

# Frustration in our everyday lives



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We all strive to gratify our wants, desires, our goals and ambitions. Self realization make this evident and our experiences with others confirm the generalization.

However, we are often unable to reach our targets – our ambitions sometimes exceed our abilities or often-external barriers stand in our way. It could be a traffic jam delaying our journey, or a university rule preventing us from taking up a course. Whatever the cause, it frustrates us. All of us are frustrated from time to time.

This frustration also brings along with it irritation and anger. A long queue at the movie theater, or slow cashier at the supermarket causing a bottleneck, or an obtrusive driver on the road, has at some point of time caused us to flush with annoyance and at times anger. It is therefore commonly believed that frustration of our goals and desires leads to anger.

Yet, not all our frustrations lead to anger. We make take frustration as a signaling feedback to adjust or redirect our goals. It comes to us autonomously, every hour and every day. Frustration leads us along the trial-and-error process directing our perspectives to reflect externalities and potentialities. As we live and strive, every assertion will be hindered and we will face difficulties and be opposed.

My will to write this dissertation is hindered by loud music in the background; the summer heat beating down upon me; my search for the expressions to direct my thoughts to words, a link between my “understanding” language and “unstructured” insight. Frustrations are associated with family, peers, ideas, regimes, politics and religion. As I write,

my life is a fusion of such frustrations, great and small, large and insignificant, highs and lows.

Yet at the moment I am content, and relatively happy without any feelings of irritation or anger.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Frustration is a common emotional response to opposition. It arises from the perceived resistance to the fulfillment of individual will. The greater the obstruction, and the greater the will, the more the frustration is likely to be. It is related to anger and disappointment.

Causes of frustration may be internal or external.

In people, internal frustration may arise from challenges in fulfilling personal goals and desires, instinctual drives and needs, or dealing with perceived deficiencies, such as a lack of confidence or fear of social situations. Conflict can also be an internal source of frustration; when one has competing goals that interfere with one another, it can create cognitive dissonance.

Frustration occurs when a subject meets an insoluble problem obstacle in attempting to satisfy its vital needs. The stimulus-situation corresponding to such an obstacle, I term as stress and the corresponding distress of the subject I define as its escalation of failure.

Primary Frustration: involves the sheer existence of an active need. It is characterized by dissatisfaction of the subject and tension due to an unachievable end point considered necessary.

Ex. A person who has been starving for a long period of time.

Secondary Frustration: emphasis is placed upon supervening obstacles in the path to the goal of the desire.

Ex. A starving person prevented from reaching his meal due to breakdown of his car.

The framework emphasizes on the secondary frustration and the primary frustration follows from this orientation.

External causes of frustration involve conditions outside an individual, such as a blocked road or a difficult task. While coping with frustration, some individuals may engage in passive-aggressive behavior, making it difficult to identify the original cause of their frustration, as the responses are indirect. A more direct, and common response is a propensity towards aggression. [1]

## [2]REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Kurt Lewin, Frustration and Regression. An Experiment with Young Children, Studies in Topological and Vector Psychology II, University of Iowa Press, Iowa 1941**

Lewin is considered as the “ founder of social psychology” and was one of the pioneers in the field of group dynamics and organizational development.

“ The first step in understanding employees’ behavior is looking for what motivates them to underachieve or overachieve. Kurt Lewin says that the situation that the person finds him/herself in causes behavior and that behavior is essentially goal oriented. Goals must be difficult enough to provide challenge, while remaining attainable. If goals remain blocked too

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many times, the employee may experience frustration, which can lead to aggression, rationalization, regression, fixation, or resignation. A manager must be able to recognize each of these symptoms as a sign of inappropriate motivational goals.”

Lewin expressed human behavior through his fundamental equation-

$B = f(P \times S)$ ; where, B – Behavior, P – Person, S – Situation.

Lewin suggested that both the person and the situation influence behavior; the person’s behavior is also situational. He further extended that people act to achieve their goals. The goals should be difficult enough to be challenging while still being attainable. If the person fails often, he may experience frustration that may lead to aggression, rationalization, regression followed by fixation or resignation. A leader should be sensitive to all these symptoms to be effective.

