

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 15, 1988

TWO EXERCISES FOR TEACHING ABOUT MOTIVATION

Janet Mills, University of Oklahoma
Melvin R. McKnight, Northern Arizona University

ABSTRACT

For undergraduate students in business, the study of motivation is often an exercise in abstraction and memorization. However, the authors have found that the following experiential exercises bring the subject to life, providing students with specific, concrete, behavioral knowledge. The first exercise is designed to introduce the subject of motivation. Students use their own past experience to generate descriptions of contrasting motivational states. The second exercise involves application and review. Students draw upon their past experience, cognitive learnings and imaginations to mentally rehearse how their behavior as managers might influence their employees' motivational states.

INTRODUCTION

Details of Class Organization

The exercises may be used with any size group and in any classroom or conference setting. Each exercise takes 20-40 minutes, depending on how much discussion the instructor desires.

Preparation Details

Instructors will need either a chalkboard and chalk or an easel with newsprint, magic markers and masking tape to post information generated by participants.

The following handouts should be ready for distribution: (1) The Highly Motivated State: Descriptions from An Organizational Behavior Class, (2) The Highly Motivated State: Descriptions from Business and Industry, (3) Lack of Motivation: Descriptions from an Organizational Behavior Class, (4) A Model of Motivation, (5) How to Ruin Motivation, and (6) How to Enhance Motivation. (These are included as Appendices 1-6.)

Experience with the Design

The authors have used these exercises many times with undergraduate and graduate students, and with diverse groups of managers. We have found that the first exercise provides students with concrete, personal referents for "motivation" and provides the basis for understanding models of motivation. The second exercise helps students apply their learnings in a practical, behavioral context. It also provides a vehicle for review and summarization.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXERCISE ONE: WHAT IT IS TO BE MOTIVATED

1. The instructor introduces the topic of motivation, stressing that motivation is an internal state. Then, students are asked to recall an experience in which they were highly motivated--excited, turned on, intensely involved in an endeavor. The experience need not be academic. It can be from any context: sports, work, hobbies, travel, home, etc.

2. Moving to the chalkboard or easel, the instructor asks students to volunteer adjectives that describe their experiences in the highly motivated state. As students volunteer words and phrases, the instructor records these, grouping positive and negative entries separately, but not labeling the columns. (Appendix 1 includes a descriptive list recently generated by an organization behavior class.)

3. The instructor asks the group what the difference is between the two lists. When they distinguish the positive vs. negative quality of experiences in the lists, the instructor labels the lists and briefly points out how positive motivation produces seeking behavior and how negative motivation produces avoidance behavior.

4. Next, the instructor reveals that this exercise has been done many times with groups in business and industry. These people recalled on-the-job experiences in which they were highly motivated. Ask the students if they think the business and industry lists would be different than the list they just generated. Then, show an overhead of The Highly Motivated State: Descriptions from Business and Industry or provide handouts (Appendix 2). Discuss the apparent similarities and differences.

5. Then, the instructor asks students to recall an experience in which they lacked motivation--were bored, apathetic, turned off. Students volunteer descriptions of the unmotivated state and the instructor records them. (Appendix 3 includes a list of recently generated by students.)

6. The instructor asks students to raise their hands to indicate which internal state they most prefer experiencing: positively motivated? negatively motivated? unmotivated? Then, ask which state students experience most at school? on their jobs? in their leisure time?

7. Distribute A Model of Motivation (Appendix 4). Discuss the four classes of variables (social inputs, personal inputs, social feedback and outcome experiences). Invite students to classify information they generated into the four classes of variables as a homework exercise.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXERCISE TWO: INFLUENCING OTHERS' MOTIVATIONAL STATES

1. The instructor asks the students to participate in an exercise to apply and review what they have learned about motivation from the point of view of managing people. Students are asked to break into small groups of 5 or 6 in any way that is convenient.

2. Ask the groups to imagine they are managers. Further, they are to imagine that their departments have recently been highly productive and the employees highly satisfied. Some of the groups of managers are assigned the task of ruining motivation so that productivity suffers and employees begin complaining within a week. Other groups of managers are assigned the task of enhancing motivation so that productivity and morale remain high.

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3. Half of the groups receive a worksheet How to Ruin Motivation (Appendix 5) and half receive How to Enhance Motivation (Appendix 6). Ask participants to brainstorm specific things they could say and do as managers to either ruin or enhance the internal motivated states of their employees. They should record these ideas on the left side of the worksheet. Encourage participants to draw upon their experience, their cognitive learnings from reading and class activities, and fantasy. Allow about five minutes for the task.

4. At the end of the allotted time period, ask the groups to turn their attention to the right side of the worksheet and to jot down a brief explanation of theoretical reference which accounts for how or why each managerial behavior in the left column works to ruin or enhance motivation. Allow eight to ten minutes for this task.

5. Gain the attention of the entire group and ask the small groups to report their ideas about ruining or enhancing motivation. Have the groups ruining motivation report first, followed by the groups enhancing motivation.

