Motivation

Key concepts and terms

- *Content (needs) motivation theory*
- *Equity theory*
- *Expectancy theory*
- *Extrinsic motivation*
- *Goal theory*
- *Herzberg's two-factor model of motivation*
- *Intrinsic motivation*
- *Instrumentality*
- *Line of sight*
- *Management by objectives*
- *Motivation*
- *Process theory*
- *Reinforcement*
- *Self-efficacy*

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completing this chapter you should be able to define these key concepts. You should also understand:

- The meaning of motivation
- Types of motivation
- The process of motivation
- The different motivation theories
- The points that have been made in critically evaluating those theories
- Approaches to developing a motivation strategy

Introduction

Motivation is the force that energizes, directs and sustains behaviour. High performance is achieved by well-motivated people who are prepared to exercise discretionary effort. Even in fairly basic roles, Hunter et al (1990) found through their research that the difference in value-added discretionary performance between 'superior' and 'standard' performers was 19 per cent. For highly complex jobs it was 48 per cent.

The meaning of motivation

A motive is a reason for doing something. Motivation is concerned with the strength and direction of behaviour and the factors that influence people to behave in certain ways. The term 'motivation' can refer variously to the goals individuals have, the ways in which individuals choose their goals and the ways in which others try to change their behaviour.
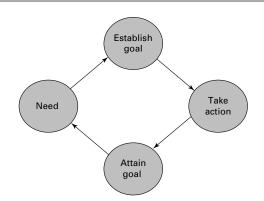
Types of motivation

A distinction is made between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation occurs when things are done to or for people to motivate them, which include rewards, such as incentives, increased pay, praise, or promotion, and punishments, such as disciplinary action, withholding pay, or criticism. Intrinsic motivation is provided by the work itself and is associated with the concept of engagement as explained in Chapter 9.

The process of motivation

The process of motivation can be modelled in a number of ways. Two of the best-known models are provided by content or needs theory and expectancy theory.

Content (needs) theory

This 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 which will satisfy the need, and a behaviour pathway is selected which will lead to the achievement of the goal and the satisfaction of the need. Behaviour is therefore motivated by unsatisfied needs. A content theory model is shown in Figure 10.1. Content theory, as the term implies, indicates the components of motivation but it does not explain how motivation affects performance – a necessary requirement if the concept is to provide guidance on HR policy and practice. This was the role of expectancy theory as described below.
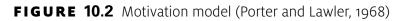
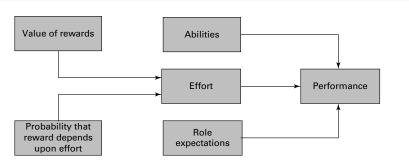**FIGURE 10.1** The process of motivation according to content theory

Expectancy theory

Expectancy theory states that motivation to perform 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. Motivation is only likely when a clearly perceived and usable relationship exists between performance and outcome, and the outcome is seen as a means of satisfying needs. Porter and Lawler (1968) spelt out that the level of effort was affected by the value of rewards and the probability that reward followed effort. But they pointed out that effort was not enough to achieve high performance. Two additional factors affecting performance had to be taken into account: (1) ability – individual characteristics such as intelligence, knowledge, skills; and (2) role perceptions – what individuals want to do or think they are required to do. A model of their theory is shown in Figure 10.2.

Motivation theories

The main motivation theories including content and expectancy theory are summarized in Table 10.1.

FIGURE 10.2 Motivation model (Porter and Lawler, 1968)

TABLE 10.1 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 which positively reinforces effective behaviour.
Content (needs) theory	Hierarchy of needs	Maslow (1954) Alderfer (1972)	People are motivated by their needs, which are translated into goals for them to attain. The content of motivation is therefore those needs and the goals they generate to which people aspire. In Maslow's theory a hierarchy of needs exists: physiological, safety, social, esteem, self-fulfilment. Needs at a higher level only emerge when a lower need is satisfied. Alderfer (1972) produced a simpler three-factor non-hierarchical theory identifying three basic needs.	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.

