

WORK MOTIVATION 4



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This is episode 4 of the work motivation lecture series. In Lecture 1 we talked about drives, positive and negative affect, achievement motivation and power. In Lecture 2 we talked about our beliefs about our own performance, and our beliefs about the relationship between our efforts and rewards. In Lecture 3 we talked about Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and so on. Here we go on with Lecture 4.

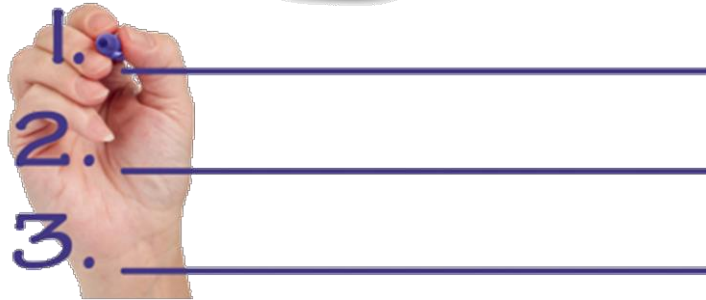
GOALS MOTIVATE

Locke and Latham's Goal-Setting Theory



Goals have the effect of directing attention and action (choice), mobilizing energy expenditure or effort, prolonging effort over time (persistence) and motivating the individual to develop relevant strategies (cognition). Given goal commitment, job performance improves because the goal provides a regulatory mechanism that allows the employee to observe, monitor, subjectively evaluate, and adjust job behavior in order to attain the goal. A lot of our understanding about how goals motivate behavior stems from another famous theory, which is Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory. The emphasis in goal-setting theory is on the core properties of an effective goal, namely specificity and difficulty level, as well as the mediators, namely direction, effort, persistence, and strategy, and the moderators, namely, ability, commitment, feedback, and situational constraints. Moreover, goal-setting research has focused on goal content (performance vs. learning) as well as on the method of setting goals (assigned, self, or participatively set). Our goal in this lecture is to focus on some of these factors and learn about their motivational properties.

GOAL SPECIFICITY



By the close of the 20th century, research had shown that setting specific goals increases performance on over 100 different tasks, involving more than 40,000 participants in at least eight countries. In short, goal setting was shown to be among the most valid and practical theories of employee motivation in organizational psychology. In one experiment, for instance, crews were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, namely a condition where the crews were assigned a specific high goal as to number of trees to cut down or a condition where they were urged to do their best to cut as many trees as possible. All the crews were paid on a piece-rate basis. Thus, the more trees they cut, the more money they made regardless of whether they were in the goal-setting or the do-your-best condition. Within a week, the productivity of the crews in the goal-setting condition as well as their job attendance was significantly higher than that of the crews in the do best condition. Why did this change in these two dependent variables occur so soon? Interviews revealed that people who were assigned goals immediately started bragging to one another as well as to family members as to their effectiveness as loggers. Goal setting had instilled in them a sense of purpose, challenge, and meaning into what had been perceived previously by them as a tedious and physically exhausting task. In short, goal pursuit and attainment led to enhanced task interest, pride in performance, and a heightened sense of personal effectiveness as well as an increase in pay. The problem with urging people to do their best, even when they are paid on a piece rate basis, is that they do not in fact do so. This exhortation is too vague, it is too abstract. There is no meaningful referent for evaluation of one's performance. Consequently, it is defined idiosyncratically. It allows for a wide range of performance levels that are acceptable to different people. Setting a specific high goal, in contrast, makes explicit for people what needs to be attained.

GOAL DIFFICULTY



Goals are proven to be an effective motivation tactic if difficulty is taken into consideration. They should be set high enough to encourage high performance but low enough to be attainable. When this grey area is achieved, goals are proven to be effective. If goals are set too high or too difficult then motivation and commitment suffer as a result. It is critical to note that a goal is simultaneously a target to strive to attain and a standard by which to evaluate the effectiveness of one's performance. Thus people with a high goal must perform at a higher level to become more satisfied than do those with an easy goal. Moreover, in the workplace, high performance typically leads to better outcomes - e.g. recognition, money, job advancement. In short, high goals not only require people to accomplish more in order for them to become satisfied, high goals also lead to more beneficial outcomes than easier ones.

