

# Motivation Theory in Practice

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*Extension workers are concerned with motivating people to learn and to grow. Motivation also plays an important part in productivity of Extension personnel. As a means of exploring adult motivations, five theories are explained. Case examples are used to illustrate the practicality of such theories and the relationship of such ideas to the creation and maintenance of a favorable administrative climate.*

PRODUCTIVITY of Extension personnel is dependent in large measure on their motivation. According to Haire,<sup>1</sup> too many organizations try to solve all personnel problems through employee selection. Wise selections will strengthen leadership and training, as Haire states, but leadership and training will improve quality of work eight or ten times as much as selection will. The quality of leadership and training can be greatly enhanced by an understanding of some current theories about motivation.

But what motivates adults? And do motivation theories really explain what goes on? As a means of exploring these questions, five motivational theories are examined. Each is explained and its practical application illustrated through case evidence from two sources. First, the writer selected actual behaviors observed in his work in Nebraska<sup>2</sup> and Colorado. Second, he surveyed his former staff members working in county and area positions in Nebraska.

## MOTIVATION-MAINTENANCE THEORY

The motivation-maintenance theory is receiving growing support

<sup>1</sup> Mason Haire, *Psychology in Management* (San Francisco: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), pp. 133-42.

<sup>2</sup> From 1963 to 1966, the writer was an area Extension supervisor in northeast Nebraska. In addition, in 1964 he was appointed an experiment station superintendent. In this joint appointment he was responsible for 14 Extension and research workers, 4 secretaries, and 5 research technicians.

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through research and practice as an effective approach to individual and organizational motivation.<sup>3</sup> This theory as presented by Myers<sup>4</sup> states that employee needs are twofold—motivational and maintenance. Motivational needs stem from the challenge of the job through such factors as achievement, responsibility, growth, advancement, work itself, and earned recognition. Maintenance needs stem from factors peripheral to the job, such as working conditions, supervision, relationships with fellow employees, policy, and job security.

Traditional supervision and administration focuses on maintenance needs. Although satisfaction of these needs is essential, satisfaction of motivational needs increases staff motivation. According to Myers, this “. . . is not only the more realistic approach for satisfying personal goals and sustaining the organization, but is also less expensive.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1963 the author presented a motivational-maintenance approach to supervision and administration, citing his own and others' research.<sup>6</sup> Findings indicated that an individual's work was more important as a source of motivation than were the conditions surrounding the job. Suggestions were made as to how to provide a growing (motivating) climate for Extension workers. Six conditions were explained: (1) *stimulation* through knowledge of subject matter; (2) *responsible freedom* on the job; (3) *support* from supervisors; (4) a feeling of *success*; (5) *commitment* to new approaches, ideas, and work innovations; and (6) *self-insight* of strengths and limitations.

Figure 1 is a model of elements of a climate which a supervisor or administrator should provide (A) to satisfy employee motivation needs (B). The writer used this model in his work as area supervisor and experiment station superintendent in Nebraska. During this three-year period the model proved to have utility. Extension workers were at times overly motivated. Some were almost physically exhausted from a heavy workload which they themselves established.

Early staff conferences with Extension workers and research technicians in the Nebraska situation generally focused on problems

<sup>3</sup> See original work by Frederick Herzberg, Bernard Mausner, and Barbara Snyderman, *Motivation to Work* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1959). For a current summary of studies supporting this theory, see Frederick Herzberg, *Work and the Nature of Man* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1966).

<sup>4</sup> M. Scott Myers, "Who Are Your Motivated Workers?," *Harvard Business Review*, XLII (January-February, 1964), 73-88.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> Denzil O. Clegg, "Work as a Motivator," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Fall, 1963), 141-48.

of a maintenance nature, such as clarifying and establishing organizational policies, improving poor staff relationships, and establishing present attitudes and future expectations toward working conditions. Later an attempt was made to take care of these maintenance needs, but to spend more time on motivational needs such as establishing job responsibilities, setting achievement goals, and discussing the work itself. This approach created a completely different type of conference. Staff comments reflected the factors of motivation: achievement, responsibility, growth, the work itself, recognition. Statements from the staff survey point out this change of focus and some of its effects:

"... motivating techniques were used at staff meetings which made me more conscious of the need to improve our conduct of meetings."

"... spent my time working, not worrying about administration."

