

Strategic Management of Human Resources. Motivation & Performance

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Abstract

The following paper represents an in-depth analysis of the causality between motivation and performance of human resources, in organizational contexts. By analyzing the complexity of the two concepts individually, followed by the correlations between the two, the current paper will prove the bidirectionality of this relationship: motivation and performance determining each. Such a proven relationship will bring significant added value to the organizations that are interested to enrich their Human Resources practices, allowing them to strategically plan and target their actions in a manner that will ensure high level of involvement, engagement and active participation of their people.

The study becomes both a theoretical and practical foundation of strategic HR management, in terms of how can motivation and performance be instrumented in order to align the individual efforts to the organizational strategy.

In terms of methodology, the paper approaches a qualitative method, starting by identifying the elements that determine motivation and the ones that determine performance, including the way they can determine one another. Current paper is therefore an initial study, that could then be valued in further quantitative studies that would collect and interpret statistical data to demonstrate the theoretical hypothesis and model proposed.

Keywords: Human Resources, Management, Motivation, Performance

I. INTRODUCING MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE

The concept of motivation is being defined in the specialized literature as “the reasons underlying behavior” (Guay, et al., 2010, p.712), or differently said “internal state that causes people to behave in a particular way to accomplish particular goals and purposes” (Denhardt, Denhardt, & Aristigueta, 2008, p.147).

In a more organizational context, motivation is usually interpreted as the satisfaction of undertaking a certain activity, getting fully involved and engaged into it. In this sense, having motivated employees easily becomes one of the most common objectives of the organizations, considered to be the key for increasing the retention of their people and having them as active participants to achieving higher results, in terms of quality and consequently, money. However, there are some voices that consider that the two concepts, satisfaction and motivation should not be confused, as they differ by their orientation. If satisfaction is considered to be past oriented, a synonym to being accomplished of specific positive results obtained, motivation is considered to be future oriented (Denhardt, Denhardt, & Aristigueta, 2008, p.147), being the drive that will lead you to get involved with enthusiasm and determination into future activities, having more chances of finalizing them with success.

In order to better understand this, we wish to as well define performance. The Cambridge Dictionary defines performance in terms of “how well a person, machine etc. does a piece of work or an activity” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). It is therefore a result of an activity. From a business perspective, on the other hand, performance means “the accomplishment of a given task measured against preset known standards of accuracy, completeness, cost and speed” (Business Dictionary, 2018). It is not any result, but it is a result of a certain standard and level, that brings certain benefits.

II. MOTIVATION DETERMINING PERFORMANCE

By combining the two concepts, in the context of the future orientation of motivation, and as demonstrated by the various study cases that have proven that motivated people perform better, it has been created a very tempting promise for organizations. It easily sounds that motivated people are like a warranty that they could become trusted instruments for obtaining higher organizational results and higher

performance overall. As this is being presented, motivation would determine performance, being a clear uni-directional relationship (see Figure 1):



Figure 1. Relationship Motivation > Performance

The human nature has a great complexity, which is and will still be studied, but some researches have however managed to prove at least some of the reasons that stand behind the human behaviors, as it will be shown next. In his study “Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us” (Pink, 2009, p. 11), Daniel Pink presents one of the most complex analysis of motivation, its evolution, and the way it can determine various levels of performance. There are considered to be three drivers of motivation, each corresponding to a certain moment in time depending on the specific needs of every period and the professional context where the human being was being active in. Each of the drivers have generated contextual performances, as it is shortly presented below (Pink, 2009, pp. 11-44).

1. Motivation 1.0 (biological driver) – characterized human behaviors at the beginning of mankind, around 50,000 years ago when biological needs were determining human actions. Performance, in this case, were straight-forward results: food to eat, survival through defending etc.
2. Motivation 2.0 – is the type of motivation known as carrot & stick motivation. Positive human behaviors are encouraged through benefits which are being promised in return of high performance, whereas negative behaviors are discouraged by using punishments. Such a driver does not see the individual as being potentially self-motivated, therefore he/she needs to receive external reasons that would eventually trigger a certain reaction in him/her.
3. Motivation 3.0 – is considered to be the new type of motivation, which finally takes into consideration the true art behind generating intrinsic motivation in the individuals by offering them: purpose (a sense of existence, values to guide upon and the chance to a fulfilled potential), autonomy (freedom of choice, of decision, of control, of even setting the limits by himself), and finally mastery (driven by passion for the subject, development opportunities).

