
MOTIVATION AND MOTIVATIONAL PROCESS: THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND HUMAN ACTION

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Abstract

Motivation, often described as the inner drive that initiates, directs, and sustains human behavior, lies at the core of individual performance, decision-making, and goal attainment. This paper explores the intricate nature of motivation and the motivational process as the foundational mechanisms behind human action. Drawing on key psychological theories—ranging from Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory to Self-Determination and Expectancy Theories—the study examines how internal and external stimuli influence behavior across various contexts, including education, the workplace, and everyday life. It further analyzes the cyclical process of motivation, from need recognition and goal formation to action and feedback, emphasizing the role of cognition, emotion, and reward in sustaining effort. The paper provides a holistic understanding of motivation as a dynamic and multifaceted force, offering practical implications for leaders, educators, policymakers and individuals seeking to optimize performance and well-being.

Keywords: Motivation, Motivation Theories, Employees Performance, & Human Relations

Introduction

Motivation is the invisible force that drives human behavior, shaping aspirations, choices, and accomplishments. It is the spark that transforms thoughts into action, guiding individuals toward success, fulfillment, and resilience in the face of challenges. Across diverse domains—from workplaces to education, sports to social environments—motivation serves as an essential ingredient for maintaining high morale and cultivating a thriving atmosphere.

At its core, motivation is not merely about incentives or external rewards; it is a psychological and emotional process that fuels determination. It answers fundamental questions: What drives people to persevere? How do they sustain enthusiasm even in difficult circumstances? What makes some individuals highly engaged while others remain indifferent? These inquiries

underline the significance of motivation in human psychology and organizational effectiveness.

Understanding motivation requires dissecting its origins, mechanisms, and impact. Psychologists and behavioral scientists have proposed various theories to explain human motivation, each contributing valuable insights into what energizes individuals. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests that human motivation follows a structured pattern, moving from basic survival needs to higher-order aspirations. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory differentiates between hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction and motivators that enhance engagement. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) highlights autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of sustained motivation.

Beyond theoretical perspectives, the motivational process encompasses a

cyclical journey: the recognition of a need, goal setting, taking action, and receiving reinforcement. Whether in corporate settings, classrooms, or personal growth endeavors, motivation directly influences morale—the collective confidence, optimism, and enthusiasm of individuals and teams, high morale fosters commitment, productivity, and a sense of belonging, while poor morale results in disengagement, burnout, and inefficiency.

The interplay between motivation and morale is a defining factor in leadership effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and organizational success. A leader who understands motivation can inspire teams, cultivate positive workplace culture, and harness collective potential. Similarly, individuals who grasp their own motivational triggers can navigate life's challenges with resilience, finding purpose in their pursuits.

This article delves deep into motivation and the motivational process, uncovering the intricate dynamics that shape morale. It explores theories, mechanisms, and practical applications, offering insights into how motivation can be strategically harnessed to enhance morale across various domains. By bridging psychological principles with real-world strategies, the discussion aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of motivation as the foundation of personal and professional fulfillment.

Understanding Motivation

Motivation is the psychological mechanism that initiates, guides, and sustains human behavior toward achieving specific goals. It is essential in shaping personal ambitions, professional achievements, and social interactions. The study of motivation helps individuals, organizations, and societies

enhance performance, engagement, and overall well-being.

Motivation is typically classified into two categories: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic Motivation originates from within an individual. It is driven by personal satisfaction, curiosity, or the inherent joy of engaging in an activity. Ryan and Deci (2000) explain that intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in fostering creativity, persistence, and deep engagement. People who are intrinsically motivated participate in activities because they find them rewarding, not because of external incentives. Examples include pursuing a passion, learning a new skill, or engaging in creative expression.

Extrinsic Motivation, unlike intrinsic motivation, is influenced by external factors such as rewards, recognition, social expectations, or fear of punishment. Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that extrinsic motivation can be effective in goal-driven environments, such as workplaces, education systems, and competitive fields. Common examples include working for a paycheck, studying to receive high grades, or participating in activities for public recognition. While intrinsic motivation is often associated with personal fulfillment and long-term engagement, extrinsic motivation is useful for achieving specific objectives and compliance within structured environments. A balance of both forms of motivation can lead to sustained performance and psychological satisfaction.

