additionally, the MAWS can serve as a useful tool to contact research on work motivation and its different types. The focus groups' composition satisfied the study aims and proved to be satisfactory for capturing the views of SE and rehabilitation staff on work motivation. The constraint on the variety of specialties of participating special teaching staff in SE focus group could be considered as a limitation of this study.

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