Two-factor model	Related to needs theory	Herzberg et al (1957)	Two groups of factors affect job satisfaction: (1) those intrinsic to the work itself; (2) those extrinsic to the job (extrinsic motivators or hygiene factors) such as pay and working conditions.	Identifies a number of fundamental needs within the two-factor model, ie achievement, recognition, advancement, autonomy and the work itself. It also indicates that satisfaction from a pay increase (extrinsic motivation) does not last long. The research methodology has been strongly criticized and the underpinning assumption that everyone has the same needs is invalid. But it has influenced approaches to job design (job enrichment) and it supports the proposition that reward systems should provide for both financial and non-financial rewards.
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 reward should be achievable and should be worthwhile.
	Goal theory	Latham and Locke (1979)	Motivation will improve if people have demanding but agreed goals and receive feedback.	Influences performance management and learning and development practices.
	Equity theory	Adams (1965)	People are better motivated if treated equitably, ie treated fairly in comparison with another group of people (a reference group) or a relevant other person.	Need to have equitable reward and employment practices.

Critical evaluation of motivation theories

Instrumentality

This theory emerged in the second half of the 19th century with its emphasis on the need to rationalize work and on economic outcomes. 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. Instrumentality theory has its roots in the scientific management methods of Taylor (1911).

The theory provides a rationale for incentive pay, albeit a dubious one. Motivation using this approach has been and still is widely adopted and can be successful in some circumstances, eg piece work. But it relies exclusively on a system of external controls and does not recognize a number of other human needs. It also fails to appreciate the fact that the formal control system can be seriously affected by the informal relationship existing between workers.

Reinforcement

It has been suggested that behavioural theories based on the principle of reinforcement pay insufficient attention to the influence of expectations, and no indication is given of any means of distinguishing in advance the class of outcomes which would strengthen responses and those which would weaken them. They are limited because they imply, in Allport's (1954) vivid phrase, a 'hedonism of the past'. They assume that the explanation of the present choices of individuals is to be found in an examination of the consequences of their past choices.

Content/needs theory

Content or needs theory has a considerable amount of face validity; it seems almost self-evident that people are motivated by unsatisfied needs. In particular, Maslow's needs hierarchy has an intuitive appeal and has been very popular. But his theory has not been verified by empirical research such as that conducted by Wahba and Bridwell (1979). It has been criticized first for its apparent rigidity – different people may have different priorities; second, because it is difficult to accept that needs progress steadily up the hierarchy; and third for the misleading simplicity of Maslow's conceptual language. In fact, Maslow himself expressed doubts about the validity of a strictly ordered hierarchy.

Alderfer (1972) produced a more convincing and simpler theory identifying three primary categories:

- Existence needs, such as hunger and thirst. Pay, fringe benefits and working conditions are other types of existence needs.

● Relatedness needs, which acknowledge that people are not self-contained units but must engage in transactions with their human environment. Acceptance, understanding, confirmation and influence are elements of the relatedness process.

● Growth needs, which involve people in finding the opportunities 'to be what they are most fully and to become what they can'.

Together, the content model of motivation shown in Figure 10.1 and the Alderfer concept usefully emphasize the significance of needs and goals as factors affecting motivation and how they function. But content or need theory ignores the important factor of expectations, which is covered by expectancy theory. This means that it does not really explain how people make choices about their goals and behaviour.

Herzberg's two-factor model

Herzberg's two-factor theory in effect identifies needs but it has been attacked by, for example, Opsahl and Dunnette (1966). The research method has been criticized because no attempt was made to measure the relationship between satisfaction and performance. It has been claimed that the two-factor nature of the theory is an inevitable result of the questioning method used by the interviewers. It has also been suggested that wide and unwarranted inferences have been drawn from small and specialized samples and that there is no evidence to suggest that the satisfiers do improve productivity. The underpinning assumption that everyone has the same needs is invalid. Rousseau (2006: 263) summed up the views of academics about Herzberg as follows: 'Herzberg's long discredited two-factor theory is typically included in the motivation section of management textbooks, despite the fact that it was discredited over thirty years ago.'

In spite of these criticisms the Herzberg two-factor theory continues to thrive; partly because it is easy to understand and seems to be based on 'real life' rather than academic abstractions, and partly because it convincingly emphasizes the positive value of the intrinsic motivating factors. It is also in accord with a fundamental belief in the dignity of labour and the Protestant ethic – that work is good in itself. As a result, Herzberg had immense influence on the job enrichment movement, which sought to design jobs in a way which would maximize the opportunities to obtain intrinsic satisfaction from work and thus improve the quality of working life.

Expectancy theory

Expectancy theory focuses on how motivation affects performance and describes how people make choices about desired goals. It is generally accepted as the leading theory of motivation and has become an important basis for explaining what motivates people to work. It used to inform decisions on the design and management of contingent pay schemes and to measure the effectiveness of such schemes.