Exegesis of Motivation Theories

Several theories provide insight into the nature of motivation and its effects on behavior. These theories serve as frameworks for understanding how individuals respond to various stimuli

and what drives their actions. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) suggests that human motivation operates within a hierarchical structure, progressing through different levels of needs: Physiological Needs (basic survival necessities such as food, water, and shelter), Safety Needs (Protection from harm, financial security, health, and stability); Social Needs (love, belongingness, relationships, and social connection); Esteem Needs (Recognition, self-respect, and status within a community); and Self-Actualization (Achieving one's full potential, personal growth, and creativity). Maslow proposed that individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before progressing to higher-level aspirations. This model is widely used in leadership, psychology and human development studies.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959) divides motivation into two categories, namely: Hygiene Factors and Motivators. Hygiene Factors are factors prevent dissatisfaction but do not necessarily motivate individuals (e.g., salary, job security, work conditions). The Motivators are elements that directly enhance motivation and satisfaction, such as recognition, achievement and responsibility. Herzberg's theory is particularly relevant in workplace settings, where understanding the distinction between hygiene factors and motivators helps in designing effective employee engagement strategies.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) emphasizes three fundamental psychological needs that drive motivation: Autonomy (the need for independence and control over one's actions; competence (the need to excel, develop skills, and master challenges); and relatedness (the need for social connections and meaningful relationships). When these needs are

fulfilled, individuals experience intrinsic motivation, leading to improved performance, creativity and psychological well-being.

Motivation is thus, a dynamic and multifaceted concept that influences human behavior across all aspects of life. Whether intrinsic or extrinsic, motivation serves as a powerful driver that shapes aspirations, productivity, and morale. By applying motivational theories, individuals and organizations can create environments that foster enthusiasm, resilience, and sustained success.

Motivational Process

Motivation is not a random occurrence—it follows a structured process that governs how individuals identify their needs, take action, and sustain their efforts toward achieving goals. Understanding this cycle is essential for leaders, educators, managers, and individuals aiming to foster high performance and morale. The motivational process consists of four fundamental steps, each playing a crucial role in shaping motivation and guiding behavior. These steps are examined as follows:

Need Recognition: Identifying a Desire or Deficiency

The first step in the motivational process is the recognition of a need. Needs could arise from biological, psychological, or social factors, driving individuals to seek solutions. McClelland (1961) classified human needs into three main categories: achievement needs—a desire for personal growth, success, and mastery of a skill; affiliation needs—the need for relationships, social connection, and acceptance; and power needs—a drive to influence, lead, or take control of situations. When individuals become aware of a deficiency in one of these areas, motivation is triggered, prompting

them to seek ways to address it. For example, an employee who feels undervalued may develop the need for recognition and career advancement, initiating their motivation to strive for success.

Goal Setting: Creating Clear, Achievable Objectives

Once a need is recognized, individuals move toward establishing specific and measurable goals to fulfill that need. Locke and Latham (1990) introduced the Goal-Setting Theory, emphasizing that well-defined goals significantly enhance motivation. Effective goal-setting follows principles such as: clarity—goals should be specific and easy to understand; challenge—they should be ambitious but attainable, fostering engagement; commitment—individuals should feel emotionally invested in their goals; feedback—regular evaluation helps track progress; and task complexity—goals should align with the individual's ability and capacity. For instance, an athlete striving for peak performance sets goals related to training, nutrition, and competitive benchmarks. The presence of a clear target motivates individuals to remain focused and committed to the process.

Action and Effort: Engaging in Behavior to Fulfill the Need

Motivation turns into action when individuals take steps toward their goals. This phase involves sustained effort, decision-making, and overcoming obstacles. Behavioral psychologists highlight that self-regulation and persistence play vital roles in maintaining motivation during the action phase (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). Key factors influencing action and effort include: the belief in one's ability to achieve desired outcomes (self-efficacy) (Bandura, 1986); supportive surroundings, access to resources, and encouragement (environmental

influences); and the ability to stay motivated despite setbacks (emotional resilience). For example, students preparing for an exam must manage their time effectively, stay disciplined, and push through challenges to succeed. Their ability to remain motivated depends on self-belief, external encouragement and strategic effort.

