CHICKEN DANCE ANYONE? A QUICK EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE FOR TEACHING EXPECTANCY THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Sometimes, students have difficulty grasping and applying motivation theories given the abstract nature of these theories. This articles describes a simple experiential exercise that helps students gain a personal understanding of Vroom's expectancy theory. This exercise invites students to do the chicken dance under different incentive conditions. Although some students require no encouragement to dance, others wait to see what other students are doing, and yet others require significant incentives to dance along with their classmates. The debriefing of the exercise illustrates the need to take into account individuals' sense of self-efficacy for a task (effort \rightarrow performance), the need for clear linkages between performance and rewards (performance \rightarrow outcomes), and individuals' assessment of the attractiveness of particular rewards (valence). Additional insights regarding students' motivation to step out of their comfort zones are also explored.

INTRODUCTION

Motivation theories are central to students' awareness of how individuals function and succeed in organizations; in other words, what causes them to direct effort in a particular direction in a persistent manner. Thus, such theories are an important component of an organizational behavior, management, or leadership course. However, surprisingly few experiential exercises that help students understand and apply motivation theories appear to have been developed. In this article, we describe a simple, "high risk" experiential exercise that requires minimal preparation and materials and that helps individuals learn about expectancy theory and gain insight into their own motivational propensities. We begin by considering existing published exercises that address the topic of motivation theories. Then, we present the central tenants of expectancy theory, which serves as the theoretical grounding for the exercise. Finally, we describe the exercise and draw conclusions regarding its use.

EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES & MOTIVATION THEORIES

Our online search of published articles describing classroom exercises aimed at helping students understand motivation theories yielded only four relevant articles. The extent to which these exercises involved students in experiential "learning by doing" varied substantially. In this section, we briefly present these exercises and the extent to which they fit within an experiential learning framework.

The earliest example of classroom exercises on the topic of motivation is that of Mills and McKnight (1988), which was presented at a conference of the Association of Business Simulation and Experiential Learning. In their article, these scholars present two exercises as follows. Their first exercise, *What it is to be Motivated*, is an instructor-led discussion on the topic of general motivation and does not refer directly to specific motivation theories. The instructor invites students to reflect on past experiences during which they were: (a) highly motivated (*excited*) or (b) unmotivated (*bored*). The instructor debriefs the exercise by soliciting examples of relevant past experiences from students, contrasting the two motivational states, and discussing lists developed by students who have previously participated in this exercise. Mills and McKnight (1988) indicate that experiences that are highly motivational are positive and tend to result in *seeking* behavior, whereas experiences in which individuals lack motivation are negative and tend to create *avoidance* behavior. Their second exercise, *Influencing Others' Motivational States*, invites students working in groups to brainstorm how they, if in the role of managers, would: (a) *ruin* or (b) *enhance* their employees' motivational levels. Students are then asked to describe the theoretical underpinning that supports their supposition that specific actions would have the noted effects.

In their exercise, Mohr, Goulet, and Heller (2004, p. 10) ask students to "identify, perform, and explain a memorable situation when a motivational theory is revealed in their daily lives." Mohr et al. (2004) consider their exercise to be consistent with Weinstein and Mayer's (1986) assertion that individuals try to make sense of new learning by relating it to previous experiences. While placed in groups, students describe their past experiences using the language of motivation theories. Mohr et al. (2004) found that students have more facility applying content theories, such as David McClelland's three need theory (McClelland & Liberman, 1949) than applying process theories such as expectancy theory (<u>Vroom, 1964</u>). They also note that students find it challenging to understand the "dynamic engines" of theories, for example the underlying dynamic of Maslow's Need Hierarchy (Maslow, 1942) that posits that individuals seek to meet their basic needs, for the most part, before attempting to fulfill higher level needs.

