Self Concepts and Motivation

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ABSTRACT: This article describes the impact of self concept on motivation process. In this article, the structure and development of the self concept is reviewed and how it effects the motivational process. The traditional theories of work motivation are also reviewed. The motivational processes of expectancy, attribution, cognitive dissonance, and reinforcement have all been used to explain motivation. This article will describe how each of these motivational processes can be understood by using the self concept as a basis of motivation.

(**Key words:** expectancy, attribution, cognitive dissonance, and reinforcement, Motivation, Self concept)

INTRODUCTION

Motivation is a form of urge in a person's heart or the need to achieve one's goal. Motivation can also be in a form of plan or need to succeed and a need to avoid failure. In other words, motivation is a process to produce energy due to the need to achieve one's goal. Our motivation determines how far we go in the directions set by our needs and values.

There is a growing realization that traditional models of motivation do not explain the diversity of behavior found in organizational settings. While research and theory building in the areas of goal setting, reward systems, leadership and job design have advanced our understanding of organizational behavior, most of this work is built on the premise that individuals act in ways to maximize the value of exchange with the organization. In addition, some researchers have called attention to the role of dispositions and volitional processes in models of motivation (Kanfer, 1990). Others point out that we have a variety of motivation theories that have no unifying theme and are not supported well by the research (Locke & Henne, 1986). In an effort to address these issues, some researchers have turned to self theory as an alternative explanation for organizational behavior. Specifically, social identity theory (Stryker, 1980, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1985), self presentation theory (Beach & Mitchell, 1990; Gergen, 1968; Schlenker, 1985), and self efficacy theory (Bandura, 1982, 1986), are all fundamentally rooted in the concept of self.

Between 700 and 1500, the concept of the "self" referred only the weak, sinful, crude, "selfish" nature of humans. Today, modern "self" theory says each person is expected to decide what is right (almost by magic and without much reliance on the accumulated wisdom of the culture) and to know him/herself well enough to determine what courses of action "feel right". In short, we must know ourselves, so we can set our life and self actualize.

STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF CONCEPT

The concept of the self has a long history in the psychology of the personality. The self-concept is identified largely with the orientation of phenomenology, and has,

perhaps, been given the most systematic use in the theory of personality associated wit

Carl Rogers (Babladelis, 1984).

The self has been variously identified with other psychic agents (e.g. soul, will) and often dismissed as a nonobservable phenomenon and thus not scientific.

Today, our self-concept, i.e. our knowledge, assumptions, and feelings about ourselves, is central to most of the mental processes. This self-awareness is one of the most important concepts in psychology. We know that each person's self-concept is different from all others. But surprisingly, there is no general agreement about the general structure or content of the self-concept. The true self may be similar to your preferred identity or your best self. This tidy unified relatively stable positive description of the self doesn't fit the reality most of us experience. We seem to have a self with many parts, some we like and some we don't.

In a recent review, Markur & Wurf (1987) state that the most dramatic advances in the decade of research on the self concept can be found in work on its structure and content.

More recent research in social psychology (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; Schlenker, 1980) has resolved the view of the self concept as a stable, generalized, or average view of the self by conceptualizing of the self concept as a multifaceted phenomenon composed of a set of images, schemas and prototypes (Markus & Wurf, 1987). There has been a similar movement in sociology where the self is defined in terms of multiple identities (Schlenker, 1985; Stryker, 1980). Identities include personal characteristics, features and experiences, as well as roles and social statuses.

In both streams of research, authors define the self-concept in terms of various self-representations. Their work indicates that some self-representations are more important than others (Schlenker, 1980, 1984). Some are representations of what the self is perceived to be versus what the self would like to be (Markus & Wurf, 1987); some are core conceptions (Gergen, 1968) or salient identities (Stryker, 1980, 1986) while others are more peripheral; and some are relatively stable (Sullivan, 1989) while others are dynamic (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

In the self concept – based model of motivation, one's concept of self is composed of four interrelated self-perceptions: the perceived self, the ideal self, one's esteem and a set of social identities. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in understanding how the self-concept relates to energizing directing and sustaining organizational behavior. Each of these self-representations will be described and their interrelationships discussed.

