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What is Motivation?

Motivation is the most important determinant for individual performance; yet, it is also the most difficult to analyze and define. Though behavior can be observed, motivational impact cannot be studied directly. The conceptual nature of motivation has given rise to the need for theories and models to help organizations better understand motivation. These theories have been divided into two categories: Content and Process.

Content Theories. The focus here is on the factors within a person that energize, direct, sustain and stop certain behaviors. The specific needs pattern that motivates people is observed here.

Process Theories. These provide a description and analysis of how behavior can be energized, directed, sustained and stopped.

Content Theories of Motivation

The content theories focus on the individual's needs while explaining job satisfaction and reward systems. The basis for these theories is that the individual's need deficiencies activate tension within him or her, triggering a behavioral response. These theories suggest that:

1. Specific needs trigger desired behavior.
2. Meaningful rewards help individuals satisfy their needs.
3. Offering appropriate rewards can optimize performance.
4. The needs of an individual will not necessarily repeat in regular patterns.

Each of the four Content Theories mentioned below explains behavior from a slightly different perspective.

1. McClelland emphasizes socially acquired needs.
2. Maslow uses a static hierarchy of needs.
3. Alderfer presents a flexible three-need classification approach.
4. Herzberg introduces intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

These theories are backed by very little research and are therefore open to criticism. Their value lies in the reinforcement of a need-based view of motivation

The implications of Content Theories are as follows:

1. The needs of an individual drive behaviors
2. Meaningful rewards help satisfy these needs
3. Individuals' needs are never static. They change because of events in life, experiences, age, etc. (These changing needs need to be understood to maximize the



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motivational impact of any program.) The use of this theory needs to be tempered by the lack of supporting research and data.

Process Theories of Motivation

While Content Theories focus on individual needs, Process Theories attempt to explain how behavior is energized, directed, sustained and stopped. The four major Process Theories are:

1. Reinforcement
2. Expectancy
3. Equity
4. Goal setting

Implications of Process Theories are as follows:

- Managers can influence the motivation of employees, i.e. motivation can be managed.
- Motivational efforts need to be sensitive to the variations in individuals' needs, abilities and goals.
- Motivation strategies should connect an individual's valued outcome with the desired performance.
- Establishing goals to direct behavior is an important part of a motivational program.
- Motivational programs should be perceived as equitable and deliver the outcome desired by the individual.

These are the basic implications of motivational theories; however, their utility can be determined better on a case-by-case basis