STRATEGY & PROXIMAL VS DISTAL GOALS



Goal setting without adequate strategic knowledge is useless. A goal may affect choice, effort, and persistence, but the employee will not be able to attain the goal unless that individual knows how to do so. The converse is also true. Knowledge in the absence of goals is also useless to the extent that the person has no desire to take action, to make use of that knowledge. It is likely that learning goals - goals targeting mastery of a task - facilitate strategic thinking or metacognition, or control over one's cognitions. This involves enhanced planning, monitoring, and evaluating progress toward goal attainment. Skill in metacognition is particularly necessary in environments with little or no external structure or guidance. Learning goals appear to prompt people to generate solutions to an impasse, implement them, and monitor their effectiveness. Furthermore, a distal goal that includes proximal goals is more motivating than a distal goal alone. Distal meaning further away and proximal meaning closer by, so distal goals can be thought of as the bigger aims and proximal goals as the sub-goals. In another experiment, setting a specific high distal outcome goal resulted in profits that were significantly worse than urging the students to do their best. But when proximal outcome goals were set in addition to the distal outcome goal, self-efficacy as well as profits were significantly higher than in the other two conditions. This is because in highly dynamic situations, it is important to actively search for feedback and react quickly to it. In addition, performance errors on a dynamic task are often due to deficient decomposition of a goal into proximal goals. Proximal goals can increase what Frese and Zapf labeled error management. Errors provide information to employees as to whether their picture of reality is congruent with goal attainment. There is an increase in informative feedback when proximal or subgoals are set relative to setting a distal goal only. On top of being informative, the setting of proximal goals can also be motivational relative to a distal goal that is set for performance attainments far into the future. Moreover, the attainment of proximal goals can increase commitment, through a person's enactive mastery. At the same time proximal goals may have no direct effect on performance, but they do so indirectly by increasing the number of strategies people discovered. And to add another relationship to the mix, individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely than those with low self-efficacy to discover and implement task-relevant strategies.