A life of frustration is inevitable for any coach whose main enjoyment is winning. – Chuck Noll

### **Alderfer, Clayton P., Existence, Relatedness, and Growth; Human Needs in Organizational Settings, New York: Free Press, 1972**

Clayton Paul Alderfer further expanded Maslow’s hierarchy of needs by categorizing the hierarchy into his ERG theory (Existence, Relatedness and Growth).

ERG states that more than one need may be motivational at the same time.

Satisfaction of a lower motivation is not necessary before moving on to a higher motivation.

Need preferences across cultures are accounted.

Different people have different priorities

Frustration of a higher order need causes the subject to regress to move to an easier to satisfy lower order need. This is known as the frustration-regression principle.

[3]

## **Impact on Workplace Motivation**

If employees are not provided with growth opportunities, it may lead to regression – more interaction with colleagues, increased desire for money, improvement in working conditions. A leader must be able to recognize these situations and implement solutions to meet frustrated needs for resolution.

**Norman R. F. Maier, Frustration, the Study of Behavior without a Goal, New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1949. Pp. 264. 21s.**

Maier was an industrial psychologist at the University of Michigan. He worked upon Lewin's equation and introduced a model called "classic sequence model".

In order to explain behavior, one must include a description of the S [situation] as well as of the O [organism]. The interaction between them must precede the behavior that results from the interaction. The product of <https://assignbuster.com/frustration-in-our-everyday-lives/>

this interaction in psychology is called perception. [The resultant] behavior (B) causes changes, which alter the relationship between the organism (O) and its world. The changes produced by behavior are an accomplishment (A). This accomplishment may be desirable or undesirable. In either case, it may alter the stimulus-situation. Thus, the behavior of one person may influence that person's world and it may also influence other people.[4]

$S \rightarrow O \rightarrow B \rightarrow A$  ; where,

S – Stimulus, O – person/organism,

B – Behavior, A – Accomplishment

Professor Maier reflects the results of his experiments over the past ten years. He advocates the theory that frustration processes differ significantly from the motivation process. According to Maier, when a subject cannot to meet its goals, resultant behavior such as aggression, rationalization, or regression ensues. A leader should understand the behavioral symptoms to identify underlying problems of frustration.

## **EMPIRICAL STUDY AND GENERALIZATION**

### **Objective:**

To study, observe and analyze the effect on human subjects by inducing a frustration in their behavior.

### **Experiment:**

The subjects are exposed to a pair of cards placed horizontally on either side of the computer screen. The subjects were asked to choose one of the cards by clicking on them and a score was maintained.

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If the choice is erroneous, the score is deducted (punishment) and a loud sound is played else the score is added (reward).

A total of 27 cards with different geometric figures were used in the experiment. Each figure was one of three shapes (circle, triangle, square), three colors (red, blue, green) and sizes (small, medium, large). The background was contrasting.

An important instruction given to the subjects was that their objective was to try and discover a basis for choosing cards such that their score is maximized. A monetary incentive was attached to the maximum score.

The subjects were indicated that the score would be reflective of their Intelligence Quotients.

In reality no solution was possible since punishment was in a randomized fashion (stress). Later, without warning the subject the situation was changed so that it required the formation of a position response.

Punishments were only given now for choices on the right (or left) side and not randomly as before.

Four groups were used. They differed according to the conditions of the problem

Group I was arbitrarily punished 75% of the time during their first 50 trials.

Group II was punished 25% of the time on their first 150 trials.

Group III was punished 25% of the time on their first 50 trials.



Group IV was not punished in their first 50 trials.

After exposure to the frustrating conditions, the groups were compared on the basis on number of trials required to learn a simple positional response.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND GENERALIZATION**

The average scores for Groups II, III and IV show striking similarities. All their averages fall between 43. 9 and 26. 2 trials. However, Group I is completely different requiring 76. 1 trials.

That Group II and II, having 25% failure show similar results indicate that 25% punishment is not disturbing at all. The concentration of the punishment is therefore more important than the total number.

