Employee Motivation: Conceptual Dimensions

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Abstract

There are many psychological needs, like social needs, recognition needs, etc. which do not fall under the category of wants. A motive is defined as an inner state that energizes, activates (or moves), and directs (or channels) the behavior of individuals towards certain goals. Thus, while motive signifies the drive that propels people to action, motivation signifies the actual (level of) work behavior of individuals. Motivation is the work behavior itself. Motivation depends on motives and motivating, therefore, it becomes a complex process. Thus, managers have an important role to play in motivating employees at the workplace so that not only are the motives of individuals properly channeled towards the goals of the organization, but such goal-directed behaviors’ are also sustained or maintained over time in the interests of the organization.

Key Terms:
- Motive
- Motivation
- Motivating

Motive, Motivation and Motivating

The terms motive, motivation and motivating are important concepts which have distinct connotations. The manager, who fully grasps the meaning and significance of these concepts and learns how to apply them intelligently, will be able to steer the energies of the employees towards the goals of the organization.

Motive

Based on the Latin word *movere*, motive (need) has been defined as follows:

A motive is an inner state that energizes, activates, or moves, chance motivations and that divert behavior towards goals.

Motive has also been described as follows:

“A motive is restlessness, a lack, a yen, of a force. Once in the grip of a motive, the organization does something to reduce the restlessness, to remedy the lack, to alleviate the yen, to mitigate the force.

Here, we can differentiate between needs and wants. While needs are more comprehensive and include desires—both physiological and psychological, wants are expressed in narrow sense and include only those desires for which a person has money and also the desire to spend the money to satisfy the wants. As we shall see later in this chapter, there are many psychological needs, like social needs, recognition needs, etc. which do not fall under the category of wants.

A motive is defined as an inner state that energizes, activates (or moves), and directs (or channels) the behavior of individuals towards certain goals (Berelson & Steiner, 1964). Though some authors make distinction between motives and needs, we can conceptualize motives as certain critical needs in human beings that have varying degrees of potency or strength. The strong motives or needs make the individual restless and in a state of disequilibrium until the needs are fulfilled or satisfied. In order to minimize the restlessness and keep it under control, the individual is propelled into action.
Thus, motives induce individuals to channel their behavior towards such types of action as would reduce their state of restlessness or inner disequilibrium. Motives, then, can be thought of as drives that energize people to action. For example, a clerk working for the Railways and nearing retirement might have an intense desire to see his bright son have access to higher education. This might be the motive that energizes him to work overtime every weekend in order to save money to send his son to a university. The anxiety and restlessness in the father’s mind created by his intense desire or need to see his son educated, which is minimized by his working and saving money now, will ensure that his son can go to college later. Thus, the strong motive of the father was the force behind his behavior of working during weekends when he could have easily rested. Likewise, the intense desire to achieve name and fame may be the motive for a tennis player to practice eight hours a day in the heat for several months before the actual tennis tournament takes place.

**Motivation**

While a motive is energizer of action, motivating is the channelization and activates of motives, Motivation is the work behavior itself. Motivation depends on motives and motivating, therefore, it becomes a complex process. For example, Dubin has defined motivations as follows:

“Motivators are the complex forces starting and keeping a person at work in an organization. Motivation is something that moves the person to actions, and continues him in the course of action already initiated”.

While motives are energizers of action, motivation is the actual action, (that is, work behavior) itself. For instance, when an employee works very hard, the manager remarks that the level of the individual’s motivation is high. When a person shirks work and is away from his desk wasting time, the manager or supervisor is inclined to remark that the person has very low motivation. In other words, the level of motivation of an individual is judged by person’s actual work behavior. Does the individual come to work regularly? After coming to the workplace, does the person actually do the allotted work? Does the individual work persistently till the work gets gone even if several difficulties are encountered in the accomplishment of the task? These are some of the criteria by which the motivation of individuals is judged. Thus, while motive signifies the drive that propels people to action, motivation signifies the actual (level of) work behavior of individuals.

**Motivating**

Motivating is a term that implies that one person, says a manager, induces another, say an employee, to engage in action (or work behavior) by ensuring that a channel to direct the motive of the individual becomes available and accessible to the individual. For example, a highly qualified and skilled employee who is doing routine clerical jobs at the workplace may have a very strong motive, that is, an intensely experienced restlessness, to take on more challenging assignments. The manager, who senses this motive, might then give that individual more responsibility and motivate the person to attain his goal. This effort on the part of the manager enables the clerk to alleviate his restlessness. He now works on his newly acquired responsibilities with enthusiasm instead of being frustrated and bored in performing the routine jobs he was engaged in doing before. Thus, managers have an important role to play in motivating employees at the workplace so that not only are the motives of individuals properly channelled towards the goals of the organization, but such goal-directed behaviors’ are also sustained or maintained over time in the interests of the organization.

In addition to channelling the strong motives in a direction that is satisfying to both the organization and the employees, the manager can also awaken or activate the latent motives in individuals- that is, the needs that are less strong and somewhat dormant-and harness them in a manner that would be functional for the organization. For example, a senior clerk may have power motive which is latent because there is no outlet for such a motive or need to get fulfilled in his current position. If he is promoted to a supervisory position, the latent power motive in the individual will be activated as he will now be influencing several employees under him. Because of his ability to influence others, he is likely to do an excellent job of supervising his people and attaining the goals of
the organization. Thus, latent potential can also be tapped by understanding how to motivate people at the workplace.

For the reasons just discussed, the three concepts of motive, motivation and motivating are significant for managers. By knowing how to motivate employees, not only can the manager help employees to satisfy their strong motives and activate the dormant motives in them, but in the process, the goals of the organization and the needs of the individuals are simultaneously met.

According to McFarland³, “Motivation refers to the way in which urges, drives, desires, aspirations, strivings, head direct, control or explain the behavior of human being”.

After defining motive, motivating, and motivation we can see the relationship among these. Such a relationship is presented in the following figure.

**Figure 1**

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**Source:** Relationship between Motives, Motivating and Motivation.

**Historical Development**

Historical views on motivation, although not always accurate, are of interests for several reasons. For one thing, they provide a foundation for contemporary thinking about motivation, an appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses can help managers gain useful insights into employee motivation in the workplace. One early view of motivation was based on the concept of hedonism- the notion that people seek pleasure and comfort and avoid pain and discomfort. Scientific management assumed that employees are motivated by money. The human relations approach to motivation suggested that favorable employee attitudes results in motivation. Need theories of motivation assumes that need deficiencies cause behavior.

The study of motivation can be traced back to the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers. More than twenty-three centuries ago, they presented hedonism as an explanation of human motivation. Hedonism says that a person seeks out comfort and pleasure and avoids discomfort and pain. Many centuries later, hedonism was still a basic assumption in the prevailing economic and social philosophies of such famous men as Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart mill⁴. They all explained motivation in terms of people trying to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

Early psychological thought was also influenced by hedonism. Psychologists in the 1800s and even in the early 1900s assumed that humans consciously and rationally strive for hedonistic pleasure and avoidance of pain. William James⁵, who is often called the father of American psychology, was one of the first to question this assumption. In his classic principles of psychology, he gave recognition to two additional important historical concepts in the study of motivation Viz- “instincts” and “unconscious motivation”.

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