The theory was developed by Vroom (1964) but has its origins in the ancient Greek principle of hedonism, which assumes that behaviour is directed toward pleasure and away from pain. Individuals will choose from alternative courses of action that behaviour which they think will maximize their pleasure or minimize their pain.

But research has not provided unequivocal backing for the theory. Connolly (1976) noted that: 'The expectancy model appears to have enjoyed substantial if uneven support.' House et al (1974) commented that: 'Evidence for the validity of the theory is very mixed.' They also established that there were a number of variables affecting expectations which make it difficult to predict how they function. These are:

- leadership behaviour – the function of the leader in clarifying expectations, guiding, supporting and rewarding subordinates;
- individual characteristics – the subjects' perception of their ability to perform the required task;
- nature of the task – whether accomplishing the task provides the necessary reinforcements and rewards;
- the practices of the organization – its reward and control systems and how it functions.

Research conducted by Behling and Starke (1973) established that individuals:

- make crucial personal decisions without clearly understanding the consequences;
- do not in practice consistently evaluate their order of preference for alternative actions;
- have to assign two values when making a decision – its desirability and its achievability – but they tend to be influenced mainly by desirability: they let their tastes influence their beliefs;
- may be able to evaluate the extrinsic rewards they expect but may find it difficult to evaluate the possibility of achieving intrinsic rewards;
- may find it difficult to distinguish the benefits of one possible outcome from another.

Behling and Starke concluded that: 'Expectancy theory can account for some of the variations in work effort but far less than normally attributed to it.'

The findings of research by Reinharth and Wahba (1975), based on a survey of the salesforces of four industrial companies, showed no support for either the Vroom expectancy model or its components. Reinharth and Wahba concluded:

> The findings of the study point to the theory's ability to explain at best a very limited portion of human behavior. It may be that the theory, founded on considerations of rationality, can serve as a useful predictor in situations where contingencies between acts and outcomes and between first-level

and second-level outcomes are clearly perceived by the individual, whereas ambiguous situations force the individual to develop a choice mechanism not based on the expectancy variables. In short, the earlier optimism for the universality of the theory appears to have been dashed.

Overall, the outcomes of research suggest that while expectancy theory offers what appears to be a convincing explanation of the factors affecting the motivation to work, it does not provide a universal explanation because of individual differences in the approach to decision making, the circumstances in which the scheme operates and the impact of social forces on individuals.

However, when designing an incentive scheme and assessing its effectiveness, expectancy theory has considerable face validity as a common-sense explanation of the factors affecting motivation and what makes incentive schemes work, ie the incentive has to be worthwhile and attainable. It provides the theoretical basis for the concept of 'line of sight' developed by Lawler (1988), which states that for a scheme to be effective there has to be a clear and easily perceived link between effort and reward.

Goal theory

Goal theory provides the rationale for performance management, goal setting and feedback. But its universality has been questioned. For example, Harackiewicz et al (2002) warned that goals are only effective when they are 'consistent with and match the general context in which they are pursued'. And Pintrich (2000) noted that people have different goals in different circumstances and that it is hard to justify the assumption that goals are always accessible and conscious. But support for goal theory was provided by Bandura and Cervone (1983), who emphasized the importance of self-evaluation and self-efficacy (a belief in one's ability to accomplish goals).

Goal theory is in line with the 1960s concept of management by objectives or MBO (a process of managing, motivating and appraising people by setting objectives or goals and measuring performance against those objectives). But management by objectives fell into disrepute because it was tackled bureaucratically without gaining the real support of those involved and, importantly, without ensuring that managers were aware of the significance of the processes of agreement, reinforcement and feedback, and were also skilled in practising them. Goal theory, however, plays a key part in performance management

Equity theory

Equity theory has been criticized because it is oversimplified and is based on laboratory rather than real-life research (Huseman et al, 1982). It has also been suggested by Carrell and Dittrich (1978) that equity can be perceived not only on a person-to-person basis, as the theory posits, but also by reference

