

# A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT WORK MOTIVATION



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*In hierdie artikel word 'n "teorie" van werksmotivering voorgestel wat beide kompleks en realistieser is as die twee-faktor teorie van Herzberg. Die belangrikste eienskappe van die teorie is: (a) motivering is die resultaat van die interaksie tussen 'n werknemer se opvatting aangaande sy eie bekwaamheid — die verband tussen sy bydrae en die verkryging van sekere belonings — en die waarde of belangrikheid wat aan hierdie belonings geheg word, en (b) bydrae is die resultaat van die interaksie tussen motivering, vermoë en rolpersepsie. Die praktiese implikasies van die teorie vir hoër motivering word bespreek.*

## INTRODUCTION

In my previous article, Herzberg's so-called 'two factor' theory of work motivation was hopefully given a decent burial. However, to prevent its resurrection, we need something to replace it. This is the aim of the present article, which summarizes a much better and more realistic theory than that of Herzberg, a theory which, in my opinion, should be understood by all personnel men. This theory, which forms the framework for my book *Productivity and Black Workers in South Africa* (1), has been tested with a variety of employees in this country and found to be generally valid, unlike Herzberg's over-simplified two-factor theory (2,3,4). Because the 'theory' has been proven in many studies, it should not be regarded as a model concocted by some academics, but rather as an accurate picture of how employees actually behave in the work situation. Hence, it deserves the close scrutiny of personnel managers. Amongst industrial psychologists (5) it has become known as the valence-expectancy theory (often called VIE theory, for short).

## WHAT VIE THEORY SAYS

1. An employee's motivation to perform — the level of effort he is prepared to expend — mainly depends on the following two employee beliefs: (i) the extent to which they believe that if they put forth effort they can perform well ( $E \rightarrow P$ ), and (ii) the extent to which they believe that if they perform well they will receive valued rewards. The first belief concerns the employee's level of self-competence, what they expect from themselves. Do they feel they are capable persons who can perform well if they want to? Or do they feel that no matter how hard they try, really effective performance is beyond them. The second belief itself depends on two more fundamental beliefs; these are (i) the degree of importance the employees attach to the various intrinsic and

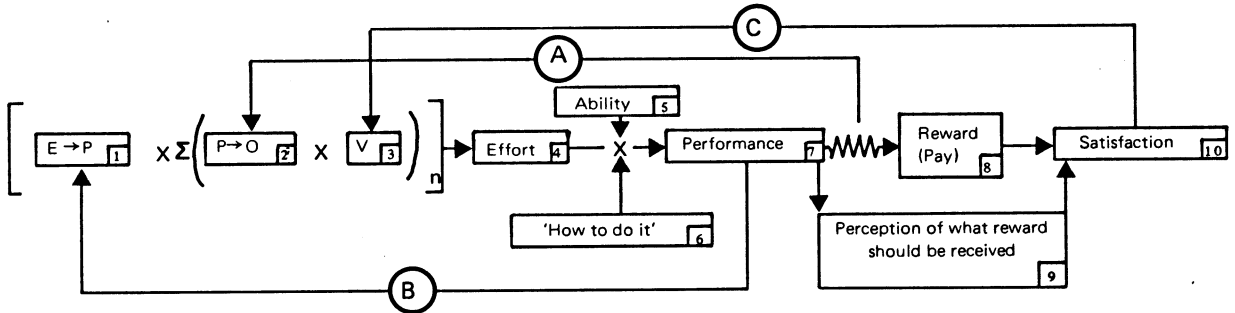
extrinsic rewards offered to them in the work situation, the degree to which they value rewards like pay, promotion, attention, and self-fulfilment (V), and (ii) the degree to which employees perceive that performing well will gain them these rewards — their perception of the performance-reward probability in their work situation ( $P \rightarrow O$ ). Do they feel that if they do a good job they will definitely receive certain rewards? Or do they feel that it makes no difference how they perform?

2. Employees will only be motivated to perform well if they believe in themselves sufficiently — if their effort-performance belief is strong — and if they both value the rewards offered and perceive them to be linked or tied to performance — if they feel there is something in it for them if they do a good job. It is important to note that these beliefs combine multiplicatively to cause or produce differences in motivation.

This means that motivation will be negligible if any of the three beliefs is weak or absent, no matter how strong the other two are. For example if a tribal black worker believes he can't perform well no matter how hard he tries (perhaps because he is forced to do an unfamiliar job) then he won't be motivated, even though he may value the rewards offered to him very highly and see a close relationship between doing a good job and getting these rewards. Similarly, if a westernized black worker believes in himself and values the rewards offered to him, but sees absolutely no relationship between working well and getting these rewards (perhaps because his company promotes and gives bonuses just for long service) then he won't be highly motivated.

It also means that these three beliefs are 'start up' factors that cause or produce variations in motivation, rather than vice-versa, in other words, that the effect of changes in these beliefs on motivation is stronger and more direct than the effect of changes in motivation on them.

## THE VIE MODEL OF WORK MOTIVATION



E → P: Effort – Performance Belief.  
 P → O: Performance – Outcome Belief.  
 V: Valence of Rewards

3. Let us assume that employees are motivated to perform well because they not only believe in themselves, but also value the various job rewards and see a close relation between performing well and getting these rewards. Will they then perform well? Not necessarily. As made clear in the diagram they will only do so if (i) they possess the necessary ability (skills, aptitudes) and (ii) they know exactly in what direction they must apply their efforts (accurate 'how to do it' perceptions). In addition, although it is not included in the diagram, the work situation, in so far as the various factors that are outside the control of individual employees, must help rather than hinder them doing a good job.