The Perceived Self

Most models and descriptions of the self involve elements of self perceptions; however, most are unclear as to what aspects of the self the individual holds perceptions of. One of the earliest theorists writing on the nature of the self was William James (1890). He saw the self as consisting of whatever the individual views as belonging to himself or herself, which includes a material, a social, and a spiritual self. The perceptions of the material self are those of one's own body, family, and possessions. The social self includes the views others have of the individual, and the spiritual includes perceptions of the one's emotions and desires. Kihlstrom, Cantor, and their associates suggest that individuals hold perceptions of themselves in terms of traits and values (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984),

their attributes, experiences, thoughts and actions (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1985; 1987), and their physical appearance, demographic attributes and dispositions of various sorts (Kihlstrom, Cantor, Albright, Chew, Klein & Niedenthal, 1988). Gecas (1982) asserts that the content of the self concept consists of perceptions of social and personal identities, traits, attributes, and possessions.

The most concept – based model of motivation utilizes three general categories of self-perceptions which is believe incorporate most of those suggested in earlier research. These include traits, competencies and values.

Traits. Traits are labels for broad reaction tendencies and express relatively permanent patterns of behavior (Cattell, 1965). Fundamental to this definition is the assumption that people make internal attributions to individuals who demonstrate a particular behavior pattern in different situations or at different times without apparent external reasons. The more cross-situational consistency one observes, and the more external causes of behavior seem to be lacking, the more likely one would make a internal or dispositional attribution (Harvey, Kelley & Shapiro, 1957). It is not important at this point to understand what really motivates aggressive behavior. What is important is that individuals hold a set of self perceptions regarding many different traits.

Competencies. A second element in the perceived self is competencies. Individuals hold perceptions of what skills, abilities, talents, and knowledge they possess. These can range from very specific skills, such as the ability to run a turret lathe, to more general competencies, such as the leadership skills to create and manage change.

Values. Values are defined as concepts and beliefs about desirable end states or behaviors that transcend specific situations, guide selections or evaluation of behavior and events,

and are ordered by relative importance (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Individuals demonstrate certain values through their speech and actions. This element of the perceived self is concerned with the set of values that the individual believes guides his or her decisions and actions.

Development of Perceived Self. Self perceptions are determined through interaction with one's environment. Processes of attitude formation, attitude change, (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and self attribution (Jones, 1990) all contribute to the development of a set of self perceptions. As indicated above, when feedback is unambiguous, plentiful, and consistent, a set of strongly held self perceptions is formed. Ambiguous, lacking, or inconsistent feedback results in weakly held self perceptions.

The Ideal Self

While the perceived self describes the set of perceptions individuals hold of their actual traits, individual competencies, and values, the ideal self represents the set of traits, competencies and values an individual would like to possess (Rogers, 1959). By possess we mean that the individual desires to believe that he/she actually has a particular trait, competency, or value, or wants others to believe that the individual has the trait, competency, or value. This view of ideal self is similar to Schlenker's (1985) "idealized image" (i.e., the ultimate person one would like to be).

Development of the Ideal Self. In the early stages of interaction with a reference group, whether the reference group is the primary group (i.e., the family for a young child) or a secondary group (i.e., one's peers or co-workers), choices and decisions are channeled through the existing social system. As an individual interacts with reference group, he/she receives feedback from reference group members. If the feedback is positive and

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unconditional, the individual will internalize the traits, competencies and values which are important to that reference group. In this case, the individual becomes *inner-directed*, using the internalized traits, competencies and values as a measure of his/ her own successes/ failures. Internalized competencies and values have been suggested as the basis of the ideal self (Higgins, Klein & Strauman, 1987) and as an internal standard for behavior (Bandura, 1986). If the individual receives negative feedback or positive but conditional feedback, the individual may not internalize or only partially internalize the traits, competencies and values of the reference group. This type of individual becomes *other-directed* and will either withdraw from the group or seek constant feedback from group members.

Social Identities

According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), social identification is a process by which individuals classify themselves and others into different social categories, such as "women", "Muslim", and "nurse". This classification process serves the functions of segmenting and ordering the social environment and enabling the individual to locate or define him – or herself in that social environment. Thus, social identification provides a partial answer to the question, "Who am I?" Social identities are thus those aspects of an individual's self-concept that derive from the social categories to which he or she perceives him – or herself as belong (Tajfel & turner, 1985).

