

Occupational psychology

Science



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Theories of motivation provide those that are in managerial positions with greater understanding of what makes employees perform to their peak performance. The practice of comprehending motivation can result in influencing and managing the behaviour of a workforce effectively.

Motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic and is seen as a desire or need that gives an individual focus and drive in their role, tasks they are employed to do and controls an individual's behavior. We are all motivated by different things and in different ways. Some people are motivated by doing a good job and look for personal recognition and personal growth, whereas others are motivated by money and promotion. When applied to the workplace it is about getting the most from an employee through encouragement in order for them to give the best performance in their role.

Two theories that have influenced organizations and are used to date are Maslow's theory 'hierarchy of needs' and Locke's theory on goal setting'. Maslow's theory is referred to as a content theory of motivation and suggests how an individual behaves in a workplace is dependent on the need or requirement to fulfill certain needs. If an individual does not accomplish these needs they encounter an imbalance which they will try to rectify. The theory suggests we are motivated by basic needs and as these needs are met we move to another level of the hierarchy of needs until we reach the pinnacle of the pyramid. The levels that Maslow proposes we all go through are, basic needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and self-actualization. Once individuals reach the self actualization level, the need continues to act as a motivator, the more they experience the need, the more they want to experience further growth and satisfaction.

A study by Parker et al (1991) looked into motivation needs and their relationship to life success. The study looked at the responses of managerial and non-managerial industry workers. It showed that the need to achieve was positively related to success. This included status-wealth, contribution to society and professional fulfillment, but was negatively related to security and when carried out the type of role i. e. managerial and non managerial was an essential predictor of power needs and accomplishment.

C. L. Cooper (2001) also supported Maslow's theory of needs believing that they are extremely important because the nature of work is changing, as employment is now insecure or short term contracts. British employment structure is becoming more Americanized, having longer hours, intrinsic job insecurity and employing a bottom line management approach. Cooper proposed that Maslow's theory is far more important today with the British workforce than it was in the last century. P. E. Ajang (2012) also supports the theory that Maslow's hierarchy of needs have been useful in organisations in motivation, believing that in order for them to be effective and efficient, managers and the organisation must be willing to understand and provide factors that motivate employees within their roles and duties.

Greenberg & Baron (2003) support the distinction between the growth needs and deficiencies in Maslow's theory but proposed that not all individuals are able to satisfy their higher order needs in employment. Their research found that managers from higher ranks in organisations were able to satisfy both their growth and deficiency needs whereas managers at a lower level were only able to satisfy their deficiency needs at work. Nadler & Lawler (1979) cited in Graham & Messner (1998) believed there were three major criticisms <https://assignbuster.com/occupational-psychology/>

of Maslow's theory arguing that the theory makes assumptions about employees in general. These are that employees are similar, all situations are similar and that there is only one best way to meet their needs.

Locke's theory is referred to as a process theory of motivation and proposes that employees are motivated by having specific goals set them and being given the necessary feedback. He suggests that if we are given goals it motivates an individual to achieve a goal which improves overall performance. Goal setting employs key points, referred to as SMART. These are specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and time bound. Goals should be specific (so an individual knows what to do), measurable (so an individual knows when they have to be completed), agreed upon (this way an individual has a joint/vested interest in their success), realistic (difficult but realistic to accomplish in period allotted, making sure they are not impractical objectives as this will demotivate them) and time constrained (having a time limit ensures individuals complete the task).

Morisano et al (2010) investigated whether goal setting would enhance academic performance for struggling students, following the conclusion that in universities twenty five percent never complete their course. The study found that the students who followed the goal setting intervention showed extensive improvements in their performance compared to those that had not had goals set. They propose that if they are standardized, easily administered and time limited that enhancement in academic performance can be attained in struggling students.

Steele-Johnson et al (2000) found in their analysis of goal orientation and task demand effects on motivation, affect and performance that participants with performance goal orientation were more satisfied with their overall performance on a simple task as this offered a better possibility for them to demonstrate their capability. Their results showed that advantages of goal direction were dependent on the type or intricacy of task given. Job complexity affected goal orientation on affect and performance and task consistency moderated goal orientation on intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy.

In Latham & Steele's (1983) study on college students performing toy assembly, and whether work strategies or goal setting would boost performance, the results showed that specific goals set by a supervisor led to elevated performance rather than generalized 'do best' objectives. The study found and supported Locke's theory of goal setting as did other studies by Mento et al (1987), Locke & Latham (1990) and Locke & Latham (2002).

Grant's (2012) study on goal setting in teaching and practice saw goal setting as an ideal structure in order for individuals to explore, recognize and modify unhelpful implicit goals. This would promote positive change and a motivational effect on behaviour, but he also felt that it could hinder performance, especially if the task allotted was too complicated, was too exigent or the individual was inexperienced, had low self-efficacy and resources were limited. He also proposed that individuals were more likely to cheat and be unhelpful with peers if there were highly competitive situations or high performance goals. He felt that SMART goals suppress the development of sophisticated comprehension and knowledge. He stated that <https://assignbuster.com/occupational-psychology/>

unclear managerial perception or knowledge of Locke's theory could result in ill informed decision making and incorrect practice.

In conclusion the level of influence on performance and motivation is dependent on how a theory is applied and by whom and whether they are proficient at applying the theory. When using Maslow's theory if an individual is inexperienced in teaching or training methods (i. e., supervisors, managers, etc) the theory is absolutely ineffective, although if they are a trained teacher or academic they may have some success in its application. Employers need to be able to work out which level of the hierarchy of needs an individual is at in order to motivate them i. e. if someone is on a low salary and are struggling to get by they are unlikely to be motivated by receiving a credential for a job well done, they are more likely to be motivated with the offer of a salary increase. Problems exist with the theory as individuals aren't always predictable, they can also sometimes be driven to do well by what they feel strongly about and not necessarily by what they require.

In contrast Locke's theory seems to have more success and is an established method used in organisations today. It has been shown to be a reliable and effective way of motivating employees. Studies have shown that performance improvements that are related to goal setting can be between ten and twenty percent. Goal setting works because it gives individuals objectives, energizes individuals, provides a challenge and encourages creativeness in an individual in their workplace. To managers and supervisors it is easy enough to employ and can be very useful as the results can be easily understood and supervised. In academics and teachers who

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are highly proficient it can be very useful as can show levels of attainment and can be a good indicator on how to progress and improve an individual's overall performance and if applied correctly will have great advantages.

In summary we all require motivation to work hard, but individual differences in motivation are due to factors such as locus of control and personality. We are all motivated in different ways and by different things, such as personal gain, money, reward or by achievement and personal success. These motivations can alter depending on our circumstances. Locke's theory seems the most useful in addressing human problems in motivation but ultimately it is down to the organisation and which method they employ, that determines whether a theory has been helpful or unhelpful. The competency on the individual using the theory will evidently determine whether motivation of an individual is successful or not in the workplace.