In practice, the most commonly applied instruments that aim to generate motivation are of the type 2.0. Instruments of motivation 2.0 are the simplest, easily applicable and their return on investment can be clearly quantified. But of course, the natural question is if the carrots & sticks really work. It is considered that in some contexts, organizations trying to determine high performance of their employees through the carrots and sticks motivation method, are actually doing more harm than good. Pink himself recognized there are several flaws of the Motivation 2.0 model, such as: it destroys internal motivation, it suppresses creativity, it encourages cheating/shortcuts/unethical behaviors, diminishes performance, eliminates positive behaviors, creates addiction, and encourages a short-term thinking (Pink, 2009, pp. 15-20).

Additionally, we want to introduce the perspective of Akerlof and Kranton under our focus, who are trying to construct a model of work motivation based on identity. Identity in this context would refer to employees that identify themselves with the organization and “behave more or less in concert with the goals of their organizations. With such an identity, workers are willing to put in high effort rather than low effort

with little wage variation” (Akerlof&Kranton, 2005, p. 10). Monetary compensation, as it was proven in various reviews of Prandergast (1999) and Gibbons (1998), has serious pitfalls, therefore being considered that “as sole motivator can be both costly and ineffective” (Akerlof&Kranton, 2005, p. 11). The main concerns of Akerlof and Kranton (2005, p. 11) regarding motivation through compensation & benefits are: its orientation towards output of the individual is making it hardly applied correctly in case of team work; gives the motivation to purely concentrate on the desired outcome that is being encouraged, but without necessarily paying much attention to the means of getting there; incorrectly prioritizes the most rewarding tasks as being the most valuable, causing significant variances in the efforts and results based on what is being promised after achieving each. We can already recognize some common flaws with what Daniel Pink presented as downsides of motivation 2.0.

Moreover, going into a deeper level, the efficiency of the carrots & sticks method is being doubted even in terms of its audience. Couldn't happen that encouragement of positive behaviors, and in general, the material benefits offered to employees, need to be targeted to a specific category of employees only? Buckingham & Coffman (2005, p. 14) make the difference between two types of employees: talented/productive employees (or translated as high-performant employees) and “ROAD warriors – the army's pithy phrase for those sleepy folks who are happy to retire on active duty”, questioning if the motivation through external perks & benefits does not wrongly engage all employees as a whole. Of course, to answer these questions is not easy, but the way the Gallup Organization tried to approach this helps solve at least one part of the issue.

By preparing for one of their biggest studies concerning what do most talented employee need from their workplace, Gallup organization has done a thorough analysis of the best questions that need to be addressed to evaluate the quality of the workplace for the employees (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, p. 3). Their analysis demonstrated that “questions dealing with pay, benefits, senior management or organizational structure” proved to be “equally important to every employee, good, bad and mediocre” (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, p. 22), not representing relevant criteria for the most talented employees. Simply said, if the company wants more of the talented employees type, it should take into consideration that there needs and expectations from a workplace don't have primarily to do with benefits. “This kind of issues can get you into the game, but they can't help you win” (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, p. 22). Out of this research performed by Gallup, the most powerful discovery was that talented employees “may join a company because of its charismatic leaders, its generous benefits, and its world-class training programs, but how long that employee stays and how productive he is while he is there is determined by his relationship with his immediate supervisor” (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, p. 4). Retention of the talented employees, which can be seen as an outcome of their motivation, would therefore be directly influenced by the perception of the individual towards his/her direct manager, aspect which is considered to be one of the basis of our future research study.

The specialized literature presents another interesting model that proves this uni-directional relationship between motivation towards performance: The Good to Great model proposed by Jim Collins (Collins, 2010, pp. 170-183). The concept discusses the intersection of three circles as being the recipe for organizations to become great from simply good. The three circles would represent:

1. What is the organization passionate about
2. What moves the economic engine of the organization
3. In which area can the organization be the best in the world.

Based on passion (or what we could consider motivation, from the Motivation 3.0 perspective), financial opportunities and area of expertise (knowledge/skills) of the organization, this can achieve high results via a disciplined focus on obtaining sustainable results.

We can therefore recognize this directionality of motivation, as being a determinant of performance. Is already very present in the specialized literature, and without any doubt, we can consider that motivation of the employees has a direct result of better involvement into their work and consequently higher performances.