Development of Social Identities. Individuals establish social identities through involvement with reference groups in social situations. Reference groups provide three major functions with respect to social identities: (1) the determination of the profile of

traits, competencies, and values for a particular social identity; (2) the establishment and communication of the relative value and status of various roles or identities;   and (3) are the basis of social feedback regarding one's level of these traits, competencies, and values.

Individual's establish at least two types of social identities: a *global identity* and *role-specific identities*. The global identity is the identity one wishes to portray across all situations, across various roles, and to various reference groups. The global identity exists independently of any specific social identity. The reference group for the global identity includes those members of one's primary group, and the traits, competencies and values which are relevant to the individual are those which are reinforced by the individual's culture. The global identity is formed early in life, and one's family, functioning as a primary reference group, performs the three functions mentioned above.

The global identity provides a starting point for role-specific identities. As the individual matures, the control of the primary group lessens and the individual begins to establish certain role-specific social identities. Role-specific social identities are those identities established for a specific reference group or a specific social role. It is this process of selecting and "earning" the identity that acts to define one's self to various reference groups. By "earning" the identity, we are describing the process whereby the individual meets basic expectations of the reference group (either formal or informal credentialling) necessary to carry out the role.

Self Esteem

The self esteem is the evaluative component of the self concept (Gergen, 1971; Rosenberg, 1965). It is a function of the distance between the ideal self and the perceived self. When the perceived self matches the ideal self, self esteem is relatively high.   Low self esteem occurs when the perceived self is significantly lower than the ideal self. Since the distance between the ideal and perceived self constantly varies depending on task and social feedback, self esteem is a dynamic component of the self concept and it is always in a state of change and development.

SOURCES OF MOTIVATION

As indicated earlier, most motivation theorists have proposed that there are two major sources of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic (deCharms, 1968). Extrinsic motivation is that which derives from external forces and is represented in our model as instrumental sources of motivation. Our conceptualization of intrinsic motivation expands deCharms' definition of intrinsic motivation as behaviors which occur in the absence of external controls. This expansion integrates Deci's (1975) classification of intrinsic motivation as behaviors that individuals engage in to seek out challenging situations or to overcome challenges, Katz and Kahn's (1978) definition of internalized motivation as self-expression or internalized values and Etzioni's (1975) conceptualization of pure moral involvement which results from internalized values, and social moral involvement which is results from feedback from reference group members. These types of motivation are represented in our model as intrinsic process, goal internalization, and both internal and external self concept-based processes. In this section, we will discuss each of the sources of motivation in more detail.

Instrumental Motivation: Instrumental rewards are a motivating source when individuals believe that the behaviors they engage in will lead to certain outcomes such as pay, praise, ect. Rooted in the work of Barnard (1938) and March and Simon (1958), the basic assumption is that individuals and organizations constitute an exchange relationship. Expectancy and equity theories are currently accepted models of motivation based on exchange relationships.

Intrinsic Process Motivation: Individuals are motivated by intrinsic process rewards when they perform a behavior just because it is "fun". In other words, the motivation comes from the work itself. Individuals enjoy the work and feel rewarded simply by performing the task. There are no external controls regulating the behavior (deCharmes, 1968) and behavior that is challenging (Deci, 1975) may be considered enjoyable to some people. Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model is representative of intrinsic process motivation.

Goal Internalization: Behavior is motivated by goal internalization when the individual adopts attitudes and behaviors because their content is congruent with their value system (Kelman, 1958).

Internal Self Concept-based Motivation: Self concept motivation will be internally based when the individual is primarily inner-directed. Internal self concept motivation takes the form of the individual setting internal standards that become the basis for the ideal self. The individual tends to use fixed rather than ordinal standards of self measurement as he/she attempts to first, reinforce perceptions of competency, and later achieve higher levels of competency. This need for achieving higher levels of competency is similar to what McClelland (1961) refers to as a high need for achievement.

External Self Concept-based Motivation: Self concept motivation is externally based when the individual is primarily other-directed. In this case, the ideal self is derived by adopting the role expectations of reference groups. The individual attempts to meet the expectations of others by behaving in ways that will elicit social feedback consistent with self perceptions.