6. Note that “knowing a thing by its opposite” applies here; what not to do can be as important as what to do.

7. Turn students’ attention to the explanations they generated about why their behaviors would work. Ask each group to report brief explanations of how or why any two of their strategies would work, referring to theory or experience.

8. Suggest that each student repeat the exercise at home, working on the condition (enhancing vs. ruining) they did not work on during class.

APPENDIX I

THE HIGHLY MOTIVATED STATE: DESCRIPTIONS FROM AN ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR CLASS

(POSITIVE)

Being rewarded
 Being involved
 Being challenged
 Being interested
 Making someone happy
 Being encouraged
 Being “high” emotionally
 Making the right choice
 Being appreciated
 Having a purpose
 Being special
 Increasing prestige
 Being honored
 Being respected
 Being curious
 Being able to prove I could do it
 Knowing results will be lasting
 Gaining personal insight
 Accomplishing something
 Finishing/completing something

(NEGATIVE)

Anger
 Revenge
 Social pressure
 Stress
 Forces (no choice)
 Dissension
 Conflict
 Envy
 Hate
 Covering up a failure
 Resentment
 Jealousy
 Saving face
 Competing
 Against someone I didn’t like
 Being miserable (wanting to change)
 Fear of failure
 Fear
 Being bored

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APPENDIX 2

THE HIGHLY MOTIVATED STATE: DESCRIPTIONS FROM BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

MIDDLE MANAGERS: UTILITY COMPANY

Being trusted
Being challenged
Competition
Receiving honor

Self esteem
Pride
Feeling understood
Others were excited
New experience
Proving myself
Being supported
Job was important
Feeling worthwhile
Having freedom
Was interested
Desire to do well
Dissatisfaction
Fear of punishment
Stress

MIDDLE MANAGERS: RESORT

Enjoyed task
Giving good service
Gaining prestige
Seeing someone else enjoy
their task
Being a member of a team
Being encouraged
Feeling a challenge
Fear
Seeing everyone benefit
Feeling needed
Striving for a goal
Being a winner
Learning something new
Overcoming negative odds
Competing
Receiving recognition
Causing change
Failing
Money
Being rewarded
Chance for advancement
Chance to be creative
Threat

APPENDIX 3

LACK OF MOTIVATION: DESCRIPTIONS FROM AN ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR CLASS

No hope
Being idle
Being totally unsuccessful
Couldn't have it my way
Being scheduled
Feeling worthless/bad about self
Feeling not understood
Being rejected
Feeling something is futile
Having nothing to look forward to
Being stubborn
Making a wrong choice
Being afraid
Feeling apathetic
Losing self-worth
Losing face
Losing something valuable and can't have it back

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APPENDIX 4

A MODEL OF MOTIVATION

SOCIAL INPUTS

Being challenged (11)
Good relations with workers/sharing work/being member of a team (10)
Good relations with supervisor (6)
Being given responsibility/authority (5)
Others were motivated (5)
Being trusted (3)
Being supported (3)
Chance for advancement (2)
Being encouraged (2)
Having security (2)
Being asked to help
Consistent behavior from boss/associates
Being understood
Knowing what was expected
Being taught

PERSONAL INPUTS

Doing/experiencing something new/different (10)
Being interested/involved/committed/enthusiastic (7)
Doing my thing/enjoy what I was doing (6)
Competing with others (5)
Seeing/causing change/innovation (5)
Had/striving for goal/purpose (4)
Being creative (4)
Desiring something--excellent/learning/accomplishment (4)
Helping others/making someone happy (4)
Being spontaneous/self-expressive/curious (3)
Admitting I was wrong

SOCIAL FEEDBACK

Money/raise (9)
Being recognized (7)
Being rewarded (6)
Getting/anticipating positive feedback/praise (6)
Being respected (2)
Being honored (2)
Being appreciated/special (2)
Getting constructive feedback/criticism (2)
Being promoted

OUTCOME EXPERIENCES

Proving myself/winning/being successful/the best/being competent/doing good job (22)
Self-esteem/pride (9)
Learning/developing abilities or skills/improving myself/overcoming fears/learning from failures (9)
Completing project/task
Feeling good/worthwhile/together (5)
Seeing results/progress (4)
Status/prestige (3)

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APPENDIX 5

HOW TO RUIN MOTIVATION

INSTRUCTIONS:

Imagine you are a manager with a staff of 20. Productivity and morale are at an all time high. Your objective is to interfere with productivity and morale by ruining employees' motivation within one week. Describe what you could say and do to frustrate people, lower morale and productivity, get poor performance, and encourage self-defeating, neurotic behavior.

ACTIONS TO TAKE

HOW/WHY THIS WOULD WORK

APPENDIX 6

HOW TO ENHANCE MOTIVATION

INSTRUCTIONS:

Imagine you are a manager with a staff of 20. Productivity and morale are at an all time high. Your objective is to keep this productivity and morale high by enhancing employees motivation. Describe what you could say and do to encourage people, keep morale and productivity up, keep the performance level high, and engender good work spirit.

ACTIONS TO TAKE

HOW/WHY THIS WOULD WORK
