Chapter 2
Motivation, Learning, & Development

All of us are theorists. We develop theories to explain how the world works. Yet the mere mention of the word “theory” leaves my clients and students cold.

The reason for this aversion to theory is rooted, I believe, in our experience with classroom instruction focused on theory divorced from practical application. Kurt Lewin insisted on the marriage of theory and practice. Lewin is well-known for saying, “There is nothing more practical than a good theory.”

This chapter (more so than any other chapter in this book) will contain a lot of theory, but it is practical theory. In this chapter, you will find only theory with practical applications for organizations attempting to acquire, capture, and transfer learning.

Ultimately, our goal is to improve performance at the individual, group, and organizational levels. Performance is made up of multiple factors. Throughout this book, we will refer to the following performance formula:

\[ \text{Performance} = \text{KSAs} + \text{Motivation} + \text{Environment} \]

**FIGURE 2.1 The Performance Formula**

KSAs are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to perform a job well. Training is a possible solution for KSA deficiencies. But as the Performance Formula indicates, training is not the answer for all performance problems. Training will not solve motivation-related or environment-related performance problems.

Motivation-related performance problems include factors such as poorly designed reward systems. Environment-related performance problems include excessive interruptions, old equipment, poor raw material quality, bottlenecks in production, communication breakdowns, and poor working conditions. Clearly, training will not solve any of these problems.
When diagnosing performance problems, it is important to make a distinction between training (KSA) needs and non-training (motivational or environmental) needs. A needs analysis should reveal deficiencies in KSAs, motivational factors, and/or environmental factors. Any motivational or environmental needs revealed in the needs analysis should be discussed with the managers who have the authority (and motivation) to make the necessary changes. We will look at how to do a needs analysis in the next chapter.

Motivational Theories

For many of you, this section will be a basic review of the motivational theories you learned in a “Principles of Psychology” or an “Organizational Behavior” course. It is essential that you are familiar with these theories as they provide a basis (along with adult learning theory, which we’ll discuss next), for effective use of the strategies and techniques covered later in this book.

Maslow & Alderfer
Let’s begin with Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs model. Many academics refuse to accept this as a scientific model, but practitioners (managers and consultants) use it every day. The model is simple, but the implications for practice are powerful.

Maslow believed there were five levels of needs; the lower level needs must be satisfied before the higher level needs become motivating. Maslow envisioned needs in the following hierarchy:
Practically speaking, most of the organizational members we are working with are not focused on their physiological and safety needs; they are focused on higher-level needs. Since few people are operating at the self-actualization (SA) level, most people we’ll encounter are focused on their social and esteem needs. To motivate these individuals, we must show them how their efforts will fulfill their social and esteem needs.

Alderfer’s (1969) ERG theory builds upon Maslow’s theory. Alderfer’s existence needs correspond with Maslow’s physiological and safety needs. Alderfer’s relatedness needs correspond to Maslow’s social needs. And Alderfer’s growth needs correspond to Maslow’s esteem and self-actualization needs.

Keep in mind, it is our unsatisfied needs that motivate us. Satisfied needs are no longer motivating. Appealing to somebody’s satisfied needs will not lead to motivation.

Alderfer’s theory recognizes more complexity in the motivation process than did Maslow’s. Alderfer spoke of needs that expand overtime, such as a desire for better food or a bigger house.
In a spirit of full disclosure, I must admit I don’t like behavioralism or the behaviorists (e.g., Watson and Skinner). I believe behavioralism dehumanizes people by ignoring their wonderful cognitive abilities. In graduate school, I had the opportunity to take a course with Albert Ellis, the leading cognitive psychologist, so I confess to being an advocate of cognitive psychology.

However, in a spirit of fairness, I must admit that the behaviorists have made some valuable contributions to our understanding of motivation. John Watson said, "Whatever behavior you reward, you get more of." The implication for all of us (not just trainers and managers) is clear; we must design and maintain reward systems that encourage desired behaviors. A poorly designed, or maintained, reward system that rewards the wrong behaviors can render an otherwise well-designed training or learning program ineffective.

The behaviorists spoke of positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, and punishment. Understanding these three concepts is essential in designing a reward system.

Positive reinforcement involves the receipt of something desirable after a behavior. Negative reinforcement is the removal of something undesirable (a double negative). Both positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement are positive events. Both are valuable in management and training because both encourage (motivate) positive future behaviors.

Punishment should not be confused with negative reinforcement. Punishment does not encourage positive future behavior; its purpose is to eliminate negative future behaviors. While punishment is sometimes appropriate (e.g., firing an employee for theft or poor customer service), it must be used sparingly.

