Lesson 5: The Expectancy Theory of Motivation and Goal Setting Theory

Introduction

This lesson consists of:

1. Expectancy Theory

2. Goal Setting Theory

3. Case Study

4. Student Journal Entry

Assignment

1. Read **the Course Guide for Expectancy and Goal Setting Theories**.

2. When you solve a case study or act as a leader in your organization:

I. ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using Expectancy Theory.

A. ***Identify*** the individual behavior(s), performance outcome(s), and reward outcome(s).

B. ***Classify*** the components of Expectancy Theory that are high, low, or missing: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence.

Alternately,

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using Goal Setting Theory.

A. ***Identify*** the current explicit individual goal(s).

B. ***Classify*** the current conditions for successful goal setting.

1. Specific and measurable?

2. Difficult and challenging?

3. Participative process followed by goal acceptance and commitment by employee(s)?

4. Employee(s) receives objective and timely feedback on goal attainment?

C. ***Identify*** the missing goal setting conditions.

III. ***Explain*** how the low component(s) of Expectancy Theory contributes to a drop in motivation and an Area of Interest(s).

Alternatively,

III. ***Explain*** how the lack of effective goal-setting techniques has decreased individual motivation, satisfaction, and performance.

IV. ***Select*** a theoretically correct leader strategy(ies) to increase motivation and address an Area of Interest(s).

V. ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest.

3. **Complete a Student Journal entry** for Expectancy Theory.

Think of any person you have known who appears to have a lack of motivation to perform an assigned task in a police work situation. Describe the behavior that leads you to this assessment. Does the person know how to do the assigned task? Does he or she perceive that valued rewards are available? What is the person’s role in choosing the assignment and deciding how well it will be done? What could a leader have done to increase this person’s motivation?

4. **Complete a Student Journal entry** for Goal Setting.

Think about your own motivation to do well in your current and next assignment. What are your short-term and mid-term goals, and how do they contribute to your department’s mission and goals? What are your long-term goals; what level of responsibility do you want to reach during your career in policing? Apply Goal-Setting Theory to increase your own motivation in the near-term (six to 12 months) and mid-term (two-five years). What specific goals can you set? How committed are you to these goals in terms of their importance to you and the likelihood that you could realistically achieve them if you put in the effort and have a little help, and maybe even a little luck? How can you measure your progress toward reaching your goals? How will you get the feedback you need to measure progress toward the goals? With whom might you discuss your goals? Whose help do you need to develop your self so that you can meet your own goals? What might keep you from discussing your goals with this person(s)?

Expectancy Theory

“But there is one element that must be kept in mind, and that is…that no amount of motivation will incite a man to undertake zealously that which he knows is manifestly beyond his capabilities.”

—General Bruce C. Clarke

**Expectancy Theory** offers us a three-part framework to understand human motivation. This theory, developed by Victor Vroom in the 1960s, helps us see how leaders can close the gap between individual needs and organizational goals. Expectancy theory claims that motivation is a function of three components:

1) **Expectancy** or the individual’s belief that his or her effort will lead to an acceptable level of performance. **Individual behavior**is the knowledge, skills, and abilities a person has. According to expectancy theory, a person must have confidence that their individual behavior (knowledge, skills, and abilities) will lead to an acceptable level of performance. In other words, the person asks, **“If I try, can I perform to standard?”**

2) **Instrumentality** or the confidence that achieving an acceptable level of performance will result in a reward. **Performance Objectiv***e*, often called performance outcome, is the action or behavior in question and the standard to which it needs to be completed. The performance objective is determined by evaluating the quantity or quality of work done. According to expectancy theory, a person must have confidence that meeting performance objectives will result in a reward. The person asks, **“If I perform to standard, will I get a reward?”**

3) **Valence** or the perception that the resulting reward has value to the individual. *Reward,* or **Reward Outcome**, is received for the extended effort. According to expectancy theory, a person must consider the reward to be valuable enough to perform to standard. The person asks, **“Do I really want the reward?”**

**Expectancy Theory** claims that all three of the above components need to be present, in sufficient quantity, to cause motivation. This means that the higher the expectancy, instrumentality, and valence, the stronger a person is motivated to perform any given behavior. Additionally, if any one of the three components is zero, motivation is also zero. For those mathematically inclined, the relationship between expectancy, instrumentality, valence, and motivation can be expressed as follows: **M = E x I x V**

People who won’t apply for advanced pay grades because they know they can’t make it, employees who no longer trust their boss to give them a good rating, and burned-out individuals who no longer seem to care about anything can all be favorably influenced by Expectancy Theory.

Expectancy Theory makes the assumption that human beings will choose to engage in behaviors that they believe will lead to the rewards they want. Conversely, if people do not believe they can accomplish tasks that lead to these rewards, those activities will be avoided (or only minimal effort will be expended).

