

A Person-Centered Expectancy Motivation Model

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Abstract

Intrinsic, extrinsic, and Maslowian motivation (specifically, self-actualization) are synthesized to repurpose traditional expectancy theory (in which motivational force is a product of valence, instrumentality, and expectancy) to accommodate the subjective human experience. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are rationalized as a single theoretical construct in the context of self-actualization. Self-actualization is used to reformulate expectancy theory to describe motivational force as a product of the squares of the valence that a person associates with an outcome, and his/her perceived ability to achieve the outcome. Discussion centers on the relative power of motivational force, motivation as a uniquely person-centered phenomenon, and implications in path-goal leadership theory.

Introduction

The topic of this article is motivation. With path-goal leadership theory as the starting point, I explore the question of what it means to be motivated. In the course of this discussion, I will build a conceptual framework for understanding motivational force that synthesizes several prevailing motivational theories. A unifying formula is presented that describes motivational force as a phenomenon that is fundamentally dependent upon the relative condition of the person. A brief discussion of implications concludes this exercise.

Path-Goal Theory

Path-goal theory is a staple of educational leadership research and is therefore an appropriate starting point for an examination of the principles of motivation. Generally, path-goal theory suggests that a follower will become motivated if a leader properly manages his/her relationship with the follower and removes environmental obstacles that stifle the follower's tendency to achieve his or her goals (Northouse, 2013). The success that a leader may have in a path-goal framework depends on his/her ability to cultivate a follower's motivation. Leadership tactics are successful in a path-goal sense when they induce genuine follower motivation.

Path-goal theory is fuelled by expectancy theory, a motivation construct with conceptual roots in psychology and economics. Vroom (1964) originally proposed an expectancy motivation model to explain job choice and work behavior. When removed from those specific applications, expectancy theory generically describes motivational force as the product of valence, instrumentality, and expectancy (VIE). Expectancy is an individual's belief that exerting effort will result in a required level of performance. Instrumentality describes an individual's anticipation that the performance achieved will leverage a desired outcome. Valence is the subjective value that an individual associates with that outcome.

A Critique of VIE

A problem with the common understanding of VIE motivation is that it omits the actual, subjective experience of the agent. The expectancy element, for example, supposes that an agent believes a certain effort will result in a required level of performance. However, it does not account for the agent's subjective assessment of his/her own ability to sufficiently or correctly exert the effort. VIE does not readily accommodate perceived competence/ability as an integral component of motivational force. Perceived competence, however, directly impacts motivation, particularly in a valence/belief driven motivation framework. Deci & Ryan (1985) note that "when one perceives oneself to be incompetent to achieve intended outcomes...amotivation results" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 72).

A second, related issue with conventional VIE logic is its assumption and projection of non-specific desire. Vroom (1964), for example, imagines people striving for desired instruments (certain performance, job, education, etc.) to leverage other desires (promotion, other job, increased pay, etc.), but does not address the antecedents of those personal objectives. Conventional VIE theory is not regulated by individual bases of desires. I believe this is a significant shortcoming, as subjective bases of desire must figure centrally in understanding motivation and behavioral choice.

Choice and Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation

The limitations of conventional expectancy theory reveal a gap where individual bases of motivation are lacking. By contrast, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are theories structured directly upon individual, subjective experience (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These closely related theories are defined and distinguished by personal motive. Behavior undertaken for its own sake (personal fulfillment, satisfaction, enjoyment, etc.) is intrinsically motivated. Behavior that is intended to satisfy an external compulsion (e.g. reward achievement) is extrinsically motivated.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are bifurcated by locus of causality, or the perception of freedom to choose one's own behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Where the locus of causality is internal, an individual perceives no regulation of choice and he/she will behave intrinsically, exclusively by his or her own desires. Extrinsic motivation is characterized by the perception of an external compulsion and, therefore, restriction of freedom of choice. The restriction of choice is subjective. It is a cognition experienced reflexively and uniquely by a given individual.

Relative individual perception is not well accounted for in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theory. The existence of euphoric feelings is typically submitted as telltale evidence of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). To this I offer a counterpoint: if a person is externally and continually required to undertake some activity, but then begins to cheerily enjoy the activity, are they engaging in the activity by their own desire? Do they continue to perceive the external requirement? If they lose perception of the external requirement during their moments of enjoyment, but then reacquire it, do they cease enjoyment of the activity? Where does the locus of causality reside? Is its position static? If they perceive the external requirement and enjoy the activity simultaneously, which describes the motivation: intrinsic or extrinsic?

Maslowian Motivation: Need-desire (Valence) and Capability (Instrumentality)

Does a person perceive a *desire* to act? Or does the person perceive a *need* to act? Such is the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The potential for conceptual and psychological overlap is considerable, if not complete. New research is beginning to acknowledge and investigate the blurriness between the two theories (Kwok, Chui, & Wong, 2013; Lazaric & Raybaut, 2014). However, the theoretical/philosophical backdrop for such research and findings has been in place for decades.