The inappropriate use of punishment can lead to several problems:

1. It does not motivate people to do the right thing. Instead, people become focused on not doing the wrong thing; it can
lead to doing nothing, in order to remain “safe.”

2. It establishes somebody (e.g., manager or trainer) as the “punisher.” Punishers are not well liked; punishers are feared. Punishers are not in a position to build positive working relationships. Nobody wants to build a relationship with the punisher.

3. It requires constant monitoring. If the wrong behavior still offers some kind of reward, some individuals will continue the wrong behavior when the punisher is out of sight.

Cognitive Theory & Motivation

Cognitive psychologists, including Albert Ellis, reject the S-R (stimulus-response) model of the behavioral psychologists as too simplistic (Ellis & Dryden, 1987). Ellis offers the following A-B-C model to help us understand the role of perception:

A Activating Event
B Belief about the Activating Event
C Consequential Behavior or Thinking

The “A” (activating event) in Ellis’s model corresponds to the “S” (stimulus) in the behavioral model. The “C” (consequential behavior or thinking) corresponds to the “R” (response) in the S-R model.

Ellis suggests that the “B” (belief about the activating event) is what causes the subsequent behavior (or thinking). The “B” is the result of our cognitive processes. These cognitive processes are what separate us from animals.

As managers, trainers, or consultants we must understand somebody’s belief about an activating event (the “B”), if we hope to understand his or her behavior. These beliefs (perceptions) are a combination of expectations, values, and assumptions. Only through skillful questioning can we understand what is motivating somebody else’s behavior or thinking.
Beitler’s Motivation Model

My own motivation model is based on Victor Vroom’s (1964) Expectancy Theory. Vroom’s model is widely accepted in the academic world because of its complexity. Unfortunately, it is ignored by practitioners for the same reason.

My own model of motivation (considerably simpler than Vroom’s) is meant to be used as a tool in practice. My model takes the form of a simple mathematical equation:

\[
\text{Level of Motivation} = \text{Expectation of Success} \times \text{Trust in Receiving the Reward} \times \text{Perceived Value of the Reward}
\]

**FIGURE 2.3 Beitler’s Motivation Model**

Whenever someone (manager or trainer) tries to motivate someone else (subordinate or trainee), all three factors must be considered. Let’s use the example of a manager trying to motivate a subordinate. The manager says, “If you successfully complete this task you will be rewarded with ____.”

Immediately, the subordinate considers his or her expectation of success. If the expectation of successfully completing the task is low, motivation will be low.

If the subordinate’s trust in receiving the reward is low, motivation is low. Perhaps other employees have been promised a promotion or bonus for completing the same task, but they did not receive a promotion or bonus.

Finally, the subordinate will consider his or her perceived value of the reward. Once again, if the perceived value of the reward is low, motivation will be low.
As you know, whenever you are doing multiplication, if any of the factors are zero, the result is zero. The implications are significant.

If the subordinate believes that the possibility of successfully completing the task is zero, no amount of money (or perceived value of a reward) will motivate him or her. If the subordinate’s trust in receiving the promised reward is zero, no amount of money (or perceived value of a reward) will motivate him or her.

Finally, if the value of the reward is perceived as zero, motivation is zero unless the subordinate is motivated by something other than the promised reward. Please note, what matters here is the subordinate’s perception, not the manager’s.

This model of motivation suggests how critically important the open and honest communication of expectations and values is to organizational effectiveness.

Self-Confidence & Motivation

What is often mistakenly called a motivational problem can be a self-confidence problem. Albert Bandura has made some valuable contributions to the concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as one’s feelings about one’s own competency.

Bandura (1977a) stated that individuals with low self-efficacy are preoccupied with concerns about failure. Ford, Smith, Weissbein, Gully, and Salas (1998) added to Bandura’s insights with their research. They found, in various situations, that individuals with high self-efficacy try harder; those with low self-efficacy often reduce their effort or give up.

Blanchard and Thacker (2004) added a valuable insight by saying, “If failure is expected, the employee acts to minimize the negative consequences of failure. For example, withdrawing from the activity (refusing to try) moves the person away from proven failure to simply ‘I didn’t try!’” (p.84).
Building self-confidence is often a necessary “pre-learning” activity. A lack of self-confidence should be revealed during a needs analysis.

**Adult Learning Theories**

Everybody claims to have experienced learning, yet nobody seems able to clearly define what learning is. We know that learning occurs physically. “Learning is related to changes in the physical, neuronal structure of the brain and its related electrochemical functioning” (Blanchard & Thacker, 2004, p.85). Unfortunately, debating definitions of learning and discussing brain activity during learning are beyond the scope of this book.