Although this sounds simple enough, the ramifications for the leader are enormous. Suddenly, traditional wisdom such as, “Work hard, and you will be rewarded,” is called into question. Sometimes, effort alone is not enough. Employees need the skills, abilities, resources, and confidence to succeed. They also need to believe that a fair opportunity exists for them to reach their goals, and they must be offered goals that have value to them.

**Figure 5.**



Expectancy is the link between the individual behavior(s) and the performance objective. Instrumentality is the link between the performance objective and the reward. High instrumentality cannot always be assumed. People realize that in the real world, not everyone gets the just rewards they deserve; they take this factor into account when deciding how much effort they will put forth. Instrumentality is influenced by a variety of factors, many of which are beyond the control of the employee or even the supervisor. A few examples of these influences are organizational policies, judicial decisions, and leaders’ behavior.

Valence is the value or importance that the employee places on the reward; it can be the most motivating component of all. If an employee wants something badly, whether that reward is extrinsic or internal, the person will likely be motivated to overcome all obstacles. Frequently, leaders make the mistake of assuming that employees share the leader’s sense of which rewards are valuable. Reflective leaders realize, however, that each person has his or her own assessment of the rewards that matter most.

Leader Actions

Understanding Expectancy Theory can greatly increase a leader’s ability to motivate employees. Armed with this insight, leaders can diagnose motivation problems and take concerned, strategic action. The following list of guidelines, coupled with practical experience, can help leaders craft specific actions to increase workers’ motivation.

1. To increase expectancy:

a. Clarify the path (between behavior and objective) by breaking the job into smaller parts or showing the employee the specific behavior(s) that will lead to the desired job standard.

b. Lower the performance standard if this is consistent with organizational goals.

c. Conduct training to provide the employee with requisite skills.

d. Build the employee’s confidence by altering the perception of his/her capabilities.

e. Restructure the work environment by ensuring that adequate resources are available.

2. To increase instrumentality:

a. Clarify the requirements for receiving a reward by ensuring that the leader does, in fact, control the advertised rewards.

b. Distribute rewards equitably by administering them in a timely, fair manner.

3. To increase valence:

a. Determine which rewards are valued by asking employees, in person or via surveys, to identify the rewards that matter most to them.

b. Provide valued rewards by making desired rewards available.

c. Explain the benefits of available rewards by clarifying the positive aspects the employee may overlook.

Goal Setting

A goal is simply a desired end state. Regardless of the nature of individual achievements, successful people tend to have one thing in common: their lives are goal-oriented.

Goal setting is developing, negotiating, and forming the targets or objectives an employee is responsible for accomplishing. Goals provide leaders the necessary road markers to guide our assessment of our followers, as well as road markers that may be used to guide our followers’ behavior. Edwin Locke, a respected goal-setting researcher, and his colleagues define a goal as “what an individual is trying to accomplish: it is the object or the aim of an action.”

In Lewis Carroll’s classic *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, the smiling Cheshire cat advises the bewildered Alice, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.” Goal-oriented leaders find the right road toward achieving their goals because they know where they are going. In addition to knowing the right road to take, the goal-oriented leader must ensure that his or her followers are committed to the chosen goals as well.

The main idea of goal setting is that setting a goal can often lead to better performance. According to Goal Setting Theory, goals are the main drivers of motivation because goals guide their thoughts and actions. However, not all goals lead to success. This can happen if a goal clashes with other goals the person has or if the goal doesn’t fit the situation. For leaders, the most important thing is to make sure people are committed to the set goals.

How and why does goal setting work? According to Edwin Locke’s model, Goal Setting Theory has four specific motivation mechanisms, described below.

1. Goals Direct Attention

People have limited attention and can only focus on a certain amount of information at once. This affects how we use our mental energy and effort. Goals help us focus our attention. We are usually more engaged and attentive to personally meaningful goals.

2. Goals Regulate Effort

Generally, the level of effort that one expends on a project or task is proportionate to the difficulty of the goal.

3. Goals Increase Persistence

Persistence represents the effort expended on a task over an extended period of time. Persistent people tend to see obstacles as challenges to be overcome rather than reasons to fail.

4. Goals Foster Strategies and Action Plans

Goals assist people by encouraging them to develop strategies and action plans that enable them to achieve their goals.

Much research has supported the concept of goal setting as a motivational technique. Listed below are four practical insights for leaders in terms of goal setting.

1. ***Difficult*** goals lead to higher performance. A difficult goal shows how much effort is needed to achieve it. Research by Locke and his colleagues found that harder goals are linked to better performance—the tougher the goal, the more people push themselves to succeed. However, this only works up to a point. Performance starts to drop if a goal seems impossible because people may feel discouraged or overwhelmed.

