

A Theoretical Reference Identified With Motivation in the Workplace

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Abstract – *Work is performed by people, and for each of those individual people there is a complex interaction of reasons for them to do the work, to do it in particular ways, to particular standards and with particular levels of energy and enthusiasm. This complex interaction is often summed up in one word: “motivation”. In this review a variety of perspectives on this essential force is examined and the implications for organisational practice are considered.*

Consistent with evidence from neuroscience, the worker may experience conflicting cognitive and affective motivations during the workday. In particular, the affective system values effort more highly as long the worker's performance is below a personal goal, or income target, and becomes increasingly aroused as the goal approaches.

INTRODUCTION

Employees need to be motivated to function effectively in the workplace - and again, someone has to oversee this. According to the Occupational Health and Safety Act (1993:6) the workplace is any premises or place where a person performs work in the course of his/her employment. The activities required to motivate employees in the workplace, focus on one primary goal: to have those competent and adapted employees, with up-to-date skills, knowledge, and abilities, exerting high energy levels" (De Cenzo & Robbins. 1999:15). Managers are supposed to try to be more concerned about dealing with people. It is necessary for social work managers to have a general understanding of what motivates employees, and in particular the implications that motivation holds for management.

Motivation concerns “those psychological processes that cause the arousal, direction and persistence of behaviour” (Ilgen and Klein, 1988). Whilst there is general agreement in the literature about these three components of “motivation” (eg, Korman 1974, or Kanfer, 1990), the nature and place of motivation in a work-related context has been the subject of a long and developing study. Theories have been propounded, tested and superseded at a pace which has left organizational practice often several steps behind the researchers. The following pages will attempt to document the main themes and the most widely recognized theories.

The word *motivate* is frequently used in the context of management as a transitive verb: motivation is by implication something done *by* one person or group to another. A further implication of this usage is that the *motivated* parties need to be induced to perform some action or expend a degree of effort which they would not otherwise wish to do. That this is an issue of vital importance to the prosperity of commercial organizations is emphasized by Lawler (1973): “Those individual behaviors that are crucial in determining the effectiveness of organizations are, almost without exception, voluntary motivated behaviors”.

By contrast, new evidence points to the importance of affect as a source of motivation.¹ Experiments show that humans (and other animals) tend to evaluate performance on a task relative to a reference level, or goal, and experience affect as they make progress, or fail to make progress, towards this goal. This affective reaction has an impact on behavior. In particular, affect apparently explains *loss aversion*, a strong preference for not falling short of a reference point or goal, which acts as a psychological incentive to exert effort as long as the individual is below the goal. The tendency for affect to become increasingly intense, as distance from a goal decreases, can explain the so-called “goal gradient effect,” the tendency for humans, rats, and other animals to increase effort as a goal draws nearer.

Since the mid-1980s there has been considerable interest

in the idea that firms can improve their performance by harnessing the commitment of their employees through human resource management (HRM) practices capable of transforming the workplace (e.g., Beer et al. 1984, 1985; Kochan and Osterman 1994; Pfeffer 1998; Walton 1985, 1987). Despite an extensive literature establishing associations between HRM practices and organizational performance scholars have frequently pointed to difficulties in establishing a causal linkage (e.g., Cappelli and Neumark 2001; Guest et al. 2003; Huselid and Becker 1996; Osterman 2006; Wall and Wood 2005; Wright et al. 2005). Many theories of the HRM-performance linkage rest on an assumption that employees have a positive motivational response to HRM practices, but this is rarely tested in studies concerned with firm performance. Our analysis of HRM-motivation linkages helps fill this gap and, if the relationship is shown to be positive, may help explain the HRM-performance relationship. Conversely, if HRM is not accompanied by higher employee motivation, this may stimulate interest in other plausible mechanisms.

MOTIVATION CYCLING/PROCESSING

According to Luthans (1998:161-164). a comprehensive understanding of motivation includes the need-drive-incentive sequence, or cycle. The basic process involves needs, which set drives in motion to accomplish incentives (anything that alleviates a need and reduces a drive). The drives, or motives, may be classified into primary, general, and secondary categories.

The primary motives are unlearned and physiologically based. Common primary motives are hunger, thirst, sleep, avoidance of pain, sex, maternal concern, survival, well-being and self-actualization. The general, or stimulus motives are also unlearned but are not physiologically based. Curiosity, manipulation, activity and affection are examples of general motives.

Secondary motives are learned and are most relevant to the study of organizational behavior. The need for power, achievement, affiliation, security and status are major motivating forces in the behavior of organizational participants (Luthans. 1998:162-164; Smit & Cronje. 1997:306).

More and Wegener (1992:148-150) and Smit and Cronje (1997:306) refer to the motivation cycle or process as consisting of needs setting up drives (or motives) to accomplish goals (specific behavior). More and Wegener (1992:148-150) argue that the intensity of the drive toward a goal is always proportional to severity. They also refer to Chrusden and Sherman's (1976) description of the motivation process, which consists of four sequential steps namely: need, goal-directed behavior, personal goal

achievement and tension reduction. Motivation is an internal (dynamic and goal-oriented) process where the personal needs of individuals act as motives for their behavior.

THEORETICAL REFERENCE

Various taxonomies have been proposed for the organization of motivation theories. Kanfer (1994) classifies theories according to their distal or proximal nature, that is, their immediacy in relation to observable behaviours. Kanfer remarks:

- "To date, most distal theories of motivation have enjoyed their greatest success in predicting other distal constructs, such as predecision and decision processes and intentions, rather than behavior or performance.
- Proximal constructs focus on motivational constructs at the level of purposive action. Analyses of motivational processes in these theories tend to begin with the individual's goals rather than with the factors which have shaped the individual's objectives".