For our purposes, we need to be aware of the two opposing approaches to learning theory and the implications of those approaches for adult and organizational learning. The two different approaches, behavioral and cognitive, have the same roots as those discussed in the previous section on motivation.

**Behaviorists vs. Cognitivists**

Behaviorists define learning as a relatively permanent change in behavior. The behaviorists de-emphasize the brain or mental activity in the learning process. B.F. Skinner (1971), the most ardent of behaviorists, believed the brain is simply like any other organ; its neural activities are conditioned to occur based upon a past history of consequences. “Learning occurs when new consequences are experienced” (Blanchard & Thacker, 2004, p.86).

Cognitivists define learning as a change in cognition. Cognition refers to the mental processing of information. Cognitivists believe, “Even though learning can be inferred from behavior, it is separate from the behavior itself” (Blanchard & Thacker, 2004, p.85). As in the previous section on motivation, I agree with the cognitive theorists.
Implications of the Two Approaches

As you can imagine, there are significant differences in practice when training or learning is designed and conducted by a behaviorist, as opposed to a cognitivist. Let’s look at a few of the implications:

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FIGURE 2.4 Practice Implications of the Two Approaches

The implications are quite dramatic. “In the behaviorist approach, the trainer controls learning by controlling the stimuli and consequences that the learner experiences” (Blanchard & Thacker, 2004, p.86). In the cognitive approach, it is assumed learners have their own goals, priorities, and learning style preferences.

The behaviorist approach has obvious applications for childhood education, but I question its use in adult education and training.

Assimilation & Accommodation

Piaget is best known for his work on child development, but his insights are also valuable for adult and organizational learning.

Piaget (1954) spoke of “assimilation” and “accommodation” in terms of cognitive maps. Cognitive maps are made up of categories created to help us understand the world.
When we experience something for which we have an existing category we can assimilate it into that category. When we experience something for which we do not have an existing category we must accommodate for it by creating a new category.

During my college days, I took a calculus course. The instructor, a brilliant engineer, assumed we could assimilate the new information (calculus) into our cognitive maps of the world. Unfortunately, while he could assimilate calculus into his existing categories containing engineering tools, none of us in the class had such categories. What we needed was help in creating a new category to accommodate for this new knowledge.

We must remember that people need ways to organize their experiences (and knowledge) to enable them to understand the world around them. We can help facilitate the assimilation and accommodation processes.

Social Learning Theory

Bandura’s (1977b) “Social Learning Theory” proposes that individuals can learn by observing others and the consequences of other people’s behavior. Since this learning comes through observing others, Bandura’s theory is also called observational or vicarious learning. But there is more to Bandura’s theory than the learning power of observation.

Bandura also stressed the importance of “attention” and “retention.” He believed the learning process does not begin until the learner’s attention is focused. There are serious implications here for trainers. Objectives and benefits for the learner must be discussed first to obtain learner attention. Put simply, no attention, no learning.

Adults do not retain all the information they see or hear. Bandura believes trainers can facilitate the cognitive process of retention. There are many ways available. Noe (2005) states, “Behaviors or skills can be coded as visual images (symbols) or verbal statements” (p.110). Blanchard and Thacker (2004) add, “This process, cognitive organization, can be facilitated in
training by asking the trainees to provide examples of how the new information relates to what they already know” (p.99).

Pedagogy vs. Andragogy

Malcolm Knowles (1990) made a major contribution to our understanding of adult learners by giving us the concept of “andragogy.” Until Knowles, pedagogy, the study of teaching children, dominated learning theory. “Pedagogy gives the instructor major responsibility for making decisions about learning content, method, and evaluation” (Noe, 2005, p.114). Pedagogy clearly applies to teaching children; it is generally ineffective when teaching adults.

Knowles’ theory of andragogy makes the following five assumptions about adult learners:

1. they need to know why they are learning something
2. they need to be self-directed
3. they bring work-related experiences with them
4. they have a problem-solving approach to learning
5. they are motivated by both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards

Clearly, adult learners are seeking a facilitator for their learning projects, not an all-knowing guru. Adult learners want to retain as much control as possible over the learning process.

Knowles’s theory of andragogy leads us into a necessary, albeit brief, discussion of adult development theories.

Adult Development Theories

Understanding adult development theories sheds much light onto adult learning needs. The theories of adult development can be classified into three basic categories:
1) trait models – in which patterns of individual behavior are seen as being constant over time (exemplified by Allport’s theory),

2) stage models – in which development is seen as predictable changes over time (exemplified by the theories of Erikson and Levinson),

3) interactional models – in which development is seen as the result of the interaction among age-related, cohort/history related, and non-normative life events (exemplified by the work of Neugarten and Schlossberg).