2. ***Specific***, difficult goals lead to higher performance. Goal specificity pertains to the ability that we as leaders have to quantify a goal. Specific goals lead to higher performance than just the comment “do your best.”

1. ***Feedback*** enhances the effect of specific, difficult goals. Feedback helps employees understand whether they are on track to achieve their goals or if they need to adjust their efforts. When combined with clear, specific goals, feedback plays a key role in improving performance.

4. ***Participativ*e** goals are superior to assigned goals. Research shows that goals set through participation, rather than being assigned, lead to better performance. Participation helps people feel more competent and increases their acceptance of challenging goals. While earlier studies suggested mixed results, recent findings confirm that involving people in goal setting boosts motivation and performance.

Practical Application of Goal Setting

1. ***Goal Setting***

a. Goals should be specific, which often includes being quantitative and having a built-in time limit or deadline.

b. Consider individual differences in the skills and abilities of your employees when establishing goals since it is often necessary to establish different goals for people performing the same job.

2. ***Goal Acceptance***—the extent to which an individual is committed personally to achieving an organizational goal.

a. Provide instructions and an explanation for implementing the goal-based program.

b. Be supportive and do not use goals to threaten your employees.

c. Encourage employees to participate in the goal-setting process.

d. Train leaders in how to conduct goal-setting sessions with followers.

e. Provide rewards for accomplishing goals.

3. ***Support***—the ability to provide the necessary support elements or resources to employees to complete the required task (e.g., training, resources, time, people, etc.).

4. ***Feedback***—providing people with information about their own progression toward attaining their goals.

a. Conduct frequent performance-based feedback sessions with all employees.

b. Allow employees to share their perceptions of the level of success—then ensure that it is accurate and based on objective measures.

c. Get and give feedback from a variety of sources.

**References**

Associates of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership. (1981). *Leadership in Organizations*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Associates of the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership. (1999). *Course Guide for PL 300: Military Leadership (AY 99-00)*. West Point, NY: Authors.

Deal, N. M., & Lloyd, R. (2024). Retracing expectancy theory: An evolution of management studies’ second best known motivation theory. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, *2024*(1). https://doi.org/10.5465/AMPROC.2024.17246abstract

Hughes, R., Ginnett, R., & Curphy, G. (2022). *Leadership: Enhancing the lessons of experience*. 10th ed., McGraw Hill.

Lloyd, R., & Mertens, D. (2018). Expecting more out of expectancy theory: History urges inclusion of the social context. *International Management Review*, *14*(1), 24–37.

Locke, E. A. (1978). The ubiquity of the technique of goal setting in theories of and approaches to employee motivation. *Academy of Management Review*, *3*(3), 594–601. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1978.4305786

Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation. *American Psychologist, 57*(9), 705. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.57.9.705

Los Angeles Police Department. (1998). *West Point leadership course – Course guide*. Los Angeles: Authors.

Prince, H. T., Halstead, J. F., & Hesser, L. M. (2005). *Leadership in Police Organizations*. New York: McGraw-Hill – Primis Publications.

Case Study I

You are an evening watch sergeant. Things have been going well lately, but you have noticed some changes in the performance of one of your officers, Randy Odom. In the six years Randy has been with the police department, he has established an excellent reputation as a hard worker and a smart, “heads up” employee. Lately, however, he seems to be fatigued during his watch; his reports are constantly being returned for errors, and his standards of appearance have fallen. You decide it is time to talk with him.

When asked about his recent change in performance, Officer Odom had this to say: “Sarge, I have been told ever since I’ve been here that I’m one of the best officers on this watch. I’ve really done well—not only for myself but also for the whole watch. I have received outstanding rating reports, letters of commendation from citizens, and commendations from the detectives for tracing stolen property and following up on armed robberies. I have made the most felony arrests on my watch for the last two years. But what did I get for all of that? Nothing! I used to be gung-ho to promote as soon as I could. But I don’t see much hope of promoting to detective now; so why even study for the exam?

“Six months ago, the lieutenant told me I was ‘in a good position’ to get the next community-oriented policy staff position that became available. But look what happened! There have been two staff positions in those six months, and as you can see, I didn’t get either of them. The main reason I worked so hard was to become a staff representative and have a chance for a better balance between being a cop and my family. It would have gotten me on day watch, and I could spend more time with my family. So I figured, hey, if the department won’t take care of me, I’ll take care of myself. I signed up for a full load of classes during the day so I can get my degree in business administration. Maybe after I graduate, I can do better for myself in my uncle’s furniture store.”

You realize you had better do something quickly. You are on the verge of losing a good officer, and his low morale is starting to affect the rest of the watch.

Use the first three steps in the Leader Thought Process.

I. (Step I) ***Identif****y* the **Areas of Interest**.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

(If necessary, continue listing **Areas of Interest** on another page.)

