Energizing Behavior at Work: Expectancy Theory Revisited

Mahfooz A. Ansari

This paper addresses itself to motivating people at work. Specifically, it examines a widely known theory--expectancy theory of work motivation. Elaborating upon the properties of this theory, it recommends the need for research in the Islamic perspective. The present discussion is divided into three parts. First, a brief orientation to the key elements relating to motivational behavior at work is presented. The next part provides a review of the relevant literature. Finally, a general framework for understanding work motivation is specified.

Key Considerations

The term "motivation" has no definite and clearly agreed upon definition. In fact, it means different things to different people. As a consequence, different researchers have defined motivation differently depending on their individual perspective and research purposes. Some of the common salient points concerning this concept may be arranged in the following order:

1. Motives are not directly observable. They are inferences from behavior. The statement, "I did X because I wanted to..."illustrates the point.

2. We may or may not be consciously aware of our motives. That is, the behavior can be driven by conscious as well as unconscious motivation.

3. Motives are a tool for explaining behavior, provided our inferences about them are correct--for instance, why am I attempting this paper in the Islamic perspective?

4. Motives help us make predictions about behavior.

It is not intended to resolve the controversy over the definition, nor is it attempted to provide the single-best definition. It is tried simply to make the readers aware of the problem of defining motivation. However, for the present purpose, work motivation is defined as the efforts expanded toward organizational objective(s) (DuBrin, 1978).

The fundamental aim of any organization is to improve performance. Whereas a number of factors determine performance in complex ways, motivation is considered to be crucial in this regard. A simple formula for relating motivation and other factors to performance, as stated by Cummings and Schwab (1973), is as follows:

Performance $= f$ [CP] [WP] [OP];

where,

CP = Capacity to perform (i.e., skill and ability);
WP = Willingness to perform (i.e., motivation);
OP= Opportunity to perform (i.e., environment).

Clearly, then, performance is a function of (or influenced by) ability, motivation, and environmental factors interacting together. Of all the three factors, motivation (i.e., willingness to perform) has universally been accepted as a "power-house" of almost all behavior at work.

Foci of Research: A Review

Despite the decades of empirical research and centuries of speculations, the problem of motivating (others and oneself) still persists for experts in social and organizational psychology. The

fundamental aim of this section is not to present a comprehensive review of the literature. Rather, the attention is directed at providing a brief orientation to representative research in this area. Much of the published literature on this subject seems to capture two distinct theoretical frameworks: content theories and process theories.

Content

Content theories focus on the content of' an individual's personal needs and motives. What is it that arouses, energizes, or initiates behavior? A number of theorists have attempted to address this question (e.g., Alderfer, 1972; Herzberg Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959*;* Maslow, 1954; McClelland, 1961). The basic idea behind such theories has been that people have certain fundamental needs and that people are motivated to engage in behavior that will lead in the satisfaction of these needs. The implication for managers is that situation must be created at work that will result in the satisfaction of employees most important needs when they (employees) are performing effectively. All of these content theories provide important insight into the subject of motivation, although from different points of view. Nevertheless, they oversimplify the variables underlying human motivation. As a result, a second set of theories (i.e., process theories) developed in an attempt to represent the diversity and complexity of motivation more adequately.

Process

How is behavior initiated, sustained, redirected, or halted? Process theories address this question. They help us to understand some of the underlying psychological processes that generate motivation within individuals.

Of all the process theories, expectancy theory has received considerable treatment in social and organizational research. Originally proposed by Vroom (1964), this theory is also known as performance-expectation theory, instrumental theory, or path-goal analysis. It has seen several refinements, but the latest version is that of Lawler (l973). Grounded in cognitive and hedonistic orientation, the theory assumes that individuals should be viewed

as rational, calculating, and thoughtful entities who decide on which course of action to pursue and how much effort to expend. That is, how hard a person works depends essentially upon what he/she expects to get out of it. According to this theory, there are three separate factors that influence a person's overall level of motivation, symbolically designated as:

Effort = f [E→P] [P→O] [V];
where,
E = Effort;   P = Performance;
O = Outcome;   V = Valence.

The above formula may seem a little awesome now, but it should become intelligible after we look at each component separately within the framework of a realistic example.

Effort→Performance Expectancy. This component is a person's belief or expectation regarding the link between putting effort into a job (E) and performing effectively on the job (P). The more strongly a person believes that he/she can perform effectively if effort is put into the job, the stronger is the E-P expectancy. Such a strong expectancy is a necessary condition for the existence of high levels of work motivation.

Performance→Outcome Expectancy. People also hold that they will obtain or experience various types of outcomes (O) as a result of performing (P) effectively on the job. The more strongly a person believes that positive outcomes will follow from effective performance, the more motivated he/she will be to perform effectively.

Valence of Outcomes (V). The degree of attractiveness to, or preference for, an outcome is known as valence. Naturally, the degree of impact that any outcome may have on a person's motivation will depend on how much the person values that outcome. People differ in the extent to which they value outcomes. The more positively the person values an outcome, the greater potential power the outcome has to influence the person's motivation.

Now, let us have a concrete example. The University wants Alam to publish good research papers. But what is in it for Alam? What will he get for standard publications? Suppose for a moment that Alam perceives a positive correlation between standard publications and a promotion. Given this assumption, there are two outcomes: the first-level outcome, which is standard publications (P); and the second-level outcome, which is a promotion (O). The relationship an individual perceives between a first-level outcome (E→P) and a second-level outcome (P→O) is known as instrumentality.