III. PERFORMANCE DETERMINING MOTIVATION

But as we have stated from the beginning of this paper, we wish to analyze the opposite of this relationship as well: can performance be determining motivation? To be able to answer this question, we need to first differentiate between: individual, group and organizational performances. By performance overall, as defined at the beginning, we already understand specific positive results that respect a set of standards, minimum requirements that qualify a result as being a good performance.

We can therefore understand that individual performance would look at how good can the individual be in his work, his/her level of positive outputs and outcomes. Group performances could be simply considered a sum of the performances of all the individuals in the group (but should as well consider the specifics of groups and teams, their dynamics, the way that working together makes individuals perform different). And finally, organizational performances which could again simply be considered the sum of the performances of its groups/teams/departments, to which some organizational specifics should be added (organizational targets, market competition and pressure from the external environment etc.). How could all of these be determining motivation? By making current performance be not an end scope, but a mean to auto-generate motivation for future performances. Relationship graphic is being completed below (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Relationship Performance <> Motivation

Using performance in such a way, might need the organizations to be again highly adapted to the very complex human nature. The various kinds of employees have very different needs and modes of reacting to the outside world. Equally, they have different attitudes towards their professional life and the work they do. Companies are very often being recommended to carefully select their personnel, to look for specific skills and ways of thinking or working when recruiting new employees to join the organization, and then ensure they grow and learn and are being promoted in order not to stagnate. "Conventional wisdom" (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, p. 63) would dictate to recruit based on experience, intelligence and skills, and then set the right steps they need to perform in their work, try to support them fixing their weaknesses and ensure they are being promoted "to the next run on the ladder". However, this is not what Buckingham & Coffman are saying its right.

To ensure a highly rated workplace by the employees "a manager must be able to do four activities extremely well: select a person, set expectations, motivate the person, develop the person" (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, p. 55). Such managers would select new employees for their talent, not simply experience, intelligence or not even pure determination. In this sense, talent is defined as "recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behavior that can be productively applied" (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, p. 67). Could easily be translated as the employee's inner instinct of reacting in a certain way, of noticing specific things in his surrounding world, a spontaneous interpretation of events, or even a "mental filter" that will always make him so things in his way: having a visual memory would always make him/her try to illustrate his thoughts, or to summarize new concepts or processes in a visual way. Ideally, in order to be highly performant on a certain role, the unique talent of the employee would need to be aligned and matched with the needs of the role he/she in performing. Talent becomes therefore the key for predicting how good an

employee would perform, “a prerequisite for excellence in all roles”, and is being considered of higher value in recruitment processes above experience or certain specific skills. This happens because experience can usually be translated into a certain amount of years being worked in a specific domain, but the quantity does not grant quality. Moreover, having certain skills already acquired does not ensure the success in the role. “Skills are the “how to” of a role, capabilities that can be transferred from one person to another” (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, p. 82), which will not ensure that the individual has as well the mindset and habit of using his skills at his best, or to value them in an optimum way. Knowledge, on the other hand, “is simply “what you’re aware of”. There are 2 types of knowledge: factual knowledge – things you know (rules, steps to take); and experiential knowledge – understandings you have picked up along the way. Acquiring experiential knowledge is your responsibility. You must discipline yourself to stop, look back on past experiences and try to make sense of them” (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, pp. 82-83). But as an individual to do that, requires a certain “filter”, a talent to make the best out of everything you have seen and experienced.

Of course, apart from the inner personality of the individual, there can be other elements, more factual, that directly influence and feed performance. One could be to have all the needed materials and equipment in order to be able to do your work. Having these should directly determine a certain level, at least minimum, of performance. However, in one study performed by the Gallup organization and presented by Buckingham & Coffman (2005, pp. 31-33), they are analyzing the strength of the work environment of an extremely successful retailer, having 37,000 employees across 300 stores. All stores designed to be very similar to all the others, “same distinctive brand identity”, “the building, the layout, the product positioning, the colors, every detail”). Each employee was asked twelve questions, same questions being addressed to the entire group, the response scale being from 1 to 5, where 1 would mean “strongly disagree”, and 5 – “strongly agree”. Over 75% of all employees participated (28,000) and the findings were shocking. One of the questions had to do exactly with the materials than employees benefit from in order to do their job. Reminding that all stores offer the exact same environment and materials to all their employees, it is surprising to see “two stores at opposite ends of the measuring stick” regarding the responses received for the question: “Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?”. Store A had 45% of their people responding with 5 (strongly agree), while Store B had only 11%, although they have the same materials and equipment being offered. This mean that the employees’ perception regarding their workplace can vary even when it has to do with such aspects that would seem straightforward and not leaving much room for subjectivity. Both stores “had the same materials & equipment; yet the employees’ perception of them was utterly different. Everything, even the physical environment, was colored by the store manager” (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005, p. 33). We dare to say, in this context, that even when there is no official team work, individual performance is not purely individual, as the employee seems to be highly dependent on the way his/her manager performs. Individual performance and motivation (as has to do with the perception of the workplace in general) is therefore influenced by managerial performance, becoming even more difficult to correctly predict the chances of each of them to be successful by isolating individuals from their environment.