The similarity of the results of Group II, III and IV despite different levels and concentrations of punishment indicate that a certain level of disturbance is required for frustration to set in.

The point becomes more lucid when we consider the distribution of scores across the groups.

### **DISTRIBUTION OF LEARNING SCORES FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS**

If we assume that frustration leads to resistance of change it follows that frustration interferes with learning a new response. On this basis we can interpret the slow learners to be individuals whose frustration threshold was exceeded by concentrated failure.

While most of today's jobs do not require great intelligence, they do require greater frustration tolerance, personal discipline, organization, management,

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and interpersonal skills than were required two decades and more ago.

These are precisely the skills that many of the young people who are staying in school today, as opposed to two decades ago, lack. – James P. Comer

If slow learners are excluded from Group I, the average number of trials becomes 42.3 trials, approximating the averages of the other three groups.

When the frustration threshold is exceeded, it leads to fixation being produced that imposes with it a degree of rigidity to responses that tend to interfere with learning processes. Although these fixations are not strong enough to block learning, they are sufficiently powerful to allow for clear distinction between frustrated and non-frustrated individuals.

As a matter of fact, it was increasingly difficult to get the subjects from Group I to sit for the experiment again as they rendered themselves unavailable.

The experimental evidence yields to –

It describes an abnormal fixation type behavior

It shows a contrast between behavior expressed during a state of frustration and a normal task oriented state

In support of this view, a study by Theodore Newcomb, studied changes in political and social attitudes in a student population. He found that first year students were subject to social pressures and that the attitudes developed at home tended to change to conform to those of the college group. Some students, however, changed more than others, and he attempted to analyze

these differences in terms of personality differences. When his case histories are analyzed from the point of view of home frustrations, we find that among students who readily changed their attitudes 15 per cent had a background of frustration, whereas among those who failed to change, 37 per cent had background that revealed frustration. If we assume that frustration tends to fixate the attitudes prevailing at the time of frustration we can see why there was a higher percentage of frustrated individuals in the group that did not change attitudes under social pressure than the group that did change. Thus the phenomenon of fixation may explain stubborn attitudes as well as persistent segments of behavior.

Subjects were shown to have developed a rigidity to change. This was measured by a reduced ability to learn under frustrating situations. Since learning a new response requires giving up of an old response, the problem of fixation plays an important role.

## **IMPLICATIONS ON GROUP WORK**

In the context of an group, frustration as symptom plays a very important role. It could be the result of blocking motivational behavior. An individual may react in different ways to overcome the blockage failing which he becomes frustrated. An example blockage would be an employee who deserves a promotion but finds out that he lacks a trivial qualification. In such situations appealing to reason doesn't remove the obstacle and leads to the end products of frustration – aggression, fixation or regression.

Aggression: A worker who is refused time off when it is due may “ attack” his superior, either verbally or physically. If the supervisor isn't present, the

attack may be directed towards someone or something else. Expressing his frustration out on family or an object like a car as examples of transfer of aggression.

A goal object may have two meanings for the individual. First it has its intrinsic meaning, and secondly, it may have also a secondary, symbolic value. Thus a certain child deprived of an ice-cream cone which he wanted may have lost simply an ice-cream cone. A second child, however, deprived of an ice-cream cone, may have lost not only a sensory gratification, but may also feel deprived of the love of his mother because she refused to buy it for him. For the second boy the ice-cream cone not only has an intrinsic value, but may also be the carrier of psychological values. Being deprived merely of ice-cream qua ice-cream probably means very little for a healthy individual, and it is questionable whether it should even be called by the same name, i. e., frustration, which characterizes other more threatening deprivations. It is only when a goal object represents love, prestige, respect, or achievement that being deprived of it will have the bad effects ordinarily attributed to frustration in general. [5]

Regression: Reverting to a more basic and easier to satisfy needs or coping with the barrier. Throwing a temper tantrum, bursting into tears or sulking would be examples of this case. Having a long face or a worried look, degrading performance are other signs of this approach of dealing with frustration.