Stecher and Rosse (2007)'s *simulation* exercise is intended to illustrate equity theory in combination with expectancy theory. In their exercise, the instructor invites groups of students to discuss a case study in which an employee fails to receive a well-

deserved promotion (an inequitable outcome) as a result of either: (a) unfair procedures, or (b) fair procedures. Students are asked to put themselves in the shoes of this employee and consider their reactions in relation to equity theory (distributive and procedural justice) as well as the elements of expectancy theory, "the motivational force to react to the inequity in the scenario in a particular manner" (Stecher & Rosse, 2007, p. 787).

Finally, in their exercise on job characteristics theory, *Under Construction*, Donovan and Fluegge-Woolf (2014) place students in four groups, each of which possesses the characteristics of a bureaucratic, organic, downsized, or ambiguous environment. These working conditions are intended to parallel the core job dimensions of the Job Characteristics Model and generate the critical psychological states and various outcomes that form part of this model. The instructor engages groups of students in a Lego[®] structure building project and then debriefs the exercise through the lens of Job Characteristics Model.

The extent to which these exercises fit within an experiential learning framework differs considerably. "In its simplest form, experiential learning means learning from experience or learning by doing. Experiential education first immerses learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking" (Lewis & Williams, 1994, p. 5). The *experiences* in which students are immersed in the five exercises discussed above vary greatly. Whereas Mills and McKnight (1988)'s first exercise, *What it is to be Motivated*, and Mohr, Goulet, and Heller's (2004) exercise both invite students to discuss their past experiences, Stecher and Rosse's (2007) case study and Mills and McKnight's (1988) second study, *Influencing Others' Motivational States*, invite groups of students to consider hypothetical situations involving others. In contrast, in Donovan and Fluegge-Woolf's (2014) exercise, *Under Construction*, students experience motivational conditions in an immediate and personal sense.

According to Chapman, McPhee, and Proudman's (1995) principles of experiential learning, experiential exercises enable students to relate their experience to broader issues (e.g., the world around them, workplace management) and theory (i.e., bringing "theory to life"), but also to reflect on the personal significance of the experiences so that they may develop insights into their own behaviors, values and motivations and their impact on future actions. In this regard, the five exercises and their debriefing appear to focus on encouraging students to draw connections between the subject matter (theory) and their experiences and perceptions. For example, debriefing in Donovan and Fluegge-Woolf's (2014) exercise emphasizes the identification of various elements of job characteristics theory. This activity falls squarely in the abstract conceptualization stage of Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 2015). Although making this linkage to theory is a significant element of the learning cycle, it does not assist the students in capturing the personal implications of experiences as would be the case if the debriefing process journeyed around the entire learning cycle. The exercise proposed in this paper includes both elements of experiencing learning: enabling students to draw significant linkages with theory as well as personal lessons regarding motivation.

EXPECTANCY THEORY

Whereas the previous section pointed to the need for more classroom-based experiential exercises addressing the topic of motivation theories, this section briefly outlines the theoretical foundation of the exercise presented in this paper. Although this exercise can be debriefed from a variety of perspectives, it fits particularly well with Victor Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. Expectancy theory is a cognitive process theory that seeks to explain how employees decide on what actions to take and evaluate how successful those actions are. It is "one of the most central motivation theories, and substantial evidence supports the view that expectancy theory can predict effort and performance" (Erez & Isen, 2002, p. 1055). According to this theory, people are motivated to take action if their efforts lead to effective performance (i.e., good results) and if they receive adequate and desirable rewards. Thus, according to Landy and Becker (1987), employees engage in a type of cost-benefit analysis as a means of evaluating alternative course of action. The extent to which this analysis is undertaken in a conscious or mindless manner may vary depending on the individual and the task.