From a very factual determinant of performance, the materials & equipment which could be seen as data input in the performance process, we transition to very soft outputs of performance, which are broadly referring to the fulfilment of achieving specific results, having a positive perception of self-efficacy which all have the consequence of wishing to be experimented again. Once the individual feels the accomplishment of his high-performance, this creates an inner satisfaction which becomes a motivator from that moment on.

This has been proven in the specialized literature by Daniel Pink in his book (Pink, 2009, p. 7), presenting the studies performed by Harry Harlow and Edward Deci.

Harry Harlow, in 1949, together with some of his colleagues, created a mechanic puzzle which was then offered to a rhesus monkeys. Without officially starting the study, after simply offering the puzzles to the monkeys, they immediately became interested in the object and started making obvious efforts to solve it, which meant to pull out a pin, undo a hook and lift. A simple task for a human, but not necessarily

something a monkey would do every day. While presenting the study, Pink underlines the unexpected factor out of this whole story, as monkeys were not taught how to do it, were not rewarded for their achievement once done, so their focus on the puzzle solving must have been driven by the performance of the task itself. "The monkeys solved the puzzle simply because they found it gratifying to solve puzzles. They enjoyed it. The joy of the task was its own reward" (Pink, 2009, p. 7). Harry Harlow came to this conclusion once he understood that the puzzle solving was not driven by the two main drivers that were known by that time: biological drive (performance to receive "food, water or sex gratification") or external forces drive (performance influenced by the promised rewards, or punishments). Eventually, later in time, Harry Harlow seeing how primates responded naturally to the puzzles, he named the inner gratification of performance as being intrinsic motivation (Pink, 2009, p. 7). To add to this, we consider this represents the first well defined way in which performance determines motivation. By performing well once, satisfaction towards the own results will become a motivation for the individual to work at least as hard as last time, to be able to experiment again the feeling of gratification. Additionally, if not the positive results, motivation can come from the act itself of performing that action, as long as it is a pleasant activity, in this case performance referring to the work itself, not yet the result, but the pleasure of undertaking a certain activity. To complete his research, Harlow introduced a new element: raisins. The monkeys were offered raisins for solving the puzzles, Harlow assuming they would perform better. But surprisingly, "introduction of food in the present experiment, served to disrupt performance, a phenomenon not reported in the literature" before, as Harlow observed (Pink, 2009, p. 7). We can therefore conclude that introducing rewards was not very efficient in this case, even though it is supposed to be the most straight-forward method of motivation. Possibly, the important aspect is that rewards were introduced in a moment when intrinsic motivation was already present, which would mean that intrinsic motivation would prevail over the extrinsic motivation. For the moment, this was only a hypothesis.

Later in time, in 1969, Edward Deci recreated the puzzle experiment, this time on humans and using a Soma puzzle cube (Pink, 2009, pp. 8-9). The subjects were divided into two groups, experiment being performed in different moments for every group, so that Deci can follow all the aspects of their work and performance. Participants were sitting in a room, on the table being various magazines, three pictures showing three possible configurations created from the Soma puzzle pieces and the 7 wooden cubes of the Soma puzzle. Both groups participated in 3 sessions, held in consecutive days. In first day, both groups had to replicate the three configurations from the images on the table. In the second day, groups received different images they had to replicate, group A being promised to receive a material compensation for every configuration they manage to replicate, while group B was continuing to perform without any change to the first day. In the third day, both groups returned to the situation from the first day, when they had to replicate the images without even a mentioning of any rewards. In each day, and with both groups, Deci introduced another element in the experiment: after participants have finished performing the assigned activity, Deci was leaving them alone for some minutes, justifying his absence based on the need to generate additional configurations for them. In this time, subjects were told to do whatever they like, while Deci was secretly following them. The reactions of group A and B were similar in the first day: left alone, participants were continuing to play with the puzzle for around 3.5 – 4 minutes, but reactions started to differ from the second day. Group A, proved more interest for the puzzle in the day when they were promised to receive a monetary award for every completed puzzle; they played with the puzzle for around 5 minutes in their "free-time". Group B, on the other hand, performed again similarly to the first day. In the third day, group A was told there were enough money for only one session, and can't be paid again, so they would need to perform without any award. In this context, the "free-time" of the subjects was spent in a much different way, as they only continued to pay attention to the puzzle for around 2 minutes, considerably less compared to the time spent in the paid day, but also less than spent in the first session, when they had some intrinsic curiosity for the task. On the other hand, Deci assumed group B has actually managed to naturally increase the engagement for the task, as the subjects slightly increased the amount of time spent on the puzzle in their free slot, in a context not polluted by external motivators. "When money is used as an