Maslow's (1943) thoughts on human motivation describe needs and desires as two sides of the same theoretical coin. His enduring hierarchy of needs is a typology of human motivational drives (all of which may be classified as either intrinsic or extrinsic) that are broadly categorized and arranged from primary to terminal. A person may be driven by a composition of these drives at a given time, with precedence among them staged accordingly: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization.

In his seminal paper, Maslow describes a person as a "perpetually wanting animal" that is driven by the need to self-actualize when all other needs are met (Maslow, 1943, p. 395). With respect to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (need and desire, respectively), self-actualization is a paradox. Intrinsically motivated behavior satisfies a desire for fulfillment in the self-actualization construct. Yet, self-actualization itself is classified as a need. This presents a rationale in which people are driven by the need of

desire. (Because desire is presented part-and-parcel of need, I will refer to the valence they collectively represent as need-desire.)

A Maslowian perspective on motivation also indicates which self-actualizing behaviors a person will undertake, and why.

A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man *can* be, he *must* be. This need we may call self-actualization. ... It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming. (Maslow, 1943, p. 382)

The need-desire valence is on full display in this excerpt. However, there is a subtle, yet clear and profound implication here. If people must endeavor that which they believe themselves capable, they will not endeavor that which they believe themselves *incapable*. Furthermore, if in the course of some endeavor, a person comes to believe him or herself incapable of the endeavor, a person will cease the endeavor.

In the Maslowian construct, then, a person's motivation is the product of their need-desire orientation, and their subjective assessment of capability. These concepts are common throughout motivation literature. With respect to intrinsic motivation, for example, Deci & Ryan (1985) refer to capability as competence. Because I have already borrowed the term "valence" from expectancy motivation theory to describe need-desire, I will refer to a person's subjective/perceived capability as their instrumentality.

VIE Reconstructed

Returning to a problem within expectancy theory that I noted previously, the Valence-Instrumentality-Expectancy framework omits the subjective experience of the individual. The theory projects an array of desires onto a person, and suggests that the person will determine by an unidentified schema that certain objectives are instrumental for acquiring other objectives. Maslow (1943), however, reframes motivation directly to the experience of an individual. In his theory, for example, instrumentality is not a quality of objective X to leverage objective Y, but rather it is the agent's perception of his/her own ability to achieve a particular objective.

Furthermore, a Maslowian perspective alters the expectancy element in VIE motivation. In conventional VIE theory, the expectancy element is an agent's belief that exerting a certain effort will result in a required level of performance. However, under Maslow (1943), performance expectancy is the product of the valence that a person associates with an objective, and the belief that he/she is capable of the endeavor (again, his/her instrumentality). Only when these two elements are satisfied (subjective valence and perceived instrumentality) will a person acquire a performance outcome expectancy.

With this Maslowian, person-centered understanding of instrumentality and expectancy, VIE theory may be reformulated. In conventional VIE theory, motivational force (M) is a product of valence, instrumentality, and expectancy ($M = V \times I \times E$). With instrumentality and expectancy recast in the Maslowian sense, $M = V \times I \times (V \times I)$. Therefore, $M = V^2 \times I^2$.

Implications

In a person-centered orientation, I have demonstrated that expectancy motivation is the product of the squares of the valence that a person associates with an outcome, and his/her perceived ability to achieve the outcome. This reformulation bears several implications.

First, expectancy motivation may be understood to be a strictly person-centered phenomenon. The basis of motivation resides exclusively in the perceptions of the individual. It is a function of a person's unique and shifting attributions of desire and competence at a given time. This suggests that motivation is as dynamic as an individual's interpretation of his or her environment, including self.

A second implication is that motivational force is, conceptually, rather muted. If we assume the measures of valence and instrumentality cannot exceed 1.0 (100%), the product of anything less than these theoretical maximums will yield motivational force that is disproportionately lower than the valence and instrumentality that produce it. Given that the reduction is further compounded by the squares of both valence and instrumentality, motivational impulse is highly tempered. This is consistent with the logic and overall restraint of human behavior. If people acted upon every consideration or desire, human social order would be lost to a sea of behavioral reflex.

A final implication for these purposes ties back into the launching point and backdrop of this article. Path-goal theory is distinguished among leadership theories for its incorporation of motivation as an essential component for understanding leadership. The person-centered expectancy model I formulated here modifies our understanding of path-goal leadership theory. Under traditional path-goal, focus is placed on the relationship that a leader develops with a follower in order to better understand and remove obstacles from the follower's achievement. The revised, person-centered expectancy model suggests that a successful leader will keenly orient followers to objectives they may not otherwise acquire, and enable them to believe themselves capable of achieving those objectives.

Conclusion

An understanding of human motivation unlocks leadership theory and allows for enhanced leader insight and ability. This is nowhere more important than in the arenas of education and education research. The objective of this article was to synthesize intrinsic, extrinsic, and Maslowian motivation in order to repurpose conventional expectancy theory to accommodate the subjective human experience. I am hopeful that the results satisfied this objective.

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