Expectancy theory makes a number of assumptions. First, behavior is the result of factors in the person and in the situation. Thus, neither the person nor the situation alone determines behavior. People come into the workplace with all of their experiences, expectations, and needs. These interact with factors in the work environment (e.g., structure, support, well-defined tasks, etc.) to produce behavior. Second, people make choices about how they will behave: they make choices about being a member of the organization (e.g., coming to work on time, interacting with others, etc.) and about how much effort they will direct towards their work (i.e., how hard they'll work). Third, people value outcomes differently. This valence for various outcomes or rewards is influenced by differences in strengths for particular needs. So, for example, an individual with a strong need for belonging will assign a high valence to rewards involving others (for example, a team celebration). Finally, people choose their behavior based on their perceptions of the likelihood that a particular behavior will bring them valued outcomes. People do what gets rewarded and avoid things that are not rewarded or that are punished.

At the core of expectancy theory are three relationships:

- Effort → Performance (expectancy). Expectancy refers to an individual's estimation of the probability of successful
 performance given the exertion of effort (i.e., the extent to which effort affects task performance levels). Typical questions at
 this point are: "If I work hard, will it make a difference? Do I have the skills needed to perform at a reasonable level? Am I able
 to perform the task?"
- 2. Performance \rightarrow Outcome (instrumentality). Instrumentality refers to a belief that performance will result in consequences such

as rewards or punishments. Examples of questions that consider instrumentality are: "If I perform at a certain level, what are the likely results? What's in it for me?"

3. Rewards → Personal Goals (valence). Valence refers to the extent to which the consequences are valued by individuals (i.e., the value or attractiveness of an outcome assigned by an individual). Typical questions pertaining to valence are: "Are these outcomes important to me? Is it worth my while to make the effort?"

According to expectancy theory, people make choices about the level at which they perform, and they do so based on the level of performance that provides for the best possible outcomes. All three linkages must be present for motivation to occur. People who are motivated will expend effort in a particular direction. Effort combined with ability results in a particular performance level and, in turn, the realization of valued outcomes. The absence of one or more of these linkages results in lower levels of motivation. For example, if people perform well but don't receive desired outcomes or, perhaps, are even punished, this negatively affects their future motivation. Research indicates that employees who perform at high levels perceive all three linkages to be present (see Langton, Robbins, & Judge, 2016). This research also indicates that a strong relationship between performance and outcomes is a better predictor of performance than job satisfaction.

CHICKEN DANCE ANYONE? EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

OBJECTIVES AND INTRODUCTION

The objectives of this exercise are to help students develop an understanding of expectancy theory and gain insight into their own motivational propensities. If the exercise is undertaken in the context of a management/leadership course, it may help individuals reflect on how managers/leaders can motivate the members of their teams.

According to Mancini (2016), the chicken dance, originally called, "Der Ententanz," was composed by Swiss accordion player, Werner Thomas, in the 1950s. It became popular at Germany's Oktoberfests, and Belgian producer Louis van Rijmenant added words to the song. Americans Eddie Duling and Larry Karhoff popularized the song in the USA in the 1970s. Since then, a variety of versions and names of the song have been released.

Inviting students to do the chicken dance as a way of examining expectancy theory is especially suitable for multiple reasons. First, it requires that students step out of their comfort zones. According to Chapman, McPhee, and Proudman (1995, p. 243), "Learning is enhanced when students are given the opportunity to operate outside of their own perceived comfort zones... [including] being accountable for one's actions and owning the consequences." Second, this exercise is relatively easy and quick to do and doesn't require any special skills or materials. Finally, because the chicken dance is known around the world, students are likely to be familiar with it. However, it is possible that students are not familiar with the specific steps involved in performing the dance.

PARTICIPANTS AND TIME REQUIREMENTS

This exercise has been used with undergraduate university students in organizational behavior, management, and leadership courses over the past three years. Class size has ranged from 30 to 60 students. The experience takes approximately 5 to 10 minutes to carry out, and debriefing may take an additional 15 to 30 minutes.

STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR PREPARATION

No student preparation is required. However, typically, students have read a chapter on motivation in their textbook in preparation for the class and, thus, are familiar with expectancy theory and other motivation theories. Prior to the start of the class in which instructors will be presenting the exercise (and, ideally, prior to students arriving in the classroom), instructors should do a Google[®] search for a brief video of individuals performing the chicken dance and have it ready to start. This video will serve as the model and source of music for the students when they perform the chicken dance. In the absence of this video, instructors will need to demonstrate the steps of the chicken dance to students and, perhaps, hum the music. In this case, instructors should prepare themselves by reviewing a video and practicing the chicken dance on their own in advance of the class.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

No particular materials are required to undertake the exercise. However, prior to the class in which the exercise will be undertaken, instructors need to consider what they are prepared to offer students as incentives to perform the chicken dance. If the incentives involve chocolate bars or candy, for example, instructors need to have them on hand for the class (or promise to bring them to a future class). If the incentives involve bonus points, instructors must ensure that offering such points is consistent with their school's policies on this matter (if any exits).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CARRYING OUT THE EXERCISE

Rather than introducing the exercise explicitly, instructors should invite students to stand up and join them in doing the chicken dance as follows: "To start our class, we'll be doing an exercise. Please stand. (Once, the students have stood up), now, let's do the chicken dance together." At this point, "Level 1," no video, incentives or words of encouragement should be used. It is

unlikely that students will stand up and/or dance at this point.

If fewer than 50% of students have started to do the chicken dance, instructors can proceed to "Level 2" – cueing and playing the chicken dance video, and, once the video has ended, encouraging students to perform the chicken dance. Here is a possible script, "Oh, perhaps you need a model, here's a video that shows you the steps. (After the video), so, let's get up, stretch, and get some exercise. This is your chance to let loose and have fun!"

Again, typically few, if any, students respond to this minimal level of encouragement. Instructors can then proceed to "Level 3," which involves telling students that they will receive a simple reward such as some career insights, chocolate, or even tips for writing effective term papers. Here is a possible script, "How about if I offer you a little incentive for doing the chicken dance? Would that interest you? (After a few minutes), I'm prepared to offer you some chocolate in exchange for your doing the dance. I'll show you the video again, and we'll get started!"

Again, few students typically respond to offers of small incentives. Finally, at "Level 4," instructors can announce that all students who participate in the chicken dance will receive a bonus point on their final grade. Here is a possible script, "How about if I offer every student who does the chicken dance a bonus point that will be added to your final grade? Would that interest you? (After a few minutes), I'll show you the video again, and we'll dance together!" This is usually sufficient incentive to ensure that all students perform the chicken dance. At this point, instructors play the video and participate with the students in performing the chicken dance. There is typically a high level of energy and excitement in the room during and immediately after the dance. At the end of the dance, instructors should invite students to sit down and write their names and student numbers on a sheet of paper. This will serve as the record of who performed the dance and, thus, will receive a bonus point.

A high risk alternative for carrying out the exercise is for instructors to employ a coercive influence tactic such as suggesting that students will be penalized for not participating or even cancelling the bonus point (after they have performed the dance). Instructors need to judge how reactive their students might be in response to such disincentives. People typically react poorly to coercion, and may do so, even if it is intended to illustrate a point.

In the past, instead of asking students to perform the chicken dance, we have asked students to sign the happy birthday song, which is a less risky demand to make of students. However, our experience is that students will readily accept this invitation, especially if we inform students that we recently celebrated a birthday. Consequently, this approach reduces the exercise's effectiveness in illustrating the elements of expectancy theory.

DEBRIEFING THE EXERCISE

Instructors should use Kolb's experiential learning cycle to debrief this exercise (Kolb, 2015). After the dancing (experience), instructors should ask students questions about their experience (reflection), invite students to 'step back' and consider the broader lessons that the exercise reveals and draw linkages to expectancy theory (abstract conceptualization), and then encourage students to consider the implications of the exercise for future action (action planning). Here are some pertinent questions and some possible answers:

1. What happened? How was the experience for you? What were your thoughts and feelings during the exercise? What did you observe among other students? What stopped you from standing up and doing the chicken dance? Have you ever done it? Did you know what to do? How would you describe the "encouragements" that you received to do the chicken dance? How effective or ineffective were they?