"... great improvement in general climate . . . lessening of tension . . . improved our image . . . increased pride followed."

Area and county agents were asked in a survey to identify what they liked about their jobs and the style of supervision that had been used. Their statements demonstrate how motivation can be provided through some of the "A" items in the model.

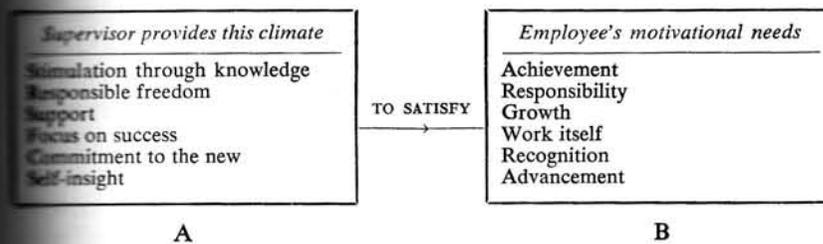


Figure 1. Model of elements of a climate necessary to satisfy motivation needs.

1. *Stimulation through knowledge of subject matter.* Most of the staff had Master's degrees and several were conducting research along with their extension work. They continued to learn by reading scientific journals and attending professional conferences, seminars, and schools. The following statements reflect their awareness of having an opportunity to increase their knowledge of subject matter:

"My courses at Summer School helped me in my work."

“. . . a joint Extension-Research appointment increases my effectiveness as an Extension worker and a Research worker.”

“I am more effective in my extension work because I have firsthand knowledge of the subject through research.”

2. *Responsible freedom.* To use an acquired subject matter there must be freedom. The following staff statements reflect the existence of responsible freedom:

“I appreciated the opportunity of having full responsibility for my program.”

“The aspect of my job . . . I like best is freedom of initiative.”

“. . . the existence of a wide range of freedom in the choice of programs, methods, and policies.”

3. *Support.* Stimulation and responsible freedom can be maintained and developed by two-way communication. These statements indicate the mutual support that existed between supervisor and staff:

“I appreciated the availability for consultation at any time.”

“I appreciated the opportunity to express my opinion.”

“I was included in the making of some decisions.”

4. *Success.* Success is a powerful motivating force, as indicated by the following quote: “I received recognition for a job well done, which a person needs to bolster his enthusiasm and morale.”

5. *Commitment.* Commitment is expressed through a balance between “holding on” to what is worthwhile and “letting go” on new approaches, ideas, and work innovations. Highly motivated individuals are willing to commit themselves to new challenges:

“I like the challenge of new programs, new approaches in established programs, and new methods.”

“I like . . . to exercise initiative and challenge others to do so.”

“I like . . . the combination of research and extension which allows a great variety in our work. It does not become boring or stale.”

6. *Self-insight.* An extension worker has to be able to examine his capabilities and his limitations against the job requirements. Development of self-insight is reflected by these statements:

“My ability was improved through (1) constructive criticism of job accomplishments and suggestions as to how my work could be improved . . . (2) encouragement to try new ideas as well as weigh the pros and cons of a new idea.”

“I was encouraged to reappraise established programs and methods.”

In summary, motivation-maintenance theory does have practical application on the job. County and area Extension staff did respond

to a motivating climate which emphasized development and growth of the individual through work.

#### MOTIVATION AS A FUNCTION OF ORGANIZATION

McGregor suggests that motivation can be obtained by integrating organizational goals and employee goals.<sup>7</sup> He states that conditions can be created so “. . . the members of the organization can achieve their own goals *best* by directing their efforts toward the success of the enterprise.” Motivation through goal integration stresses the requirement of commitment to achieving organizational objectives. Commitment is obtained when the supervisor, in setting targets, helps the staff member plan his work in such a way as to achieve both personal and organizational goals.

In the area of Nebraska where the author worked or supervised, area Extension home agents had spent much time developing a team approach to home economics programs. These agents said they appreciated the team approach whereby their goals, the goals of the people, and the organization's goals were collectively developed into an Extension program. Their comments illustrate the relationship between motivation and commitment to target objectives:

“I like working with other home economists. We are striving to achieve common program goals. It is stimulating, exciting, and seems to motivate us on to try to accomplish these goals.”

“I like the team approach. It is helpful to have others arrange contacts with cooperators in my field of work. I appreciate the assistance received from our county, area, and state staff.”

