Motivation: A Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

As researchers continue in their quest to find dynamics between human and motivation, this article intend to provide some reviews on the published works in human motivation. Motivation is a desire that elicits certain behaviour (Steers, Porter, & Bigley, 1996). It is an inner state or condition that gives direction by stimulating behavioural responses (McClelland, 1998). Although motivation has been defined in varieties of way, there are three qualities that are most often included in the definition; (a) it is an inner power, (b) it inspires action, and (c), it regulates action and behaviours (Russell, 1971). Over the years, various theories have emerged in relation to human and motivation. In this article, discussion was done on some of the most significant theories of motivations available over the years. Selective qualitative reviews on previous motivational theories, published researches, book chapters and special issues of journal on human and motivation were done. It can be concluded that motivation is an important attributes in human being, either for personal or work life. With motivation, human could achieve many tasks and goals that are important in life. Thus, it is believed that more research in human motivation should be done to foster stronger motivation in human that can benefit in increasing work performance and personal accomplishment. This article highlighted future directions that may promote our understanding on human motivation. This article only manages to review articles that are available online. Hence, this review is limited to the online availability of the resources.

Keywords: Motivation, determination, motivational attributes.

1.0 Introduction

In life, there are individuals who worked hard and are ambitious, be it in school or in work, while there are others who simply live life idly. Some may wonder why some individuals
put in more effort in life compared to the others. The answer lies is the individual’s motivation. Motivation is known as an aspiration that produces certain behaviour. It is defined as an inner state that gives direction by encouraging appropriate behavioural reactions (David C. McClelland, 1998). Motivation is a power from the inside that stimulates an act and control the course of an act (Russell, 1971). Motivation is related to interest, relevance, expectancies and believes on the outcomes, decision to be involved, and persistence (Baker, 2011). Motivation could be resembled as an essential ingredient of a food. Without the ingredient, the food cannot be produced. Motivation is a boost that influences human to take an action in achieving a goal. It stimulates the desires to achieve success, and thus, it induces the needed behaviour in order to achieve a certain target. This shows that motivation is a very important attributes in individual to achieve success in life.

2.0 Theories on Motivation

There are many theories on motivation. Among the very first theory on motivation is the Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1954) suggested a pyramid system known as needs hierarchy that consist five division of motives starting from the bottom-level needs that is a prerequisite to be fulfilled before moving on to the higher-level needs. Through this pyramid, it is believed that human should first fulfil their physiological needs such as food, water, and shelter. These needs are essential to keep us living. When these physiological needs are met, human will make the appropriate action to fulfil the next need, which is the safety needs. The safety needs includes financial and life security, which can be obtained through work, living in a safe environment and financial planning. Once the safety needs are met, human moves to the third stage in the pyramid, that is social needs. Social needs refer to love, acceptance and the sense of belonging. These needs could be fulfilled through bonding with family members, friends, and colleagues. The next stage is the esteem needs, in which, individual cultivate the own self-conception and worthiness. There are six principal of esteem needs, which are; the practice of living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully and personal integrity (Branden, 1995). The social and esteem needs are essential for our psychological well-being. When the esteem needs is met, an individual will pursue the highest stage in the Maslow’s pyramid, which is the self-actualization. In this stage, an individual will pursue their desire to become anything he or she aims to be, based on their
ability, potential, capacities and talents. However, Maslow believed that this highest level of needs could only be achieved when all the previous needs have been fulfilled. However, Alderfer (1972) suggested that these needs can be classified into three categories, in which, he suggested that the physiological needs and the safety needs could be categorized as the existence needs. While the social needs and external esteem could be classified into the relatedness needs. Whereas, the internal esteem and self-actualization could be categorized as the growth needs. Contrary to the Maslow’s theory, in his ERG theory, Alderfer believes that all these needs can be satisfied simultaneously, without the necessity to satisfy the lower-order needs first, before moving on the next needs.

The next influential theory on motivation is the McClelland’s Needs theory. David C. McClelland (1961) suggested that human desires were influenced by the society their living in and also from their own experience, particularly earlier in life. Through his theory, he proposed three categories of motivational needs, which are the Needs for Achievement (nAch), Needs for Power (nPow), and Needs for Affiliation (nAff). Individual with high nAch tends to work harder and focus more on achieving goal that they have set for themselves. They believed on setting high personal responsibility on their course of action. Meanwhile, those with high nPow yearn to be in the higher and influential position, in which, they could have control over others. They have high desire to influence others and lead a prestigious life. Whereas, those with high nAff, prefer to have a good relationship with those around them, and yearn to get others’ approval. NAff individuals prefer to have a strong sense of belonging in their team or group and avoid conflicts. It is believed that all individuals have a combination of all these three motivators. However, each of us will have a higher tendency on either one of these motivators. This tendency will affect individual’s choices in work and life. It will also have strong influence on individual’s motivational attributes (Steers, Mowday, & Shapiro, 2004).