Here are some potential answers to these questions: I wasn't sure why you wanted us to do the chicken dance. I knew about the dance, but I forgot the steps. I don't know how to do it, and I feel self-conscious especially in front of other people. At home, I might do it alone (but probably not). I don't like to try new things at all but especially not in front of others. I was curious, but I was waiting for others to stand up. I really wanted to stand up, but not alone. I was waiting to see what others would do. I'm not a good dancer; I didn't think that I could do all the steps correctly. When you encouraged us to dance saying that it would be fun and good exercise, I was willing to do it, and I almost stood up, but I stopped myself out of fear of embarrassing myself. I need a big incentive to get up and do something out of my comfort zone. Small rewards don't motivate me. The bonus point was what I needed to take the risk to stand up and dance. I can really use it. I didn't care about most of the incentives or encouragements you offered because they weren't of any value to me. Now, the bonus point can make a difference between a B and a B+, and I was willing to risk looking stupid for a few minutes to get it.

2. So what does this mean? What have you learned about yourself? What parallels might you draw between your motivation to participate in this exercise and your level of motivation more generally? What motivates you to wake up in the morning? How could we tell that you were motivated? What causes people to feel motivated? What conclusions can you draw about yourself and what it takes to get you to do something that might be risky? How might leaders or managers be asking their employees to *metaphorically* 'do the chicken dance'? How might we relate this exercise to motivation theories? What other lessons can you draw from this exercise?

Here are some potential answers to these questions: I have trouble being the first 'adopter' as they say in marketing. I tend to follow the crowd and simply conform to what others do. I realized that I'm not much of a risk taker. If I see others willing to

take risks, I will do so as well. I need big incentives to do something out of my comfort zone. I have to figure out what's in it for me before I'm willing to do something. I won't just do something because I'm asked to do it. This tends to be the case for me more generally. It takes a special incentive to get me to change my routine and do something different. I can't say that I'm a generally motivated guy. I just do what I have to do every day, and then move on to the next day. I follow a routine. This was obvious in the exercise because I wasn't feeling motivated to do it; it wasn't part of my routine. You can tell that I was motivated when I was willing to get up and do the chicken dance; it turned out to be lots of fun, and I really made an effort to do it correctly and right to the end of the video. I also encouraged others to do it even though I knew that I wouldn't get extra points for doing this. This is very similar to how I operate in life; I'm enthusiastic about finding new opportunities and trying new things, and I tend to influence others to do the same. Managers might be asking employees to 'do the chicken dance' when they ask them to do something unusual, something outside the normal routine. But employees are likely to resist if managers just tell them to do it with no explanations or encouragements. Depending on what is being asked, even encouragements such as "it's good for you" are weak. Managers may need to appeal to employees' bottom line, but, first, figure out what really motivates them to work. Regarding motivation theories, when they see others dancing, people who have a strong need for affiliation may be more likely to comply even if they feel uncomfortable. They want to be part of the group. Another way of looking the exercise is intrinsic versus extrinsic rewards: in this case, the extrinsic rewards (the bonus point) was much stronger than the intrinsic reward associated with dancing (increasing energy, having fun). I wonder if, from now on, bonus points will always be required if the instructor wants us to do something? The intrinsic rewards of a task may become less important and impactful due to the use of extrinsic rewards. Expectations are set! Regarding expectancy theory, some people weren't confident that their attempts to dance would result in their being able to dance in a non-embarrassing way; so their effort-performance linkage was damaged or weak. They didn't know how to do the chicken dance. When you showed the video, it was obvious that everyone could successfully perform the chicken dance; this reinforced the effort-performance linkage. Also, at first, no rewards were offered, so the performance-reward link didn't exist either, or, at least, it wasn't obvious. Later rewards were offered, but they weren't valued, so the rewards-valence link didn't function. When a valued reward was finally offered, then we were willing to make the effort and perform (to the best of our ability). If managers want their employees to do something, they need to first determine what rewards are most valued by employees, and then offer that reward in exchange for performance.