“. . . appreciate being your own boss, so to speak, the team approach, the backing and cooperation of staff members, and the opportunity for creativity and individualism as we try to accomplish our objectives.”

A negative comment illustrates the relationship between motivation and lack of commitment to group objectives: “Oftentimes I was wishing for a direct answer to a question concerning organizational goals. This was sometimes hard to get. Once in a while you felt you weren't completely backed. You weren't motivated as much when you didn't get a direct answer.”

Where there has been commitment to a goal, motivation may still exist even when the goal has not been achieved: “I would still like to do those things we planned to do that never materialized.”

<sup>7</sup> Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1960), pp. 49-56.

## MOTIVATION CHANGED BY LEARNING

X Lewin<sup>8</sup> sets forth a theory of motivation as change through learning—learning to like or dislike. Liking or disliking can be changed through the thrill of a “new experience” which satisfies a need or a worthwhile goal.

The area approach to Extension work is a new idea. Because people have not had a chance to really know how it works, they often react unfavorably to the idea. After one area-wide leadership conference, a participant from a “resistance area” commented: “That conference should be a plug for area agents. If anyone complains around the territory about an area arrangement, I think they’re nuts, if you’ll pardon the expression.” This individual’s motivation had been changed through a successful learning experience.

## MOTIVATION FROM MEANING

Motivation influences communication. Boyd explains that subject matter presented in a group has specific meaning to an individual because of “. . . his social-psychological setting.”<sup>9</sup> An individual behaves in groups according to meaning he places on information.

Extension workers often use small group meetings in their educational programs. One real difficulty in presenting subject matter to a small group is to assess whether or not the topic has meaning or practical application for each individual. For example, an area dairyman conducting a small group workshop noticed that one man did not respond to any of the information presented. The dairyman asked the man why he was not taking part in the discussion. The answer was, “The other men in this group produce Grade A and Grade B milk. This information is for them. I only separate [milk].” This man’s lack of communication with other group members was mainly because he felt himself apart from the group. He saw no meaning or practical application in the information.

## MOTIVATION THROUGH HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Maslow developed a theory of human motivation which identified a hierarchy of needs.<sup>10</sup> In order of importance, these needs

<sup>8</sup> Kurt Lewin, “Field Theory and Learning,” in *The Psychology of Learning*, 41st Yearbook, Part II, National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942), pp. 220-39.

<sup>9</sup> Robert D. Boyd, “The Dynamics in Adult Education,” *Adult Education*, XIV (Spring, 1964), 134.

<sup>10</sup> A. H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), pp. 80-106.

are: (1) physiological needs—to have food, oxygen, and rest; (2) safety needs—to be free from war, disease, injury, etc.; (3) love and belonging needs—to have affectionate relations with people and a place in the group; (4) esteem needs—to be recognized as a worthwhile person, to have confidence, security, strength, etc.; and (5) self-actualization needs—to become the kind of person one desires to be.

A guest speaker at the 1966 Annual Extension Conference in Colorado explained Maslow's theory, proposing that it is a means of understanding and working with people—of knowing why they behave as they do. He suggested that a person who cannot satisfy some of these needs experiences a high degree of tension, showing symptoms of frustration and anxiety, and perhaps feeling failure and inner conflict. Under these conditions, his work is likely to suffer.

This presentation was most effective and served a practical purpose. During the conference there had been increasing concern (tension) about personnel changes that would affect everyone in the organization. Staff wanted to know who was going to change jobs. The Director decided to change the program format and announce personnel changes one day early. Obviously his announcement satisfied several of the needs identified in Maslow's hierarchy. Tensions were certainly reduced, and the group was able to probe into new problems and ideas at an accelerated rate.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Two questions were asked at the beginning of this article: What motivates adults? And do motivation theories really explain what goes on? There are numerous ideas about what motivates adults. And the theoretical ideas about motivation help explain what happens to some Extension workers and clientele.

What does all of this mean? Basically it means that Extension personnel can and should use motivation theories in their work since they are concerned with motivating people to learn and to grow. And these people have the right to expect professional performance from Extension educators—administrators, supervisors, specialists, agents, etc. If there are research or theoretical ideas about motivation that could improve Extension's effectiveness and efficiency, then these ideas should be used to see if they have practical application.