Ex. A football player plays deliberately bad to express his frustration at not being chosen as the lead striker.

Fixation: Refusal to respond to new conditions or action patterns after removal of the frustrating object or barrier. As deduced earlier, severe frustration leads to individuals to continue with non-adaptive behavior blindly.

Ex. A person who was refused a promotion may turn down other training programs that might improve his future chances and continue to sulk.

It is essential for manager to recognize the symptoms of frustration to avoid acting in ways that would intensify rather than placate the situation. The essential point to remember is that the individual is often not in a rational, problem-solving frame of mind and hence cannot be reasoned with by facts or logical proceedings. Frustrated people need to be guided back as they cannot be reasoned with in the current mental state.

Motives energize and direct behavior. Appropriate behavior in turn reduces the inherent stresses that signal the motivated state. A keen understanding of the relations between motives, behavior and individuals goals provides the manager with a framework within which he can analyze human activity and gather and sort data related to behavioral problems.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS TO ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR**

### **Two Opposite Effects of Punishment are Suggestive of Two Opposite Functions**

It was found that punishment increased the strength of fixations in behavior. Learned habits too could be transferred into abnormal fixations thorough punishment. Ordinarily, it is presumed that punishment weakens a response. However, we observed the contrary case to be true if the punishment

frustrates the subject and therefore leads to fixation of the response in consideration. In a similar manner, the compulsive property of fixations and the lack of learning of new methods are not analyzed as motivation or learning principles but better understood if viewed in the light of frustration-fixation.

Thus within an organizational context, the use of punishment as a deterrent or a threat needs to be carefully analyzed by the manager in light of the behavioral symptoms expressed by the employees in response to the punishment. An effect contrary to what was expected may arise if careful consideration of all factors is not achieved.

### **Behavioral Controls During Frustration and Motivation**

In a frustration-instigated behavior there is no orientation to a goal; therefore, the behavior appears senseless when looked at from the point of view of motivation. Frustration is a behavior experienced as a terminal response and not a means to an end. There is no need to be satisfied as there is no goal involved.

Therefore, frustration although having been set up due to need deprivation, may initiate behavior that is unrelated to the condition leading up to frustration. It represents a change in the condition of the subject and sets forth in motion a different set of behavior mechanisms. In all of this, frustration linked behavior has characteristics of a compulsion.

To seek for goals or attempt to influence this behavior through manipulation of goals confuses the issue. We are more likely to succeed if we give up our goal-seeking bias and attach no goal significance to what the frustrated

subject does. Thus, when we consider behaviors that are available to the subject at the time or those that the subject is fixated upon, we are describing types of control unrelated to goals. In motivation, rewards and punishments influence a direct modification of behavior whereas in frustration rewards and punishments don't bear a one-to-one correlation.

Therefore, as a manager, it is essential to recognize symptoms of such behavior and in dealing with them, not restrict our understanding of behavior modeling to be focused on motivation through rewards and punishments.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

When Maier first published his study on “Frustration and Motivation”, it was met with considerable opposition as its views different from those held by clinical psychologists and experts in learning theory. At that time, therapy was dominated by psychoanalytic theory emphasizing that some form of motivation was reflected in all behavior. We have come a long way since then and the views on frustration theories have been well established.

There is a clear distinction between frustrated and motivated behavior and they must be treated as separate but not exclusive processes. A number of insights follow from this result. An important inference relates to reason; we frequently try and change a person's emotional attitudes through reasoning. When this fails, we may accuse him of being close-minded. But if the logical tool of reason itself were unavailable to the person – in times of excessive frustration, then we would have an explanation.

In attempting to describe frustrated behavior as “without a goal” we do not imply that the frustrated individual lacks a goal. Actually, it is his inability to

reach that goal which breeds frustration in him and leads him to a behavior pushing him further away from the goal. Two individuals subjected to the same circumstances may experience different levels of frustration.

Therefore, a good theory of frustration must explain differences and similarities, degrees and tendencies, and when it accomplishes this it will help us to understand ourselves as well as others.