Katzell and Thompson (1990) divide theories into exogenous theories, which "focus on motivationally relevant independent variables that can be changed by external agents" and endogenous theories which "deal with processes or mediating variables [expectancies, attitudes, etc.] that are amenable to modification only indirectly in response to variation in one or more exogenous variables". Among exogenous theories Katzell and Thompson list motive/need theories, arousal/activation theories, incentive/reward theories, expectancy/valence theories, reinforcement theory, and goal theory. Within the

category of endogenous theories they include equity theory, attribution/self-efficacy theory, intention/goal theories, and other cognitive theories.

As motivation research has developed, increasing emphasis has been placed on cognitive antecedents of observed behaviour. "Cognitive theories attribute the causes of behavior to individuals' processing of information. According to these views, behavior results from decisions or action choices" (Ilgen and Klein, 1988). These choices are "directed toward alternative tasks and effort directed at performance levels within tasks" (Campbell and Pritchard, 1976).

MANAGING A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

With the exception of the independently wealthy, most of us have to work in order to survive. We find that many of our emotional and psychological needs are filled through

our work, and we enjoy our jobs.

As a manager, you can help employees want to come to work and help support employee motivation by creating a work environment in which employees feel respected and empowered. Two techniques that can help you create this type of positive work environment include:

- ◆ Emphasizing positive reinforcement.
- ◆ Creating a friendly corporate culture.

Emphasize Positive Reinforcement : Many of our ideas about reinforcement come from the work of B. F. Skinner. Skinner studied the ways in which animal behavior could be influenced by reinforcement. He identified three basic types of reinforcement:

- ◆ Positive reinforcement
- ◆ Negative reinforcement
- ◆ Punishment

These types of reinforcement have numerous applications to human behavior and are often used by managers in the workplace. Choose the Right Positive Reinforcement : Knowing which type of reward to offer to which employee is an important part of using positive reinforcement effectively. We've already seen that individual employees can react quite differently to praise, public recognition, and monetary rewards. The only way you can learn what type of positive reinforcement to offer your employees is to get to know them as individuals. Then you can reinforce from a position of strength rather than guessing wildly. Plus, getting to know your employees usually means spending more time with them, which in itself is a form of positive reinforcement.

Create a Friendly Organizational Culture: Besides positively reinforcing employees on an individual level, you can also build goodwill at the group level by creating an organizational culture that's friendly to employees. A worker-friendly organization can inspire both motivation and organizational loyalty.

Every organization has its own unique culture. Some start-up software companies, for example, pride themselves on being young and innovative. Their employees dress in casual clothes and develop computer programs that utilize the latest technology. Employees are encouraged to "think outside the lines" and take risks so that these companies stay on the cutting edge of software design. Insurance companies, on the other hand, often present a more conservative image. Their employees might wear business suits five days a week and search for investments that are

secure rather than innovative.

Creating a Positive Work Environment: Positive reinforcement and a worker-friendly corporate culture are two factors that can create a positive work environment. When a work environment is pleasant, employees will enjoy coming to work, and they will be motivated to do their best. They will also feel loyalty to their organization, which will result in less employee turnover.

CONCLUSION

The concept of motivation is defined as a force that leads to the motivation of employees in the workplace. Motivation is a key factor in social services and equally valuable to the social work manager. The comprehensive discussion on extrinsic rewards (such as pay, promotion, etc.) and intrinsic rewards (such as personal pride in a job well done) emphasises the importance of motivation with regard to the achievement of the goals of the organisation. Internal motivators (such as a feeling of self-satisfaction) and external motivators (such as money, power, etc.) imply that motivation is not a simple phenomenon.

Some important motivation theories, categorized as content theories, process theories and reinforcement theories, include Maslow's definition of the hierarchy of human needs. Herzberg's two-factor motivation framework to make jobs more interesting and challenging. McClelland's emphasis on achievement motivation. Adam's equity theory, Vroom's expectancy theory with the concept of valence and reinforcement theories based on behavioral principles. Each theory can help social work managers to better understand workplace motivation.

The standard economic model of labor supply assumes that a worker decides how hard to work, and when, based on a purely cognitive calculation of costs and benefits. By contrast, this paper argues that affect is an additional, important source of motivation in the workplace. Building on evidence from neuroscience, we propose a new, dual-process model of labor supply, which maintains the standard assumption in economics, that the worker's cognitive processes are sophisticated and forward-looking, but allows for circumstances in which affective processes can override cognitive priorities and distort the worker's effort profile. In particular, the worker's daily performance is assumed to have an affective significance, depending on how it compares to a personal goal or reference level. Consistent with evidence from neuroscience, the affective system is assumed to value effort more highly when the worker has not yet achieved the goal.

Furthermore, the affective system is assumed to become increasingly aroused as the goal becomes more

immediate, leading to the prediction of an increasing effort profile, or goal gradient, leading up to a goal.

A positive association between HRM practices and business performance has often been explained via HRM's assumed effect on employee motivation. Yet evidence for this assumption remains scanty and is not wholly consistent. Also, little use has been made of the major insights of the HRM-performance literature concerning the importance of „bundling“, that is of highly developed or intensive HRM systems: the suggestion has been that major effects on performance can only be achieved through workplace transformation, and this is suggestive of non-linear or threshold effects on motivational outcomes. We have pointed to further theoretical arguments that HRM's effects on employees will depend not only on specific opportunities for participation and personal development, but also on whether the HRM practices in total communicate a transformative development that evokes employee identification.

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