external reward for some activity, the subjects lose intrinsic interest for the activity”, concluded Deci (Pink, 2009, p. 9).

Both of the studies presented by Pink converge to seeing the value that a well performed task can deliver, not only in terms of its direct results, outputs, but also due to the intrinsic motivation they generate. This would become the engine that keeps things in movement, desire for performance being a motivator for performance, while performance achieved becomes a motivation. We already can assume that the bidirectionality of the relationship motivation – performance could eventually be a continuous cycle, but we look to further refine this idea.

We have mainly addressed so far, the performance from an individual perspective, but this can benefit of many other considerations when it is interpreted in the context of a team, or moreover, of an organization.

Team performance could simply be considered the joint performance of all its members, but this might not have enough coverage over the concept of team. As defined by the Business Dictionary, (2018), team is “a group of people with a full set of complementary skills required to complete a task, job or project. Team members operate with a high-degree of interdependence, share authority and responsibility for self-management, are accountable for the collective performance and work toward a common goal and shared rewards.” We can conclude that team members have their unique performance and contribution to the collective performance, but responsibility seems to be shared over all its team members, which means that each individual would not necessarily contribute for his part, but would as well see it in context, with all its interdependencies. This is as well confirmed by the continuation of the definition of a team, which “becomes more than just a collection of people when a strong sense of mutual commitment creates synergy, thus generating performance greater than the sum of the performance of its individual members” (Business Dictionary, 2018).

One proposed formula to calculate performance of a team was introduced by Steiner in 1972 (Thompson): Team Performance Equation. Performance in this case would be identified with actual productivity of a team, which considers potential productivity, synergy and threats, in the following way:

$$AP = PP + S - T$$

Where:

- AP = Actual Productivity
- PP = Potential Productivity
- S = Synergy
- T = Performance Threats, being eliminated

Adding more complexity, performance of an organization should consider its teams, just as teams consider their individuals. Same principles apply, organizational performance cannot mean sum of all team performances, as there are specific synergies between teams and specific organizational drivers that influence the performance of it overall.

However, both teams and organizations have in common that their core essence is still the individual performance and that having individuals working together can bring equally advantages and disadvantages. Spirit of competition versus possible comfort in the presence of the others (social loafing) is just one dimension of how team work can both improve individual performance and reduce it.

However, our main scope of this paper is to primarily discuss individual performance, reason for introducing a new way in which performance can determine motivation: instrumentalized performance. This is one of the most common methods being used by organizations when they are awarding current performances. By doing so, they aim to make their employees motivated by the performance and by what this brings (a promise, a prize, a raise, an opportunity for development, more autonomy etc.).

Instrumentalized performance is most frequently met under the form of the performance review processes, especially in wide companies, where such evaluations of the individual performance are, for example, done every 6 months. Such evaluations are usually concluded through a rating score corresponding to the employee's results, rating which can consequently be instrumentalized to trigger specific follow-up actions: award, punish, develop etc.

IV. MODEL OF BIDIRECTIONAL RELATIONSHIP MOTIVATION <> PERFORMANCE

Based on all the above considerations, we wish to visually show a simplified structure of how the relationship between motivation and performance is created, and how can its bidirectionality be translated schematically (see Figure 3).

