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Abstract

The world is changing, and with it the way we work and how we relate to our work. Businesses face many challenges to which they must adapt if they hope to remain competitive. In addition to the question of an ecological transition, respect for human rights and working conditions is essential. Today, faced with recruitment difficulties and turnover issues, well-being and the quality of life in the workplace have become priorities for companies that wish to maintain their attractiveness and keep their current employees; in this context, motivation is an essential variable. As such, it is necessary to look into current managerial practices and skills and their underlying factors. In this context, we are interested in the impact of managerial practices on employees. The two principal means of becoming a manager are to be promoted “internally” or recruited externally; these two manager profiles differ in training, professional experience and organizational culture. Stemming from the theoretical field of social psychology, notably the “Five core social motives” model (Fiske, 2003), we reflect upon the issue of managerial practices in the context of a France-based business.

Introduction

The Issue of Change and the Necessity to Reconsider Managerial Practices

The world is changing, and so is the way we work and how we relate to our work. This observation was made by Olivier Dussopt, the French Minister for Labour, Full Employment and Integration, at the *Assises du Travail*, a Labor Forum that took place in April 2023 as part of the *Conseil national de la refondation*, the Nation Council for Restructuring (CNR, 2023). Environmental, technological and social changes are taking place alongside the emergence of new forms of employment, new individual aspirations and concern for human rights and working conditions. Contributing to the changes in the way we work and how we relate to our work, these developments are arising at a time when “demands for better work-life balance, greater accountability and more consistency between what companies say and do, are becoming attractive factors for employees, in a generalized context of recruitment tension” (Thiéry & Senard, 2023, p.13, own translation). While changes in employment and work conditions are not a new phenomenon (Loriol, 2017), the health crisis linked to Covid-19 highlighted the extent of the transformations currently underway, their acceleration in the professional world (Thiéry & Senard, 2023) and their impact on how we relate to our work (e.g., Gaymard & Hatton, 2023; Gaymard et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2022; Zhang & Kowalczyk, 2023). Evidence of these transformations was provided in 2022, by the 'Great Resignation' phenomenon, in which more than 50 million Americans left their jobs, following the Covid-19 crisis,

in search of better working conditions (Richter, 2024).

Managerial practices and how they evolve are important and necessary areas for reflection if companies are to adapt to the different challenges they face (Thiéry & Senard, 2023). One of the fundamental questions that arises is how to support managers in developing their skills and practices. In this context, social psychology and the findings from research into motivation provide an opportunity to understand and identify when and why an individual engages in a given behavior, by investigating what motivates humans. This allows for changes in that behavior and evolution of practices (cf. Geiger & Brick, 2023). After introducing the theoretical concept of management and motivation, we present the Core social motives model (Fiske, 2004/2008), whose relevance we assess when applied in the context of skill and managerial practice development within a French private-sector agri-food company.

Management, Skills, Cultural Influence and Motivation

Thiéart (2003) defines management as “the action, art or manner of leading an organization, directing it, controlling it and planning its development” (p.7, own translation). Reflecting upon management, the skills required of managers and their practices, means taking into account the evolution of society as well as corporate history. Indeed, the history of management is directly linked to both. Stemming from questions that relate to organization management, reflections on management have particularly flourished since the industrial revolution and the evolution of the industrial landscape, which led to the emergence of increasingly large companies (Nicolas, 1996). Mintzberg (1989/2004) described the twentieth century as “the ‘Management’ century” (p.17, own translation), and pointed out that, “having reached the highest level of economic development in the history of mankind, the world could not but be seduced by the management procedures that marked this century” (Mintzberg, 1989/2004, p.17, own translation). Employers began to ask themselves how they could mobilize employees and secure their commitment to ensure that they contribute to and participate in the collective performance (Bevort, 2013). Influenced by time, location, societal and economic developments and sometimes the country (Bollinger & Hofstede, 1987 ; D'Iribarne, 1989 ; Hall & Soskice, 2001), several management theories and approaches, that combine the conception of work and consideration of the human being, have been developed over the last century in an attempt to answer these questions (Bevort, 2013; Boltanski & Chiapollo, 1999; Commons, 1934; Mayo, 1933; McGregor, 1960; Olson, 1971; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939; Taylor, 1911/1967).

Managers are key players in organizations such as businesses. According to Mintzberg (1989/2004), “managers can be defined as having responsibility for an organization or one of its departments” (p.36). Thus, within a company, managers work at different hierarchical levels, and while their missions may vary, they all play interpersonal roles linked to information management and decision-making (Mintzberg, 1989/2004). Middle managers manage operational teams and often have more operational missions than directors, who manage the company and are entrusted with more strategic missions.