SPECIFIC GOALS → POOR STRATEGIES

In a simulation of air traffic control where the acquisition of ability had yet to occur, Kanfer and Ackerman found that urging people to do their best resulted in higher performance than the setting of a specific high performance goal. This is because a specific high performance goal imposes greater attentional demands on people when they are in a learning mode than is the case with a do best goal. Effective performance on tasks that are complex for people requires not only effort, but the discovery of appropriate task strategies. In addition, contrary to expectations, multiple performance trials over a three day period did not lead to the acquisition of appropriate task knowledge when a specific high performance goal was set. In fact, setting a specific high performance goal detracted from the effectiveness of the search for an effective strategy. In focusing on goal attainment, people appeared to be spending more time thinking about how to perform well rather than actually performing well. Worse, the dysfunctional effects of a specific high goal increased over the three-day period while the performance of those with do best goals became increasingly better. The mediating variable that explained this finding is strategy. Individuals who had a specific difficult goal to attain consistently switched strategies relative to their counterparts who had been asked to do their best. This finding highlights the difference between mindlessly changing strategies versus searching systematically for effective ones. A goal to do one's best led to the discovery of strategies that were effective rather than a mad scramble to try different ways of attaining a specific goal. Thus, the setting of a specific high performance goal actually interfered with the processing of information and learning due to people constantly jumping from one strategy to another, strategies that were neither useful nor necessary. Using a complex task involving the scheduling of college courses, it was found that urging people to do their best led to higher performance than setting a specific high performance goal. However, it was also found that when a specific high learning goal is set in terms of discovering a specific number of ways to implement the scheduling task, it led to the highest performance. This is because a learning goal draws attention from the end result. It requires people to focus instead on understanding the task that is required of them, and developing a plan for performing it correctly. High performance is not always the result of sheer effort or persistence. It is also the result of cognitive understanding of the task, as well as the strategy or plan necessary for completing it. When behavioral routines have yet to be developed, a specific high learning goal focuses attention on systematic problem solving and ultimately high performance. Hence, relative to a performance goal, a specific high learning goal increases the probability that a correct process or procedure will be discovered, mastered, and implemented. In such instances, commitment to a learning goal is likely to be higher than for a performance goal as a result of goal intensity, namely the amount of thought or effort that goes into formulating a plan of action required of the former relative to the latter. Consistent with goal-setting theory, a specific high learning goal leads to higher performance than urging people to do their best because it provides a standard by which they can monitor, evaluate, and, if necessary, modify their performance. A variation of a learning goal is one that is qualitative. On the basis of their findings from two laboratory experiments, Staw and Boettger concluded that assigning a specific performance outcome goal can be damaging to an organization when a leader lacks the requisite knowledge to do so appropriately. In such cases, they recommended formulating the goal in vague terms, such as to do your best. Doing so, they said, would likely free knowledgeable subordinates to question and subsequently revise the task more so than they would if the goal were highly specific, yet the wrong one. Locke agreed with their conclusion. On the basis of a subsequent set of laboratory experiments, however, Locke and Kirkpatrick found that an even more effective method is to make task revision an explicit qualitative goal, that is, specifically instruct people to challenge the assumptions underlying a given assignment, and to revise it where it is appropriate to do so. People told to do so had higher performance than those who were merely urged to do their best.

FEEDBACK – POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

Feedback and goal setting are interrelated. The effect of feedback on performance is mediated by goal setting. That is, feedback leads to an improvement in performance only to the extent that it leads to the setting of specific high goals. Feedback, however, is a moderator of goal setting. The increase in performance over time increases more in the presence rather than the absence of feedback regarding goal attainment. In short, goals and feedback consistently work better together than either one does alone. Seeking feedback is important because it increases the likelihood of goal setting, which, in turn, increases quality and quantity of performance. The processing of feedback involves monitoring the environment in an automatic preconscious fashion through visual, auditory, and relational cues. Significant changes in the environment, or in the preconscious monitored cues themselves, may cause a shift to the conscious seeking of feedback, and the conscious evaluation of the costs and benefits of doing so. Having sought feedback, and resolving uncertainty associated with the interruption, a person returns to the automatic processing of information. Unsolicited feedback is often discarded. But, as the perceived value of feedback increases, people usually seek it actively and frequently. There are at least three primary motives for why a person seeks feedback: (1) Instrumental to attain a goal and perform well, (2) egobased to defend or enhance one's ego, and (3) image based to protect or enhance the impression others have of oneself. Only the first, instrumental feedback seeking on the part of the person, is likely to enhance future performance. Seeking negative feedback creates an image of one's effectiveness. This is because managers who do so are viewed as attentive to and caring of the opinion of others. Showing a preference for only positive feedback hurts the image of a manager in the eyes of others. Context, personality, and self-efficacy have been shown to moderate the positive effects of feedback. With regard to context, societal culture affects the type of feedback that is sought. In individualistic cultures where most people want to "stand out," feedback regarding one's successes is more frequently sought than feedback regarding failures. The opposite is true in collectivist societies where the emphasis for most people is to find ways of "fitting in". This can be explained on the basis of different motives of self with regard to self-enhancement vs. self-improvement. Individual differences in self-esteem, task vs. ego focus, promotion vs. prevention focus, and performance vs. a learning goal orientation have also been investigated in terms of their moderating effect on feedback. A feedback source that is perceived as supportive increases feedback seeking. Nevertheless, people with low self-esteem often lack the desire to seek negative feedback for fear that it may corroborate their negative self-appraisal. Kluger and DeNisi conducted a meta-analysis which shows that the effect of feedback on performance is variable. In fact, they found that 38% of feedback interventions had negative effects on a person's performance. However, feedback sign (positive vs. negative) was not shown to be a moderator of the effect of feedback on an individual's performance. They proposed that task focused individuals who receive feedback are likely to allocate their cognitive resources to the task, whereas ego involved people allocate their cognitive resources to themselves. In the latter case, this decreases the potential for future task success following the feedback the person receives. Context can be helpful in masking the effect of this personality variable, task vs. ego focused. Heimbeck and others found that error management instructions (e.g., "I have made an error. Great!") helps to keep the person's attention on the task and away from self. This is true for tasks where the feedback provides information on factors that are under the control of trainees so that their understanding of what is required of them increases. This is because errors can enhance one's mental model of a task by leading to new insights and creative solutions. By minimizing opportunities to make errors, the initial benefit of specific feedback decreases. People fail to learn how to correct errors. They fail to learn how to be resilient, subsequent to ineffective performance, through systematic exploration. The more systematic a person is in the exploration process, the less confusing the information obtained, and the more beneficial the feedback for performance. Individuals with a learning goal orientation are able to put negative feedback into perspective, and quickly rebound from any distress that it initially causes them. Frese and his colleagues have shown that people can be easily taught, through instructions, to embrace negative feedback by framing errors as beneficial to the learning process, and to be resilient, subsequent to making an error, through systematic exploration. However, negative feedback is only beneficial when the difference between a person's performance and goal is relatively small. Repeated or extreme negative feedback leads many people to give up. People typically lower their goal following feedback they perceive to be negative; they increase their goal when they feel that the feedback is positive. The mediator is affect. It influences a person's subsequent goals and performance through the emotions that are experienced. Positive affectivity has an energetic arousal component (e.g., interest, enthusiasm) that increases optimism regarding the attainment of a subsequently assigned goal. Part of this is also likely to be mediated by an employee's self-efficacy.