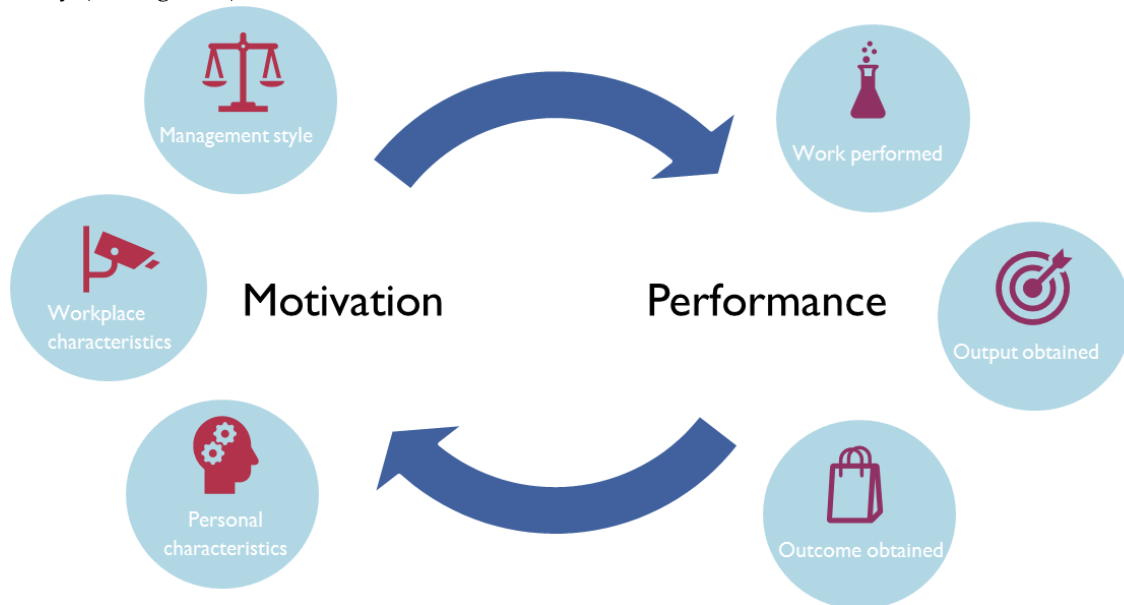


Figure 3. Model of Bidirectional Relationship Motivation <> Performance

The Model presented in Figure 3 depicts the following relations:

Motivation is being determined by various factors, out of which we have simply presented the ones that we consider are bringing most motivation:

- o an inspiring Management style and consequently a good relationship with the direct manager;
- o specific workplace characteristics that suit the needs of the individual;
- o the inner talent of the individual, the passion, or considered as the filter through which the individual sees the world and the way he/she decides to interact with it

We did not considered awards or extrinsic motivation with monetary value, as it has been concluded in the paper that such approaches don't have mid-term and long-term benefits, whereas the scope of this model is to prove the sustainable and strategic partnership between motivation and performance.

Performance is being seen as a result of motivation, while itself can as well be generating motivation, through the three main determinants:

- o pleasure of performing the work
- o pleasure of the result, output obtained through the individual's work
- o pleasure of the outcome, the long term benefit of its result, usually being obtained via an instrumentalized performance.

At the same time, it is estimated the model can be not necessarily a simple cycle, but can be a spiral, in which future motivations and performances are increments of the initial motivation and performance. Such model would look as shown in Figure 4.

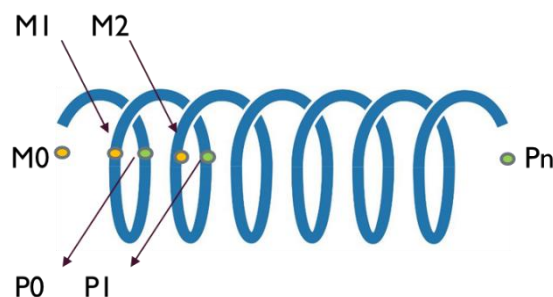


Figure 4. Spiral Model of Bidirectional Relationship Motivation <-> Performance

We consider the current paper as being the first step in a more complex research, which will continue by trying to apply the model in medium-sized to big-sized organizations, in order to validate the model, both from a managerial perspective and an executive perspective of the employees.

V. CONCLUSION

As analyzed above, and as planned to be confirmed in the future with a practical research, this paper aims to demonstrate that organizations have two very important instruments that can support them in their efforts: motivation of the employees and the employees' own performance. These two factors, once obtained, may be able to sustain each other in a dynamic manner. By acknowledging the relationship between motivation and performance, and the way they determine each other and evolve in time, we are able to offer valuable insights to companies worldwide.

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