Traditionally, there are two principal means of entering the management profession. A management position can be filled through internal promotion (path 1) or external recruitment (path 2) (Möbus & Delanoë, 2009; Cadet, 2013); in the latter case, the candidate may be a beginner or an experienced manager from another company.

This raises the question of how both a manager's career path and experience may influence his or her skills and practices. One area of psychological research has focused on the question of one's skills, and has highlighted the influence that an individual's experience (expert versus novice) can have on his or her skills and activity in various fields (Chase & Simon, 1973; Chi et al., 1981; Coulet, 2010; De Groot, 1965/2008; Gick & Holyoak, 1983; Pouté & Coulet, 2007; Samurçay & Pastré, 1995). Another line of questioning relates to the influence of organizational culture (Schein, 1985/2004) on managerial skills and practices. Organizational culture (corporate culture) was defined by Schein in 1985, as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 1985/2004, p.17).

Corporate culture, which is specific to each company, influences employee behavior and practices (Devillard & Rey, 2008), as well as managerial practices (Schein, 1985/2004). When considering the evolution of managerial skills and practices, and in order to effectively support their development through the implementation of appropriate interventions, one must first question the true skills of managers and what factors underlie their managerial practices. In this context, findings from social psychology studies on the concept of motivation represent an important line of inquiry. Vallerand and Thill (1993) define this concept as “the hypothetical construct used to describe the internal and/or external forces that lead to the initiation, direction, intensity and persistence of a behavior” (p.18, own translation). Throughout history, several theories have been developed on the subject of motivation in an attempt to understand human behavior. In 1981, Kleinginna and Kleinginna listed over a hundred definitions of the concept. Organizational settings are ideal for applying the concept of motivation, particularly in the workplace. This enables us to understand how businesses operate. Since the first half of the 20th century, motivation has been studied in an attempt to answer the question of employees' individual and collective efficiency (Roussel, 2000).

Roussel (2000) defines motivation in the workplace as “a process that activates, steers, energizes and maintains the behavior of individuals towards the achievement of expected goals” (p.5, own translation). Several motivational theories have been developed in an attempt to explain the behavior of individuals in the workplace (Adams, 1963, 1965; Alderfer, 1969; Atkinson, 1957; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 1976; Locke, 1968; Maslow, 1943; Vroom, 1964). At a time when the challenges of corporate productivity and competitiveness are intertwined with environmental, technological, social and well-being issues in the workplace, we believe that one motivational model is well-suited to address the evolution of managerial practices and skills: the Core social motives model (Fiske, 2003, 2004/2008; Stevens & Fiske, 1995).

The Five Core Social Motives Model (Fiske, 2003; Stevens & Fiske, 1995)

Considering humans as social beings, Fiske developed the socio-cognitive theory of Core social motives (Fiske, 2003, 2004/2008; Stevens & Fiske, 1995). This theory presents five interdependent social motives: *Belonging*,

Understanding, Controlling, Trusting and Enhancing self, drawn from the scientific literature on the subject of motivation. These motives, stemming from fundamental human psychological needs, have been inherited over the course of our evolution and guarantee our social survival by driving our social behaviors and enabling us to adapt to our social environment (Fiske, 2004/2008; Stevens & Fiske, 1995). While studying these motives enables us to understand people's behavior and how to encourage their commitment to change (Geiger & Brick, 2023), they also influence people's well-being in a social context (Fiske, 2004/2008; Stevens & Fiske, 1995).

This model provides a genuine resource for reflecting upon managerial practices and the acquisition of new skills. Focusing on this model means ensuring appropriate support in the process of change. Recently, several studies have applied this model to people's involvement in the fight against climate change (Brick et al., 2021), as well as to their commitment to group actions (Geiger & Brick, 2023).

Implementation within a Private Company in France

In response to the many changes taking place in the world, companies are faced with a wide range of challenges to which they must adapt. Such is the case for a French private-sector agri-food group specializing in meat production and the preparation of meat-based products. The group has begun to reflect on the evolution of its managerial practices. This agri-food group has doubled in size over the last ten years, and now has some 100 sites across the country. The group's strategic objectives are to boost the company's attractiveness, and to safeguard the health and safety of its employees. These strategic challenges are particularly important in the agri-food sector, which represented France's leading industrial sector and largest employer in 2021, with almost 57,000 companies and the equivalent of over 650,000 full-time employees (INSEE, 2023). The meat and meat-based product preparation sectors account for a quarter of all employees (Pôle Emploi, 2021; Ministère de l'agriculture et de la souveraineté alimentaire, 2022).