Next, we have to consider Alam's valence or preference for getting a promotion. If Alam wants a promotion, then there is only one way to get it. He will have to produce standard research papers which should have positive valence for him because standard publications are instrumental to his obtaining a promotion.

Finally, we have to consider whether Alam feels he is capable of attaining his standard performance. With a lot of effort and drive, does he believe he can make standard publications? The perceived probability of attaining, a first-level outcome is called expectancy.

In sum, the theory includes two specific types of expectancy. The first is the E→P expectancy, representing a belief that effort (E) will lead to a desired performance (P). The second is the P→O expectancy, or instrumentality, representing a belief regarding the likelihood that performance (P) will lead to a particular outcome (O). Therefore, an individual's motivational force is determined by a particular outcome (O). Therefore, an individual motivational force is determined by multiplying E→P expectancy times P→O expectancy times outcome valence (V), as suggested in the above formula. The probability of success, in each case, will range from 0. 0 (no chance) to 1.0 (certainty).

Comments and Overview

The expectancy theory is not free from potential limitations. Two of the major ones, according to Abdel-Kawi and Kole (1991), are

noteworthy. First, in understanding human motivation, both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (motives) are important (see, Herzberg et a1., 1959; Maslow, 1954). Although the expectancy theory does account for extrinsic rewards, it does not account explicitly for the intrinsic ones. Secondly, work motivation can be understood both in the short-term and in the long-term perspectives. The expectancy theory does focus on the short-term but does not seem to stress much on the long-term perspective.

In view of the above arguments and in view of the Maslovian meta-needs (i.e., self-actualization), Abdel-Kawi and Kole (1991) strongly recommend the researchers to understand work motivation in the Islamic perspective.

Formulating an Islamic Framework

The content approach to motivation has received some attention by those working in the Islamic perspective (Ahmad, 1988; Sharafeldin, I988; Shareef, 1988). But the process approach, with one exception (Abdel-Kawi & Kole, 1991), has received minimal consideration in social and organizational research.

Probably, the earliest attempt to understand motivational process in the Islamic perspective was made by Abdel-Kawi and Kole (1991). Their Islamic model included three processes in its deliberation: expected rewards, reinforcement, and required performance (see Qur'an, 93: 3-11). The model identified three reinforcers --(a) Allah did not forsake thee, (b) The last will be better, and (c) Allah shall give thee--that were considered to have "their instrumental value from the fact that their reinforcing properties lie in the proven past satisfaction. While rewards are extrinsic in nature, the reinforcements are based on intrinsically generated needs that were satisfied in the past" (Abdel-Kawi & Kole, 1991, p. 455). The intrinsic nature of rewards can be found in the Qur'an at several places-- for example, see 14: 7 for Allah's promise in clear terms for rewards and punishment; l6: 97 for rewards hereafter; and 24: 55 for three promises by Allah.

In keeping with the above theoretical framework, Abdel-Kawi and Kole (1991) proposed the "expectancy three theory" and its instrumentality. In this discussion, I intend to extend and define this theory and specify some of its obvious implications for potential users. While doing so, I draw heavily upon Abdel-Kawi and Kole (1991). The model, which I present, can symbolically be understood as follows:

Effort = f [E$\rightarrow$P] [P$\rightarrow$O] [O$\rightarrow$R) (V).

In the above equation, symbols have their usual meanings except R, which stands for rewards. In essence, P, O, and R are all outcomes varying at different levels, and they all can be considered rewarding for an individual. Whereas the first two expectancies-- E$\rightarrow$P and P$\rightarrow$O--denote rewards in this life, the third expectancy-- O$\rightarrow$R--refers to reward hereafter (Qur'an, 16: 9; 24: 55). In fact, there is no dearth of evidence as to the fundamental conviction about "hereafter" (see, Qur'an, 6: 32, 11: 107-108, 28: 83; 29: 64; 43: 33-35; 50: 12; 93: 4). In brief, "this life is but an interlude a preparation for the real life, which is in the Hereafter" (Ali, 1989, p. 1004).

The model states that the first two expectancies are sufficient to generate motivation for the short term perspective, but it is the last one (and valence attached to it) that is responsible for higher level of motivation in the long run. That is, satisfaction of meta-needs (such as self-actualization) can be achieved via the third expectancy. Table 1 outlines how different combinations of high and low expectancies and valences interact to influence motivation. A very high level of motivation requires that all the four components of the model be high. Specifically, the model postulates that the third expectancy and its valence will generate intrinsic motive to exert efforts even when the probabilities of other two expectancies are low. But, when all the four components are low, motivation is virtually non-existent. For other combinations, see Table 1. It is hoped that only empirical research can support or refute the various explanations proposed herein.

Table l

Components of Revised Expectancy Theory and Predictions of Overall Motivation

E➔P	P➔O	O➔R	*Valence*	*Motivation*
High	High	High	High	Very High
High	High	High	Low	Low
High	High	Low	High	Moderate
High	High	Low	Low	Low
High	Low	High	High	Moderate
High	Low	High	Low	Low
High	Low	Low	High	Moderate
High	Low	Low	Low	Low
Low	High	High	High	Moderate
Low	High	High	Low	Low
Low	High	Low	High	Moderate
Low	High	Low	Low	Low
Low	Low	High	High	Moderate
Low	Low	High	Low	Low
Low	Low	Low	High	Low
Low	Low	Low	Low	Very Low

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