Feedback & Adjustment: Reinforcement and Continuous Improvement

The final step in the motivational process involves evaluating progress, receiving feedback and making necessary adjustments. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986) suggests that people learn and improve their motivation through reinforcement mechanisms, which can be Positive Feedback— recognition, rewards, or encouragement reinforce motivation; and negative feedback—constructive criticism or failure prompts adjustments and new strategies. Through feedback, individuals refine their approach, develop new strategies, and stay on track toward their goals. In professional settings, managers provide regular performance evaluations to employees, helping them stay motivated and improve their efficiency.

Motivation as a Recipe for Promoting Morale

Morale, often described as the collective enthusiasm, confidence, and engagement of individuals within a group or organisation, is deeply intertwined with motivation. When people feel motivated, they exhibit higher levels of energy, commitment, and resilience, leading to improved performance, collaboration, and overall satisfaction. Motivation is the driving force behind morale, influencing individual attitudes, workplace dynamics, and group cohesion.

Studies suggest that high morale within organisations and teams leads to increased productivity, lower turnover rates, and a more positive environment (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Employees who feel valued and motivated demonstrate greater dedication to their work, stronger interpersonal relationships, and a willingness to go beyond expectations. Conversely, low morale results in disengagement, decreased efficiency, and a negative atmosphere that hinders progress.

To enhance motivation and consequently, improve morale, leaders, educators, and managers can implement several strategies. One of the most effective ways to boost motivation and morale is through recognition and reward. Human behavior is strongly influenced by reinforcement—individuals tend to repeat actions that lead to positive outcomes. In workplaces, schools, and social settings, acknowledging accomplishments reinforces motivation, fostering a culture of achievement. Key approaches include performance-based Incentives—bonuses, promotions, and other tangible rewards encourage effort and commitment; public recognition—highlighting achievements in team meetings or social events boosts confidence and encourages continued motivation; and non-monetary rewards—flexible work schedules, extra time off, or professional development opportunities can serve as meaningful incentives. By implementing structured recognition systems, organizations and teams cultivate an environment of motivation and high morale, reinforcing a cycle of excellence.

Empowerment and Autonomy is another way to boost motivation. For Pink (2009), autonomy is a fundamental component of intrinsic motivation. He argues that when people are given control over their decisions and

responsibilities, they feel a stronger sense of ownership and engagement. Empowering individuals leads to increased job satisfaction, heightened confidence, and overall morale improvement. Strategies for fostering autonomy include: Delegating Responsibilities—allowing individuals to take charge of projects or tasks enhances their commitment and creativity; flexible work environments—remote work options or adaptable schedules grant individuals greater control over their workflow; and encouraging initiative—supporting new ideas and independent problem-solving builds a culture of motivation and innovation. Empowering individuals promotes intrinsic motivation, reducing reliance on external rewards while enhancing long-term engagement and morale.

In addition, a major factor influencing motivation and morale is the opportunity for continuous learning and growth. People are naturally driven to develop new skills, expand their knowledge and advance their careers—when individuals feel stagnant, motivation declines, leading to reduced morale and disengagement. To support growth and development, organisations and leaders can provide educational workshops, encourage career progression, and support personal development. By fostering an environment of continuous learning, organizations ensure individuals remain motivated, engaged, and enthusiastic about their roles.

Motivation thus, serves as the foundation for high morale, shaping individual and group engagement across workplaces, teams, and social settings. Recognition, empowerment and continuous growth are essential strategies for fostering motivation, ultimately leading to improved morale, productivity, and overall satisfaction.

Whether in professional environments or personal development initiatives, understanding the link between motivation and morale provides a powerful framework for sustained success.