3. Now what? Given what you learned in this exercise, what might you do differently the next time? How might the exercise influence how you motivate yourself in the future? How might the exercise influence how you motivate your employees (once you become a supervisor or manager)?

Here are some potential answers to these questions: I might take the first adopter or leadership role and try to influence others to do the dance. What harm can it do? It would give me a feeling of being successful. I might negotiate with my team the conditions under which we would be willing to do the chicken dance and then communicate this to the instructor. I will consciously consider the incentives and rewards that I use in my day-to-day life. I might create some rewards to motivate myself to go beyond the limits that I naturally impose on myself. I will take risks based on what's right for me and not wait for the crowd to join in first. In situations where I feel demotivated, I will ask myself what is blocking me, for example, do I have important needs that are unmet, do I feel that extra effort won't lead to great performance, are there no rewards, or are there rewards available but none that I particularly value? In other words, I will do some problem solving to try to become aware of what's at the root of my lack of motivation, and I will try different solutions (such as giving myself little rewards as I reach milestones along the way). Once I become a manager, I will be more aware of the motivational process as a whole and what motivates employees. I will try to create motivational working conditions for employees and let them know that taking risks is expected and, indeed, celebrated. As a manager or leader, I will: (a) ensure that all employees have the training and skills needed to succeed in their jobs (expectancy); (b) remove roadblocks that prevent employees from performing (for example, unclear expectations, not enough tools or assistance, not enough feedback); (c) clearly spell out rewards for doing good work (even if it's a simple thank you or a team celebration); (d) ensure that rewards are clearly linked to performance; (e) ensure that there aren't any 'disincentives' for performing (for example, professional jealousy, roadblocks, giving productive people even more work, lack of equity); and (f) take the time needed to find out what's important to each employee, keeping in mind that individual differences exist.

CONCLUSION

We have used this experiential exercise on multiple occasions in undergraduate organizational behavior, management, and leadership classes with great success. In their learning journals, students report that the exercise was a personal challenge for them to consider: (a) what prevents them from taking on new challenges (more generally), (b) how they can take charge of their own motivation, and (c) how, as managers, they can be more reflective about the motivational process. Some students are able to recall the exercise and the learning they derived from it several years after having experienced it.

We would like to offer several caveats, however. Since we present this exercise in the context of a course in which experiential learning is the central approach to learning, students become accustomed to working their way around the experiential learning cycle and applying new learning to themselves. This facility with experiential learning may not be evident in a primarily lecture-based course.

Also, instructors should take into account the possibility that social facilitation and inhibition processes may influence the willingness of students to participate in the exercise. Some individuals are significantly influenced, either positively or negatively, by the presence of an audience (Strauss, 2002). According to the Yerkes-Dodson law (Cohen, 2011), when individuals perform simple,

familiar tasks, their performance is not inhibited by the presence of others. But, the opposite is true for difficult, unfamiliar tasks: asking someone to try something new and complex in front of others is likely to inhibit their performance. However, Guerin (1989) found social inhibition effects on tasks as simple as learning a list of words even in the presence of one person. Similarly, Berger et al. (1981) found that participants avoided overt practice during learning of experimental tasks (for example, talking out loud or moving one's arms).

Finally, research indicates that people with an internal locus of control are more likely to be motivated in the manner described by expectancy theory than those with an external locus of control (Broedling, 1975). The latter are more likely to be influenced by social norms. This suggests that, despite the presence of relevant rewards, individuals may still be reluctant to perform the chicken dance, especially if others are disinclined to do it.

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