Ability is a function mainly of selecting the right man for the job and giving him the correct kind and amount of training. The holding of accurate 'how to do it' perceptions depends mainly on giving employees full, detailed, and valid information about the role they have to fill in the organization. Finally, whether those factors in the work situation that are outside the control of the individual employee like availability of raw material, and assistance from other employees, etc., facilitate effective performance or not, is mainly a function of managerial expertise.

Again, as in the case of the determinants of motivation, ability and 'how to do it' perceptions combine multiplicatively with effort to determine performance. This means that if any of these three factors is absent, performance will be poor, irrespective of the strength of the others. For instance, great amounts of effort cannot make up for little ability, or vice versa. Similarly, a lot of ability and effort cannot compensate for inaccurate role perceptions. All three factors, ability, accurate role perceptions and a facilitative work situation, must be present if effort or motivation is to be translated into effective performance.

4. Let us assume that an employee performs well. Will this make him satisfied? Again, only under certain circumstances, the most important of

which is whether the rewards the employee receives match or equal what he feels he should receive. If what an employee feels he should receive exceeds what he feels he actually receives, then he will be dissatisfied. This is a frequently occurring situation. However, if what an employee feels he should receive is somehow less than what he feels he actually receives, then he will probably feel guilty or experience discomfort. This situation arises when, for instance, a person feels overpaid. This is an unstable position which is usually removed by the employee increasing what he feels he should receive, usually either by comparing himself to more fortunate others or by working harder himself.

5. The theory regards satisfaction more as a feeling that flows from performance (if it is suitably rewarded) rather than an initial cause of effective performance. In this way, it is able to explain both when there is a strong relationship in a group of employees between satisfaction and performance and when this relationship is weak. As indicated by the wavy line in the diagram, the rewards that are given may be unrelated to how well the employees have performed. If this is the case, the good performers are likely to receive the same amount of rewards as the poor performers, but are likely to feel they should receive more. This means that the good performers are likely to be either more or just as dissatisfied as the poor performers, producing a negative or negligible relationship between job performance and satisfaction among the employees in this situation. On the other hand, if the rewards that are given are seen to be tied or linked to performance, then the good performers will presumably receive more valued rewards than the poor performers and should therefore be more satisfied than the latter, with the result that there should be a positive relation between job performance and satisfaction among the employees in this situation.

6. As shown in the diagram, VIE theory regards motivation, performance, and satisfaction as influencing each other and in turn as influenced by

each other. Hence, one must be careful in making statements that one factor causes another or is caused by it. All that we can safely say is that initially one variable seems to have a more causal influence on a second variable than vice versa.

For instance, the theory shows that whereas differences in motivation it may produce variations in performance, these variations in turn influence an employee's effort-performance belief and hence his subsequent level of motivation. In general, as shown in loop B, the better an employee's past performance, the stronger his effort-performance belief. In addition, although performance is shown to be capable of raising satisfaction directly under certain circumstances, satisfaction is also shown to be capable of influencing performance indirectly, largely through its impact on the valence or importance of rewards, which, as noted earlier, subsequently influences motivation (and hence performance). As a result it is incorrect to say that satisfaction is *never* a determinant of performance, even though its effect on performance is usually weaker than the effect of performance on it. In general, as shown in loop C, as an employee becomes more satisfied with his job (usually because he receives more rewards) the less importance he is likely to attach to these rewards. This is because their marginal capacity to gratify his needs tends to diminish as the individual receives more of them. Loop B indicates that the more closely rewards are tied to performance in fact, the stronger the employee's performance-reward belief and hence, other things being equal the greater his motivation and thus the better his performance.

7. Finally, VIE theory can explain both the results of the few studies which support predictions from Herzberg's 'two factor' theory *and* the results of the many studies which do not. If employees are motivated more by content factors than context factors, like Herzberg suggests, it is because rewards like responsibility and achievement are valued more by them and they associate these rewards with doing a good job. Most whites in high-level jobs seem to fall in this category. On the other hand, if employees are activated more by context factors than content ones, in contradiction to Herzberg's theory, it is because rewards like pay, promotion and working conditions are valued more by them and are seen to be linked or tied to performance. Blacks in low-level jobs seem to react mainly in this fashion.

According to Herzberg, favourable feelings towards context factors cannot generate feelings of job satisfaction. This is nonsense. As VIE theory makes clear, if an employee only expects rewards like pay, promotion and good working conditions for working well and gets them, he is likely to feel genuinely satisfied with his job. According to

Herzberg, an employee's attitude towards content factors do not affect his feelings of job dissatisfaction. Again, nonsense. As VIE theory indicates, if an employee feels he should receive rewards like responsibility and achievement and does not, he is likely to feel dissatisfied, the more so the greater the discrepancy between how much of these rewards he feels he should and does receive.

## IMPLICATIONS OF VIE THEORY

In the most general terms, the theory suggests that an employer must *simultaneously* do the following if he really wants to motivate his employees:

1. Train and select employees so that they possess the required ability.
2. Supply detailed job information so that employees hold accurate 'how to do it' perceptions.
3. Tie or link the intrinsic *and* extrinsic rewards to performance, so that the better performers receive more than the poorer performers, even if only slightly.
4. Provide intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that are genuinely valued or regarded as important by the employees.
5. Treat employees in such a way that they believe they can perform effectively if they want to.

The precise way in which these aims are best realized is difficult to specify — a lot depends on the precise circumstances in different enterprises. In fact a discussion of the best way of realizing any one of these aims requires a special article on its own, or at least a special chapter in a book (1). However, one thing is clear. Only if the personnel manager *understands* how the various factors interact to determine performance and satisfaction — as shown in VIE theory — will he be in a position to apply the various strategies and methods successfully. If he clings to dangerously over-simplified models like Herzberg's 'two factor' theory, his efforts will be doomed before he starts.

## REFERENCES

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