Practical Applications: Cultivating and Sustaining Motivation

Motivation is not an abstract concept—it is a driving force that can be actively nurtured and applied in various settings. Whether in leadership, personal growth, or organisational dynamics, strategic interventions can enhance motivation, ultimately promoting high morale and sustained performance. The following approaches offer practical ways to cultivate motivation in individuals and teams:

Leadership Practices: Inspiring Motivation through Transformational Leadership

Effective leadership plays a critical role in fostering motivation, especially in organizational and team settings. Transformational leadership, as described by Bass (1990), has proven to be one of the most impactful approaches for enhancing morale and driving motivation. This leadership style revolves around visionary guidance, which involves inspiring followers by presenting a compelling vision of the future; personalized mentoring, which meant that leaders provide individualized support, recognising the unique strengths and aspirations of each team member; encouraging innovation; and empowering followers. By fostering autonomy and responsibility, leaders cultivate intrinsic motivation within individuals. Studies indicate that employees led by transformational leaders exhibit higher job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment to organisational goals (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Leaders who adopt this approach can boost motivation in their teams by

fostering a positive and growth-oriented environment.

Personal Development Strategies: Strengthening Self-Motivation

Motivation in personal development is deeply rooted in self-awareness, goal-setting, and mental resilience. Goleman (1995) emphasizes that emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in sustaining motivation, enabling individuals to navigate challenges effectively. Key strategies include:

1. **Goal-Setting Techniques:** Setting clear, actionable, and realistic goals enhances focus and motivation (Locke & Latham, 1990). The SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) framework helps individuals design effective objectives.
2. **Optimism and Positive Thinking:** Cultivating a growth mindset and focusing on possibilities rather than limitations reinforces persistence.
3. **Self-Regulation and Discipline:** Developing habits that align with personal goals and values strengthens intrinsic motivation. Regular reflection and self-assessment improve adaptability and commitment.
4. **Continuous Learning:** Engaging in lifelong learning and skill-building sustains motivation by fostering a sense of accomplishment and intellectual stimulation.

By integrating these personal development strategies, individuals can maintain motivation over time, leading to sustained success and fulfillment in their pursuits.

Workplace Initiatives: Building a Motivational Culture

Organisational success is directly linked to employee motivation and morale. Companies and institutions must establish policies and practices that foster a motivating environment. Some effective workplace initiatives include:

- a. **Encouraging Teamwork and Collaboration:** A supportive, cooperative environment enhances motivation by creating a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Team-oriented projects and joint problem-solving efforts reinforce morale.
- b. **Fostering Inclusivity and Diversity:** Recognising and appreciating diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and skill sets enhances engagement. Inclusive workplaces lead to higher motivation and better overall productivity.
- c. **Creating a Positive Work Environment:** Physical workspace design, flexible work arrangements, and mental wellness programs contribute to a motivating atmosphere. Employees who feel comfortable and valued are more likely to stay engaged and committed.
- d. **Recognition and Rewards Systems:** Acknowledging achievements through praise, incentives and career advancement opportunities reinforces motivation and job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1959). Organisations that prioritise these initiatives tend to experience higher employee retention, improved job performance, and a culture of innovation. Leaders and managers must proactively implement motivational strategies to sustain workforce enthusiasm and drive.

Motivation is not static—it can be cultivated, reinforced, and sustained through strategic approaches. Whether through transformational leadership,

personal development, or organisational initiatives, motivation serves as a foundation for morale, productivity and success. By integrating these practical applications, individuals and teams can navigate challenges with resilience and continue striving toward their aspirations.

Conclusion

Motivation is the driving force that propels individuals and organizations toward success, shaping aspirations, engagement, and performance. Understanding the motivational process provides a structured approach to fostering morale, ensuring that people remain inspired, committed, and fulfilled in their pursuits. Whether in the workplace, educational institutions, sports teams, or personal development initiatives, the ability to harness motivation effectively translates into sustained productivity, higher satisfaction, and overall well-being.

Applying psychological principles—such as goal-setting, autonomy, reinforcement and continuous learning—creates an environment where motivation flourishes. When individuals feel motivated, they exhibit enthusiasm, resilience, and a proactive mindset, leading to stronger relationships, improved efficiency, and greater contributions to their communities. Leaders who prioritise motivation cultivate teams that are innovative, dedicated, and adaptable, reinforcing a cycle of success and morale. Motivation is more than a fleeting emotion—it is a cultivated mindset that, when nurtured, leads to transformative results. By integrating motivation-enhancing strategies into daily practices, individuals and organisations can create an enduring culture of empowerment, inspiration and achievement, ensuring long-term growth and fulfillment.

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