SMART GOALS



Another popular list of important goal factors is SMART, which is often targeted for the managerial level. S.M.A.R.T. is an acronym for the 5 steps of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based goals. It's a simple tool used by businesses to go beyond the realm of fuzzy goal-setting into an actionable plan for results. Specific: This one we have already discussed - great goals are well-defined and focused. "Obtain 2 new million dollar corporate clients in the Boston property insurance market" is more meaningful than "Get more business." Focus creates a powerful force: goal power. The moment you focus on a goal, your goal becomes a magnet, pulling you and your resources toward it. The more focused your energies, the more power you generate. Measurable: A goal without a measurable outcome is like a sports competition without a scoreboard or scorekeeper. Numbers are an essential part of business. Put concrete numbers in your goals to know if you're on track. A goal white board posted in your office can help as a daily reminder to keep yourself and your employee focused on the targeted results you want to attain. Attainable: This relates to goal difficulty or setting high goals. Far too often, small businesses can set goals beyond reach. Relevant and Realistic: Within the availability of resources, knowledge and time. You may have heard that 80 percent of worker productivity comes from only 20 percent of their activities. You can guess where the other 80 percent of work activity ends up. But this criterion also stresses the importance of choosing goals that matter. A bank manager's goal to "Make 50 peanut butter sandwiches by 2:00pm" may be specific, measurable, attainable, and time-bound, but lacks relevance. Time-Based: goals and objectives just don't get done when there's no time frame tied to the goal-setting process. Whether your business goal is to increase revenue by 20% or find 5 new clients, choose a time-frame to accomplish your goal.

KEY POINTS

Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory emphasizes the importance of setting specific goals which should be difficult enough, but not too difficult
Complicated tasks require a good strategy for success while specific goals may get in the way of strategy-making
Negative feedback done right is good for error management

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