The evolution of managerial practices therefore represents a key area of work, in an agri-food market that must respond to significant challenges in order to remain internationally competitive (Laisney, 2015; Margetic, 2014).

Influence of Organizational Experience and Culture

The first phase of our study involved exploring how management is perceived. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 managers from different hierarchical levels of the company. The thematic analysis of these interviews and the comparison between managers who had been promoted internally and managers recruited externally revealed two managerial profiles, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Managers who had been promoted internally had a more traditional view of the job, were naturally more steeped in the company's culture, and referred more frequently to human relations. However, they found it more difficult to cope with recent changes in their work environment (notably the internationalization of teams and the presence of young workers). Managers recruited from outside the company referred more readily to strategic management, and had a less 'emotional' rapport to their work than did the managers who had been promoted internally (Gaymard & Desgré, submitted).

These results provide a basis to reflect upon the impact of a manager's career path; the question of corporate culture and its role in motivational aspects is important (Fiske, 2004/2008), as is the strategic management of human resources.

Reflecting on the Relevance of the Model as Applied to Managers

Using the Core social motives model (Fiske, 2004/2008) to reflect on the evolution of managerial skills and practices is relevant on a number of different levels. In particular, these forms of motivation enable us to understand the current specific managerial practices according to profile and experience (internal promotion versus external recruitment). If we consider the company as a human society (Thévenet, 2015) made up of workers considered to be social beings (Fiske, 2004/2008) who interact with one another, this model provides a framework to explain social behavior. What's more, if satisfied, these motivations promote appropriate social behavior and boost group productivity (Stevens & Fiske, 1995).

In addition, several studies have highlighted the links between these core social motives and the psychological well-being of individuals (Fiske, 2004/2008). At a time when the issue of human rights and working conditions is of vital importance, particularly in the agri-food sector (Laisney, 2015; Thiéry & Senard, 2023), focusing on these core social motives means seeking out the fundamental elements that guarantee and promote employee well-being. These motives also make it possible to plan appropriate support for managers who are committed to acquiring new skills. In fact, several authors have recently used this model as a means of reinforcing people's commitment to different behaviors or actions (cf. Brick et al., 2021; Geiger & Brick, 2023).

Belonging

This first motive is central to the theory of Core social motives (Stevens & Fiske, 1995), as it underlies the other four motives (Fiske, 2004/2008). It reflects each individual's need to be accepted into a group and to maintain strong, stable relationships with its members (Fiske, 2004/2008; Geiger & Brick, 2023). Belonging to a group enables each individual to gain access, through interactions with other members, to the resources and information they need to survive (Stevens & Fiske, 1995) and to defend themselves against their physical environment and potential predators, through a buffering effect: "Groups thus mediate people's interactions with the environment" (Stevens & Fiske, 1995, p.191).

This drive to belong to a group on a long-term basis, and to develop strong, stable relationships with its members, means that each individual must adapt to the norms and expectations of the reference group, and adopt behaviors that enable the group to meet its objectives (Breckler & Greenwald, 1986; Stevens & Fiske, 1995). People who behave in an unusual, incoherent, inappropriate or even harmful way within a group risk being expelled (Stevens & Fiske, 1995).

For the majority of managers interviewed as part of our recent study (Gaymard & Desgré, submitted), this need for a sense of belonging is demonstrated by a number of statements relating to social relationships, and is the

manager's main characteristic (e.g., “A manager builds a bond with his or her team, a bond that is built on listening, communication and trust”; “In my division, one of my key strengths is my proximity to the staff”; “Well-being also depends on the affinity established with one's manager, one's hierarchical superior”). These statements demonstrate the importance of taking this motive into account when considering the evolution of managerial skills and practices.

Understanding

This second motive drives individuals to understand their environment (Fiske, 2004/2008). This motivation to understand is fundamental, as it enables individuals to adopt behaviors that are adapted to the group, by understanding the needs and practices of other members (Stevens & Fiske, 1995): “The aim is to be able to both predict uncertainties that may arise and to make sense of what is happening.” (Fiske, 2004/2008, p.29, own translation). In this context: “social actors are motivated to learn the group's shared meaning system” (Stevens & Fiske, 1995, p.196).

When applied to the question of developing managerial skills and practices within a company, taking into account the motivation to understand means questioning the shared view managers have of their practices and skills, their roles and missions. This is a crucial element, because if not shared, these views can represent a problem for the company's managers, as we can see from their statements: “Today, we realize that everything falls upon managers, but what they are really provided with and what is expected of them is unclear”; “The definition of a manager's role is not always clearly formalized or explicit: managers often deal with situations they shouldn't.” (Gaymard & Desgré, submitted). In an article presenting four studies, Campbell and Kay (2014) focused on the skepticism of certain groups regarding scientific data relating to climate change. According to the authors, this skepticism, driven by an aversion to the solutions, is linked to the fact that the proposed solutions contradict the group's own values and shared view of the world. Thus, in order to better support managers in acquiring skills and developing their practices in line with their world of opinions, it is essential to question their representations.

