

Motivation theories

Motivation theories are classified as:

- reinforcement theory
- instrumentality
- content (needs) theory
- process theory
- Herzberg's two-factors model

Reinforcement theory

As experience is gained in taking action to satisfy needs, people perceive that certain actions help to achieve their goals, while others are less successful.

Instrumentality

The belief that if we do one thing it will lead to another. It assumes that people will be motivated to work if rewards and penalties are tied directly to their performance; thus the awards are contingent upon effective performance.

Content (needs) theory

The theory focuses on the content of motivation in the shape of needs. Its basis is the belief that an unsatisfied need creates tension and a state of disequilibrium. To restore the balance a goal is identified that will satisfy the need, and a behaviour pathway is selected that will lead to the achievement of the goal and the satisfaction of the need. All behaviour is therefore motivated by unsatisfied needs. Needs theory has been developed by Maslow, Alderfer and McClelland:

- *Maslow's hierarchy of needs* – there are five major need categories that apply to people in general, starting from the fundamental physiological needs and leading through a hierarchy of safety, social and esteem needs to the need for self-fulfilment, the highest need of all. When a lower need is satisfied the next highest becomes dominant and the individual's attention is turned to satisfying this higher need. The need for self-fulfilment, however, can never be satisfied. Maslow's needs hierarchy has an intuitive appeal and has been very popular. But it has not been verified by empirical research such as that conducted by Wahba and Bridwell (1979), and it has been criticized for its apparent rigidity – different people may have different priorities and it is difficult to accept that needs progress steadily up the hierarchy.
- Alderfer (1972) devised his ERG theory of human needs, which has three categories: existence needs, relatedness needs and growth needs.
- McClelland (1961) identified three needs as being most important for managers: achievement, affiliation and power.

Process theory

Process theory is concerned with the psychological processes or forces that affect motivation, as well as basic needs. The main process theories are:

- *Expectancy theory* – motivation will be high when people know what they have to do to get a reward, expect that they will be able to get the reward and expect that the reward will be worthwhile.
- *Goal theory* – motivation and performance are higher when individuals are set specific goals, when goals are difficult but accepted, and when there is feedback on performance.

- *Equity theory* – this refers to the perceptions people have about how they are being treated as compared with others. Better motivation is achieved when people are dealt with equitably, ie treated fairly in comparison with another group of people (a reference group) or a relevant other person.

These three process theories are generally regarded as the most significant. Expectancy theory is particularly important in reward management.

Herzberg's two-factor model

The two factors in Herzberg's model are:

1. The satisfiers that motivate individuals to superior performance and effort.
2. The dissatisfiers or hygiene factors that prevent job dissatisfaction, while having little effect on positive job attitudes.

Herzberg pointed out that while financial incentives may motivate in the short term, the effect quickly wears off. This theory has been attacked because it is said to be based on inadequate research. But the concepts of 'hygiene factors' and the transient effect of rewards persist.

Motivation and money

Money is a powerful motivating force because it is linked directly or indirectly to the satisfaction of many needs. Money may in itself have no intrinsic meaning, but it acquires significant motivating power because it comes to symbolize so many intangible goals.

Motivation strategies

Motivation strategies aim to create a working environment and to develop policies and practices that will provide for higher levels of performance from employees. They include the development of total reward systems and performance management processes, the design of intrinsically motivating jobs and leadership development programmes.

Summary of motivation theories

Category	Type	Theorist(s)	Summary of theory	Implications
Instrumentality	Taylorism	Taylor (1911)	If we do one thing it leads to another. People will be motivated to work if rewards and punishments are directly related to their performance.	Basis of crude attempts to motivate people by incentives. Often used as the implied rationale for performance-related pay, although this is seldom an effective motivator.
Reinforcement	The motivation process	Hull (1951)	As experience is gained in satisfying needs, people perceive that certain actions help to achieve goals while others are unsuccessful. The successful actions are repeated when a similar need arises.	Provide feedback that positively reinforces effective behaviour.
Needs (content) theory	Hierarchy of needs	Maslow (1954)	A hierarchy of five needs exist: physiological, safety, social, esteem, self-fulfilment. Needs at a higher level only emerge when a lower need is satisfied.	Focuses attention on the various needs that motivate people and the notion that a satisfied need is no longer a motivator. The concept of a hierarchy has no practical significance.
	ERG theory	Alderfer (1972)	Three fundamental needs: existence, relatedness and growth.	A simpler and more convincing approach to Maslow's on the motivation provided by needs.
	Managerial needs theory	McClelland (1975)	Managers have three fundamental needs: achievement, affiliation and power.	Draws attention to the needs of managers and the important concept of 'achievement motivation'.
Process/cognitive theory	Expectancy theory	Vroom (1964), Porter and Lawler (1968)	Effort (motivation) depends on the likelihood that rewards will follow effort and that the reward is worthwhile.	The key theory informing approaches to rewards, ie that there must be a link between effort and reward (line of sight), the rewards should be achievable and it should be worthwhile.
	Goal theory	Latham and Locke (1979)	Motivation will improve if people have demanding but agreed goals and receive feedback.	Provides the rationale for performance management, goal setting and feedback.
	Equity theory	Adams (1965)	People are better motivated if treated equitably.	Need to have equitable reward and employment practices.