II. (Step II) ***Analyze*** the situation using Expectancy Theory.

What is the relationship among the Areas of Interest listed above? More specifically, is there a chronological order or **logical chain of events** that helps you make sense of the facts you have? If so, outline the time sequence of events.

What is/are the individual behavior(s), performance outcome(s), and reward outcome(s) in this situation?

Which component(s) of Expectancy Theory—expectancy, instrumentality, or valence***—***is/are low (current or anticipated) in this situation?

III. (Step II) ***Explain*** how the low component(s) of Expectancy Theory contributes to a drop in motivation and an Area of Interest(s)

Do the facts of the case and your explanation form a pattern that allows you to identify a fundamental or **root cause** (i.e., is there something in the case information that suggests it is the underlying cause of all or most of the Areas of Interest)?

IV. (Step III) ***Select*** a theoretically correct leader strategy(ies) to increase motivation and address an Area of Interest(s).

**V. (Step III) *Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy (ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest.

Write a leader plan of action. Address all the Areas of Interest you have identified and translate the theoretical leader strategies into real-world action. Be as specific as possible as to what you will do and say to whom, when, where, how? What do the theoretical leader actions look like in practice?

Case Study II

You are a fairly new watch commander assigned to the evening watch. The evening watch is known for having a lot of crime problems. Before you transferred to this sector, you had been told that it was a pretty laid-back bunch of cops who never get caught in anything wrong but who don’t seem to perform very well.

After eight weeks on the job, you have observed the kind of performance you had heard about. Yesterday, you got a call from your captain telling you that he is counting on you to take some thugs off the street and start improving the department’s image with the citizens whose voices get heard in City Hall. You have talked with several patrol sergeants who have all told you basically the same thing. Most of the cops are pretty good people, no bad cops here. They just want to come to work every day and see what happens. They respond pretty quickly when there is a call for backup. And they make some arrests every day. Their attitude is “Crime ain’t going away any time soon, so why sweat the stats?” Most of the stuff they do is the same old thing. And they never get any training besides the same old stuff they have done over and over again like how to fill out a report, the latest general order in response to the most recent hot political issue, and computer procedures.

Use the first three steps in the Leader Thought Process.

I. (Step I) ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

(If necessary, continue listing **Areas of Interest** on another page.)

II. (Step II) ***Analyze*** the situation using Goal Setting Theory.

What is the relationship among the Areas of Interest listed above? More specifically, is there a chronological order or **logical chain of events** that helps you make sense of the facts you have? If so, outline the time sequence of events.

Identify the current, explicit individual goal(s).

Classify the current conditions for successful goal setting: what are the specific and measurable individual goals? How difficult and challenging are the goals?

What kinds of goal-setting processes have been used? To what extent have the employees accepted and committed to the goals?

Describe the feedback the employees receive about goal attainment? Timely? Objective?

What goal setting conditions are missing?

III. (Step III) ***Explain*** how ineffective goal setting techniques have decreased individual motivation, performance, and satisfaction.

Do the facts of the case and your explanation form a pattern that allows you to identify a fundamental or **root cause** (i.e., is there something in the case information that suggests it is the underlying cause of all or most of the Areas of Interest)?

IV. (Step III) ***Select*** a theoretically correct strategy(ies) to increase motivation and address Areas of Interest.

V. (Step III) ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest.

Write a leader plan of action. Address all the Areas of Interest you have identified and translate the theoretical leader strategies into real-world action. Be as specific as possible. What you will do and say to whom, when, where, how? What do the theoretical leader actions look like in practice?

Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry** for Expectancy Theory.

Option A

1. Think of any person you have known, including yourself, who appears to have had a lack of motivation in a police work situation. Describe the behavior that leads you to this assessment. What is the person not doing well, not working hard to accomplish, or not showing enough interest in? On what basis did you infer a low level of motivation?

2. How can you account for the low motivation regarding expectancy, instrumentality, and/or valence? What did the leader(s) do to increase this person’s motivation? How well did it work? What happened? How could you have used Expectancy Theory to increase this person’s motivation?

Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry** for Goal Setting.

Option B

Think about your own motivation to do well in your current and next assignment. What are your short-term and mid-term goals, and how do they contribute to your department’s mission and goals? What are your long-term goals; what level of responsibility do you want to reach during your career in policing? Apply Goal-Setting Theory to increase your own motivation in the near-term (six to 12 months) and mid-term (two-five years). What specific goals can you set? How committed are you to these goals in terms of their importance to you and the likelihood that you could realistically achieve them if you put in the effort and have a little help, and maybe even a little luck? How can you measure your progress toward reaching your goals? How will you get the feedback you need to measure progress toward the goals? With whom might you discuss your goals? Whose help do you need to develop your self so that you can meet your own goals? What might keep you from discussing your goals with this person(s)?