Aside from the theories discussed above, Herzberg’s (1966) hygiene theory is among the influential theories in motivation too. Herzberg’s theory is also known as the two-factor theory. In this theory, the focus is more on the practical approach towards motivating employees. Herzberg believes that job satisfaction depends on two different factors, that is motivators (satisfiers) and hygiene factor (dissatisfiers). Motivator is the factors that could satisfy individuals in their working environment. Factors that act as the motivators are accomplishment, recognition, job security and career advancement. These factors, when met, will results in
higher satisfaction and strong commitment in employees at the workplace. Whereas, hygiene factor, when unmet, would cause dissatisfaction in the workplace. Among the dissatisfiers are the salary, company policy, working environment, the quality of supervision and interpersonal relationships. The hygiene and motivators are distinct factors between each other. Therefore, to build a conducive working environment, special attention should be given to both factors. This is to ensure job satisfaction is kept to the highest among the workers.

All the above theories have contributed to the recent development in motivational studies. The recent findings are discussed below.

2.1 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Over the years, researchers realized that motivation can be classified into two types, which are the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivational behaviour is considered as a motivation to do certain tasks for the joy of doing the task itself. Intrinsically motivated individual do certain activity with no obligation or any apparent reward except for the feeling of accomplishment in doing the activity itself. Individuals with intrinsic motivation will challenge themselves by developing skills and capacities to fulfil their own sense of achievement. Therefore, when they do any activity, the motivation will come from their own self-determination, which is achieved by stimulating and persuading themselves by saying, “That’s interesting, “I like to do” or “I enjoy doing that” (Reeve, 2014). Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation refers to doing a task due to the outside effect and environmental incentives such as food, money and recognition from others, or for fears of punishment if the task is not done. Individuals with high extrinsic motivation tend to do an activity in order to achieve the reward. Therefore, they will only be motivated if the task is followed by a reward or incentives, be it in the material, or in verbal form. Although, intrinsic motivation seems to be more important to human, and indeed it is, the extrinsic motivation is important too. While, the intrinsically motivated individuals tend to be more successful in life as they are more determined in doing tasks and in achieving their goals; the extrinsically motivated individuals can be persuaded to do tasks in which they have no interest at. Individuals will be obligated to go to work every day in order to earn money to buy food and meet their psychological needs. Extrinsic motivation could also lead to personal well-being. For example, the desire to lose weight and maintain a healthy body might increase individual’s motivation to do exercises. Therefore, both the intrinsic and
extrinsic motivation is important to individuals.

The findings from studies of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have shed some light on the importance of using both types of motivation in the academic situation. Next is the discussion on the importance of motivation in the academic setting.

3.0 Motivation in Academic

It is undeniable that motivation is very important for students. Motivation plays a crucial role in increasing students’ performance and achievement at school (Afzal, Ali, Khan, & Hamid, 2010; Zusho, Pintrich, & Coppola, 2003). Findings showed that motivation plays a key role in the student’s learning process and, thus affected their achievement in school (Lee & Reeve, 2012). With motivation, students move themselves to finish their assignment and tasks, give their best effort in their study, add passion on their learning and cope with the obstacle in their learning process. Studies have been done to examine the role of student’s motivation and its relationship with their academic performance, and most of the findings showed that students’ academic performance is strongly related to their motivation level (Afzal et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schunk & Ertmer, 2012). In fact, students ‘motivation to learn was positively related to their final grade. In which, those with higher motivation to learn achieved better grades that those with lower motivation (Bandalos, Finney, & Geske, 2003; Senko & Harackiewicz, 2005). With high motivation, students would be more determined to study harder and gave their best effort to achieved better grades.

The intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can be related in academic setting as well (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). Intrinsically motivated student feels inspired to achieve their personal goal, learns with full interest and enjoys the learning process itself. They did not need any type of reward or incentive to complete a task or an assignment because they enjoyed the challenging nature of the activity itself. Extrinsically motivated students, on the other hand, do their learning tasks for the rewards, or to avoid punishment if the task is not done. Therefore, extrinsically motivated students are most often depended on the perceived outcomes such as good grades or teacher’s praises (Lee & Reeve, 2012). This is supported in a study by Próspero, Russell, and Vohra-Gupta (2012), in which, they found that college students with higher extrinsic motivation achieved higher GPA. These findings indicate that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is important for students to be successful in their studies.
The motivation to learn is more crucial as the students advanced to the higher learning institutions. The right set of motivational drive is vital for students in higher learning institutions to complete their studies. The competitive and demanding learning environment requires higher level of motivation along with the essential positive values in students. In which, value is considered as an innate factor in motivation (Locke & Latham, 2004). Values are implanted desires and it is considered as the foundation of ambition and aspiration. It could lead to the desire to achieve success and it acts as a motivational force in individuals. This strong motivational force and positive values are important for students. The challenging academic life in higher learning institution could be overcome with strong determination and self-motivation. In fact, studies have found that motivation plays a big role in students’ academic achievements and graduation success in colleges. For instance, a study by Martin, Galentino, and Townsend (2014) showed that college students with higher motivation have higher graduation success rates compared to those with lower motivation. Those with less motivation tend to lag behind and lost their interest in finishing their studies. The current struggle to compete with peers and finish their assignments on time could be seen as a burden for them. Therefore, they decided to give up and terminate their study. Meanwhile, those with higher motivation will always try to inspire themselves to keep on pursuing their study. They will find ways to complete their study despite the many obstacles they have to face during their academic life. Thus, it is important for students to have string motivation in themselves.

In any learning environment, student has to answer three main questions themselves. The first question is can they do the task given, second, do they want to do the task, and if so, why they want to do it, and the last question is what should have be done in order to accomplish the task? (Wigfield, 1997). These three questions are related to the self-efficacy, which is an individual’s own capability to organize and complete an action that requires some effort by the individual himself. Self-efficacy gives an impact on students’ choice of activity, their effort to accomplish a certain task and their determination in accomplishing it. A study by Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) on self-efficacy showed that there are positive relationship between the student performance with their personal adjustment and commitment to complete their study. Meanwhile, the second question which is, whether the student wants to do the task and if so, why they want to do it, is related to both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The last fundamental question is what should be done in order to accomplish the task are related to the
intellectual and met cognitive learning strategies used. The intellectual and met cognitive learning strategies used are highly correlated with students’ motivation and their educational achievement (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Thus, it is important to instil motivation in student by using the right methods. Academic practitioner should pay more attention on motivating their students as well as providing a good learning environment as the success or failure of a student in their academic pursuit will shape their working life as well.

4.0 Motivation in Workplace

The importance of motivation does not stop at school. Motivation is also important in the workplace. Workers who are motivated and enthusiastic in doing their jobs always performed their responsibilities diligently. Thus, it can be said that motivation has a direct effect on employee productivity (Boswell, Colvin, & Darnold, 2008). With high motivation, employees are more inclined to work harder and give their maximum effort in the workplace. Therefore, motivation is important in the workplace because it can increase the job performance. However, there are few factors that affected human motivation at works. As can be seen from the earlier theories on motivation discussed above, some factors could de-motivate employees, while some others may improve their motivation. For instance, Ganta (2014) suggests that employee’s motivation could be increased by doing the job enlargement (expanding the job of an employee), job rotation (employee is given the opportunities to learns several operations and rotate through in a set of period) and job enrichment (employees were given the chance to control their own tasks). Additionally, studies have found that extrinsic motivation plays a huge role in driving workers to work hard (Stella, 2008). Good salary, special bonuses, job advancement and frequent praises by the leaders have been seen to improve employees’ motivation in the workplace. Other than that, some attention should be given on the Herzberg’s hygiene factors as remuneration, organization policy, working atmosphere, leadership style and interpersonal relationships as mentioned above. It is recommended that to motivate the employees, the preconditions or baseline factors as categorize by Herzberg should be improved.

The workplace condition should be kept to the satisfactory level, the leaders-followers relationship should be in good sync, and wages given should be reasonable to the workloads. The special focus given on both the satisfiers and dissatisfiers factors will definitely improve the employees’ motivation at work. This in return, would lead to higher retention rates and improved
company’s performance.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that motivation plays a huge role in our daily life. Motivation triggers human to do things that matters, such as achieving academic success and excelling in the workplace. Therefore, it is crucial to have a good understanding on the basis of motivation in order to improve many aspects in human life. Focus should be given on understanding the factors to improve human’s motivation. For instance, in the academic field, the way tutors motivate their students to complete their task may improve their academic performance. Whereas in the workplace, a leader capability to motivate their employees by using various means that is suitable in the workplace is crucial to improve the company’s performance. More studies should be done on investigating methods to improve human’s motivations and recognizing the techniques to be used to motivate individual successfully. Special focus should be given on the aspect of motivational developments. A good training program that could improve individuals’ motivation should be developed. Guides on the best training programs should be established, to yield the best result. As without motivation, human performance will be lowered and thus affect their productivity and achievement be it in the academic, work or life. Without motivation, life would be meaningless. Thus, human motivation should always be kept as one of the important aspect in life.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE), Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) under vote No. Q.J130000.2729.01K51.

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