TABLE 10.2 Factors affecting motivation strategies and the HR contribution

Factors affecting motivation strategies	The HR contribution
The complexity of the process of motivation means that simplistic approaches based on instrumentality or needs theory are unlikely to be successful.	Avoid the trap of developing or supporting strategies that offer prescriptions for motivation based on a simplistic view of the process or fail to recognize individual differences.
People are more likely to be motivated if they work in an environment in which they are valued for what they are and what they do. This means paying attention to the basic need for recognition.	Encourage the development of performance management processes which provide opportunities to agree expectations and to recognize accomplishments.
Extrinsic motivators such as incentive pay can have an immediate and powerful effect, but will not necessarily last long. The intrinsic motivators, which are concerned with the 'quality of working life' (a phrase and movement which emerged from this concept), are likely to have a deeper and longer-term effect because they are inherent in individuals and the work they do and not imposed from outside in such forms as performance-related pay.	• Develop total reward systems which provide opportunities for both financial and non-financial rewards to recognize achievements. Bear in mind, however, that financial rewards systems are not necessarily appropriate and the lessons of expectancy, goal and equity theory need to be taken into account in designing and operating them. • Pay particular attention to recognition as a means of motivation and developing intrinsic motivation through job design.
Some people will be much more motivated by money than others. It cannot be assumed that money motivates everyone in the same way and to the same extent.	It is naive to think that the introduction of a performance-related pay scheme will miraculously transform everyone overnight into well-motivated, high-performing individuals.

The need for work which provides people with the means to achieve their goals, a reasonable degree of autonomy and scope for the use of skills and competences should be recognized.	Advise on processes for the design of jobs which take account of the factors affecting the motivation to work, providing for job enrichment in the shape of variety, decision-making responsibility and as much control as possible in carrying out the work.
The need for the opportunity to grow by developing abilities and careers.	• Provide facilities and opportunities for learning through such means as personal development planning processes as well as more formal training. • Develop career planning processes.
The cultural environment of the organization in the shape of its values and norms will influence the impact of any attempts to motivate people by direct or indirect means.	Advise on the development of a culture which supports processes of valuing and rewarding employees.
Motivation will be enhanced by leadership which sets the direction, encourages and stimulates achievement and provides support to employees in their efforts to reach goals and improve their performance generally.	• Devise competency frameworks which focus on leadership qualities and the behaviours expected of managers and team leaders. • Ensure that leadership potential is identified through performance management and assessment centres. • Conduct leadership development programmes.

to the fairness of processes in the organization as a whole. But the need to have equitable reward and employment practices which are supported by equity theory cannot be questioned. The problem is how to achieve equity.

Conclusions

In a sense, all the theories referred to above make a contribution to an understanding of the processes that affect motivation. But some, such as reinforcement and instrumentality, have considerable limitations, as do the needs hierarchy and two-factor theories of Maslow and Herzberg. Gerhart and Rynes (2003) pointed out that: 'Although Maslow's and Herzberg's theories were intuitively appealing to many people, research has not supported either theory to any great extent.' In fact, people are far more varied and complex than these theories suggest. To state that there are strong similarities between people leads to the conclusion that there is 'one best way' to motivate and reward them, which is simply not true.

Process theories concerned with expectancy, goal setting and equity are based on more realistic ideas and are much more relevant than the theories of Maslow and Herzberg. Expectancy theory is particularly appropriate when dealing with contingent pay (incentive schemes) but it is still dangerous to generalize that everyone is motivated in the same way by the same pattern of expectations.

Motivation strategies based on the lessons learnt from motivation theory are considered below.

Motivation strategies

Motivation strategies aim to create a working environment and to develop policies and practices which will provide for higher levels of performance from employees. The factors affecting them and the HR contribution are summarized in Table 10.2.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

The process of motivation

Motivation is goal-directed behaviour. People are motivated when they expect that a course of action is likely to lead to the attainment of a goal and a valued reward – one that satisfies their needs and wants.

Types of motivation

The two basic types are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Motivation theories

There are a number of motivation theories which, in the main, are complementary to one another. The most significant theories are those concerned with expectancy, goal setting and equity, which are classified as process or cognitive theories.

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.

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Questions

1 What is motivation?
2 What is the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation?
3 What is instrumentality?
4 What is reinforcement?
5 What is content or needs theory?
6 How valid is Maslow's concept of the hierarchy of human needs?
7 How valid is Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation?
8 What is expectancy theory?
9 What is goal theory?
10 What is equity theory?
11 Which motivation theory provides the best guide on the principles of performance-related pay and why?
12 What message for HR policy is provided by the belief that motivation is a highly complex process?
13 Why is recognition so important as a means of motivation?
14 Why are there limitations in the power of money to motivate?
15 Why is intrinsic motivation through the work itself likely to be more effective in the longer term than extrinsic motivation?