Controlling

Individuals are driven to perceive themselves as competent and effective, particularly by recognizing the contingency between their own behaviors and the results achieved (Fiske, 2004/2008; Stevens & Fiske, 1995). In other words, individuals are motivated to have an impact on their environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Fiske, 2004/2008; Fiske et al., 1996; Geiger & Brick, 2023; Stevens & Fiske, 1995). Along with the two motives presented above, these elements facilitate shared understanding between individuals and promote membership of a social group through the establishment of strong, stable bonds (Stevens & Fiske, 1995).

This motivation to exercise control affects the development of managerial skills and practices in a number of ways, both in terms of the support offered and the skills developed. Individuals avoid undertaking actions in which they do not feel efficient (Ozer & Bandura, 1990). Based on the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), the authors point out that people's beliefs regarding their own efficacy influence many areas of their lives, and affect

their behavior, their level of perseverance when faced with difficulty or failure, their learning processes as well as their level of success. In addition, a number of studies have demonstrated links between the sense of being in control and health or longevity (Gaymard & Tiplica, 2016a and b; Taylor & Brown, 1988; Taylor et al., 1997). Therefore, the choice of skills to be developed and the support offered must take this aspect into account if we hope to satisfy this fundamental need.

Trusting

Trusting implies perceiving the world around one's self as non-threatening and benevolent (Fiske, 2004/2008; Stevens & Fiske, 1995). According to McAllister (1995), who focuses on organizational trust, this can be defined as “the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another” (p.25). According to Stevens and Fiske (1995), the perception that the world is benevolent enables individuals to be less vigilant, except when faced with negative information, and thus enables them to use their cognitive resources for more important activities, such as acquiring new skills or key information for social interactions. As such, this motive “facilitates group cohesion because it not only rewards people, but also enables them to be more effective” (Fiske, 2004/2008, p.38, own translation). In this context, a manager’s trust in his or her organization seems essential for implementing change. It enables managers to commit more readily to the support provided. Indeed, the organization's perception of managerial skills will encourage managers to become involved in the proposed actions, as they will not feel threatened by these (cf. Pirson & Malhotra, 2011).

Enhancing Self

Individuals are motivated to maintain self-esteem (Stevens & Fiske, 1995) or to improve their skills, thus enabling self-enhancement (Fiske, 2004/2008). Here, “self-enhancement reflects the desire to meet societal and personal values” (Geiger & Brick, 2023, p.7). Indeed, Anderson et al. (2015) highlighted the fact that desire for prestige represents a fundamental human motivation. Using the theory of sociometry, Leary et al. (1995) demonstrated that an individual's self-esteem can be influenced by his or her societal value: disapproval, rejection or exclusion from a group diminishes societal value and is likely to have an impact on self-esteem. According to Geiger and Brick (2023, p.7): “increases and decreases in self-esteem are signals indicating whether one should maintain or adjust their behaviors to maximize their value to society”. Within a group, individual self-esteem will influence one's behavior. According to Fiske (2004/2008), “if people feel good about themselves, they will feel sufficiently optimistic to make an effort to be both a useful and pleasant member of the group” (p.35, own translation). Motivation to maintain self-esteem and self-worth is said to drive individuals to improve themselves and to progress (Geiger & Brick, 2023). This motive is linked to psychological well-being and satisfaction, but also to “the general perception of one's skills, which determines future success (Lévy-Boyer, 1993, cited in Goudron & Croity-Belz, 2005)” (Belghiti-Mahut & Drillon, 2012, p.110). This highlights the importance of such motivation in the evolution of managerial skills and practices. Moreover, in view of the influence this motive has on work behaviors and worker commitment to enriching their work (Manville, 2014), taking into account self-esteem as a motivation in the context of evolving managerial skills and practices means encouraging managers to commit to acquiring the new skills required for increasingly complex management work.

Conclusion

Applying the Core social motives model (Fiske, 2003, Fiske, 2004/2008; Stevens & Fiske, 1995) to the question of evolving managerial skills and practices in the workplace means understanding the current practices and skills of managers as well as their needs, based on their profile and experience. It also provides a means to adapt the support and actions put in place to better ensure manager commitment, well-being, usefulness within the group and company competitiveness.

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