**Trait Models**

Supporters of the trait (or stability) models of adult development use trait theory to support their beliefs. Trait theorists believe traits (e.g., friendliness or aggression) account for the consistency in human behavior. The leading trait theorist, Gordon Allport (1897-1967), suggested, “If a person’s traits are known, it is possible to predict how he or she will respond to various environmental stimuli” (1937, p.28). In other words, “traits will guide their behavior, because people can respond to the world only in terms of their traits” (Hergenhahn, 1990, p.182).

Allport believed people react differently to the same stimulus because different traits are involved. While Allport believed each individual was unique because of his or her unique combinations of traits, he believed that traits were basically fixed. Allport is well-known for his following statement about the fixed nature of human traits: “The same fire that melts the butter hardens the egg” (1961, p.72). The influence of environmental factors is determined by one’s nature.

**Stage Models**

Numerous theorists (Piaget, Freud, Erikson, and Levinson) have argued for stage (or predictable change) models of development.
Erik Erikson (1902-1990) was once a follower of Freud. An important contribution of his theory is the epigenetic principle. According to Erikson (1980), the concept of epigenesis has its roots in the biological principle that development of an embryo proceeds according to a predetermined plan. With this plan, each organ has its own time of maximum growth and development. If the parts develop properly, they will eventually form an integrated, functional whole. In psychosocial terms, Erikson translated the epigenetic principle to say that the demands of one stage lay the groundwork for the resolution of future tasks.

Erikson is best known in developmental psychology for his model of eight stages of development. His sixth and seventh stages, concerning young and middle adulthood, provide a foundation for the current stage models of adult development.

In 1978, Daniel Levinson, a social psychologist at Yale University, published his book entitled *Seasons of a Man’s Life*. The book greatly expanded Erikson’s seventh stage of adult development (generativity vs. stagnation), but emphasized the crisis nature of the midlife stage.

Levinson (1978) sees human development not as a continuous process, but as alternating stages of stability and change. This concept of alternating periods of stability and instability is clearly Piagetian. Levinson’s concept of the life cycle suggests an underlying pattern to human growth similar to Erikson’s epigenetic principle. Levinson believes that individuals proceed in an age-related series of emotional and physical transitions.

Some stage theorists (Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978) believe the midlife transition is the great transition. The focus of this stage is on the loss of youth and faltering physical powers that had been taken for granted. Additionally, there is a yearning for “individualness” and “undividedness.” No matter what a person is doing or has done, parts of him/herself have been suppressed. The major task of this stage is the reintegration of the ignored parts.
The stage theorists assure us that a period of stability will follow the turbulent midlife transition. Like Freud’s stage theory, they see adults moving into and out of midlife transition like clockwork—unfinished business or not. In other words, midlife transition is just a stage (like the “terrible-two’s”); adults grow out of it.

**Interactional Models**

Advocates of the interactional (or flexible-contextual) models, argue that the first two types of models are too simplistic. While most two-year-olds are at a similar developmental level (and exhibit similar behaviors), a forty-year-old professional athlete has little in common with a forty-year-old heart surgeon.

Historically, Carl Jung was one of the first writers to offer a model of midlife development that was not based on assumptions of predictability. While Jung believed fundamental changes in adult development occurred at about age forty, he “understood individual adult development as a product of both psychological processes and cultural forces” (Miesel, 1991, p.52).

Bernice Neugarten and other researchers at the University of Chicago “point out that their studies show that chronological age is an increasingly unreliable indicator of what people will be like at various points in their development” (Miesel, 1991, p.60). Neugarten went on to say, “The scenarios and schedules of our lives are so varied that it is virtually impossible to talk about a single timetable for adult development” (Miesel, 1991, p.60).

Nancy Schlossberg (1987) says her research indicates that chronological age is one of the least important factors in the differences between how people experience transitions. Schlossberg says, “because the adult years are so variable, we cannot assume that particular transitions will necessarily occur at specific ages” (p.75). She believes what determines the positive or negative effects of the transition are how the
individual views the transition, and his or her resources for dealing with it.

The supporters of interactional models argue that what was true for Levinson’s (1978) group (a particular cohort) will not necessarily be true for another cohort born into a time with different economic and social challenges. Interactional models are built upon the interactionist belief that the individual affects, and is affected by, his or her environment.

**Summary**

An understanding of the motivation, learning, and development theories covered in this chapter is critical to successfully applying the strategies and techniques discussed in this book. For a deeper understanding of any of these theories, read some of the referenced materials at the end of this chapter.

Now let’s shift our focus from theory to practice.

**References**


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