While intrinsic, instrumental and goal internalization have been discussed extensively in previous literature, the focus of this paper is one self concept-based sources of motivation. If internal and external self concepts are valid bases of motivation distinct from the other sources, then they must be able to independently explain motivated behavior. The following section, will demonstrate how are self concept can enrich our understanding of traditional models of motivation. We will also discuss how the self concept directs behavior via adaptive strategies.

THE IMPACT OF SELF CONCEPT ON MOTIVATIONAL PROCESSES

The motivational processes of expectancy, attribution, cognitive dissonance, and reinforcement have all been used to explain motivation. The following section will describe how each of these motivational processes can be understood by using the self concept as a basis of motivation.

Expectancy. The concept of expectancy is the cornerstone of the cognitive school of motivation. Expectancy theory posits that individuals choose among a set of behavioral alternatives on the basis of the motivational force of each alternative. The motivational force is a multiplicative combination of expectancy (i. e., the perceived   probability that

effort will lead to a desired outcome), instrumentality (i. e., the probability that this outcome will lead to a desired reward), and valence (i. e., value of the reward).

In the self-concept framework, individuals cognitively assess the likelihood of given actions leading to levels and types of task and/or social feedback consistent with their self perceptions. The valence of this feedback is based on the value or values associated with the role-specific identity as determined by the reference group. In other words, individual behavior is a choice process that is engaged in to obtain feedback on traits, competencies or values which are important in relation to the ideal self.

Attribution. The attribution process is concerned with the way in which individuals attempt to determine the causes of behavior. External attributions are those that are made when the observer (self or other) of a behavioral pattern believes that the actor is responding to situational forces, such as the expectation of a bonus. Internal attributions are made when the observer believes that the behavior is the result of some disposition of the actor such as a personality trait or internal value. Since the self concept is comprised of self perceptions of traits, competencies, and values, how the individual and others assess these attributes is important in the maintenance of these self perceptions.

In this process, the individual attempts to have others attribute certain traits, competencies and value to him/herself. The traits, competencies and values, which the individual wishes to have attributed to him/her, are those traits, competencies and values, which are valued by the reference group to which the individual aspires. In order to achieve internal attribution, individuals must behave consistently across situations and across time. For example, with respect to competencies, individuals   must establish

control over task/project outcomes in order to generate the type of task/social feedback which is consistent with their self perceptions. In order for success to be attributed to the competencies of oneself, the other-directed individual seeks this control so that others attribute the outcomes of the task/project to him/herself. On the other hand, inner-directed individuals seek control of the task/project outcomes for their own satisfaction.

Cognitive Dissonance. According to the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), inconsistency between two cognitive elements, whether they represent beliefs, attitudes, or behavior, gives rise to dissonance. Assumed to be unpleasant, the presence of dissonance is said to motivate the individual to change one or more cognitive elements in an attempt to eliminate the unpleasant state. With respect to the self concept, dissonance occurs when task or social feedback differs from self perception.

Reinforcement. Reinforcement theory explains behavior in terms of the reinforcing consequences of the behavior. Individuals learn to repeat certain behaviors because they are rewarded and they discontinue behaviors that are either punished or not rewarded (Thorndike, 1911). Reinforcers are the stimuli that are presented to the individual upon engaging in a behavior and serve to increase the probability of that behavior in the future. Task and social feedback which confirm self perceptions act as basic reinforcers. The strength of the self perception is a function of the relative amount of prior reinforcement. Perceptions that are consistently reinforced become strong and lead to a strong self concept. When feedback is lacking or inconsistent, the result is a relatively weak self concept. In other words, whether the self concept is perceived to be either high or low on any trait, competency or value, it is the consistency of the feedback which determines the

strength of these perceptions. The weaker the self concept, the greater the need for either task or social feedback, and thus the stronger the self concept-based motivation.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have discussed on expanding current theories of motivation to include self concept, in terms of self perception,ideal self,self esteem sand social identities allow us to account for both situational behaviour and inconsistent behaviour as well as the overall stability or crosssituational consistency of behaviour.Most importantly the self concept model provides a basis for explaining a wide array of phenomena typically grouped under the title of expressive of intrinsic motivation.

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