

# Ability, motivation and employee work behaviors

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## Abstract

Human resource activities match individuals and jobs. Individuals bring particular skills/knowledge/aptitudes and needs values to the employment relationship. Jobs have certain content or duties, tasks, behaviors, functions and responsibilities necessary for satisfactory performance. Three general factors affect employees work behaviors. First is individual ability. Everyone has heard stories of the super salesperson or super engineer who, when promoted to management, turned out to be mediocre or worse. Skills, aptitudes and knowledge that are well suited to one job may be useless in another. Second is the complex dimension of motivation, resulting from the match between the individual's needs/values and job outcomes, as well as the perceived link between engaging in work behaviors and obtaining the desired outcomes. The third factor affecting employee work hard behaviors is conditions beyond the individual's control. Motivation interacts with ability to affect individual work behaviors. Staffing activities move people into, through, and out of the organization. Determining which individuals to hire, promote, transfer or lay off often requires indicators of their ability to accomplish the job requirements. Measuring abilities and predicting future behaviors from those abilities is an important purpose of staffing activities.

**Key words:** employment relationship, individual ability, complex dimension of motivation, ability

## 1. Introduction

The worker-job match affects efficiency and equity.

Regarding efficiency, the match between the individual's skills/knowledge/aptitudes and job's content determines the individual's ability to accomplish work behaviours such as performance, attendance and tenure.

The match between the individual's needs/values, behaviours and the job's returns determines the individual's motivation to engage in the work behaviors.

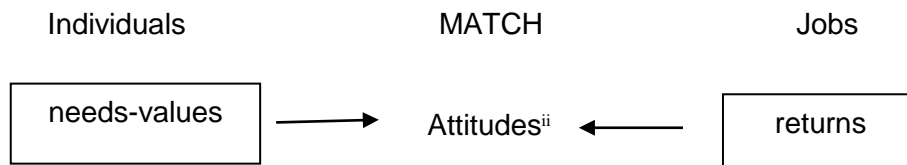
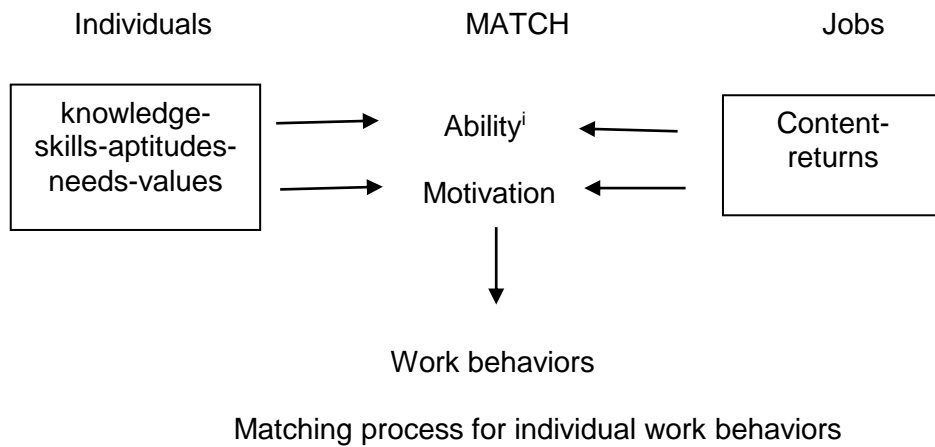


Figure 1. Matching process - matching process for individual work behaviors

Regarding equity, the match between the individual's need's/values and the job's returns affect the individual's work attitudes, such as job satisfaction.

## 2. Ability, motivation and employee work behaviors

Motivation interacts with ability to affect individual work behaviors. A simple model suggests that performance equals ability times motivation

$$P = A \times M$$

P – performance  
 A – ability  
 M – motivation

But the precise nature of the ability-motivation-performance relationship is unclear.[1]  
 Psychologists categorize various kinds of ability as:[2]

1. Mechanical ability - ability to visualize how parts fit together into a whole;comprehension of mechanical relationships.
2. Motor coordination ability - the ability to move the body effectively to perform physical tasks.
3. Intellectual ability - general intelligence or reasoning;verbal and numerical ability.

4. Creative ability - innovative and artistic ability, aesthetic judgement.

That abilities influence job performance is generally well accepted.

In fact, recent studies of abilities suggest that they may be related to job performance even in quite different jobs.

### 3. Using Abilities in Human Resource Activities

Two Human resource activities

- staffing and
- training

most strongly rely on individual ability differences to increase the match between individuals and jobs.

*Staffing* - staffing activities move people into, through, and out of the organization. Determining which individuals to hire, promote, transfer or lay off often requires indicators of their ability to accomplish the job requirements. Measuring abilities and predicting future behaviors from those abilities is an important purpose of staffing activities.

*Training* - training activities provide experiences and learning opportunities in hopes of changing the abilities of individuals to better match job requirements. Obviously, trainers must carefully consider employees learning ability. After the training, trainers must ensure that the abilities developed through training match the job requirements. Because selection predictions are not perfect, some employees who need additional strength in certain abilities.

*Motivation* - many psychologists agree that goal-directed behavior is important. Knowing why behavior occurs and why it is directed toward one of countless possible goals allows considerable progress in improving an employee's job performance.

### 4. Individual Motivation in Human Resource Decisions

A goal of designing human resource management activities is to maximize employee effectiveness through high levels of performance. This human resource management programs must act on employees abilities and motivation. Influencing employees motivation is more difficult than influencing employees abilities through staffing or training.

According to expectancy theory, employees are motivated if they believe

- ✓ that exerting increased effort leads to rewarded behaviours, and
- ✓ that achieving certain behaviors leads to desired outcomes

Equity theory suggests that employees exert effort to the extent that they believe it can reduce perceived inequities compared to some other person or group. This expectancy and equity theories suggest that motivation results not only from factors under the organization's control, such as reward levels and work rules linking behaviors and rewards, but also from factors not under the organization's control such as importance attached to rewards,

perceptions of the work outcomes received by others, and social rewards provided by co-workers.

Human resource activities such as job design and compensation establish a framework that links employee behaviors and rewards.

There is no guarantee, however, that employees perceive the system in the way that it is designed, not that the rewards considered important by the designers are also important to the employees.

### Employees Attitudes

Human resource decision makers are concerned with the feelings and emotions employees have toward their work for at least two reasons.

First employee attitudes seem related to employee behaviors such as attendance and length supporting evidence is limited, there is a common belief that positive attitudes contribute to increased employee performance.<sup>[3]</sup>

Second, independent of its effects on behaviors source management. Interest groups such as governments, unions and most important interest groups is an organization's own employees. Therefore, many employers take great pride and devote substantial effort to ensure that employees perceive them as good employers.

### Job Satisfaction

Though employee attitudes go by names such as morale, opinions or job involvement and are measured in many ways, industrial psychologists have devoted great effort to defining and measuring job satisfaction.

### Content of Job Satisfaction

Analysts measure job satisfaction primarily through questionnaires. These questionnaires typically address satisfaction with various facets of the job, as well as provide an overall satisfaction score for each employee.

The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) measures satisfaction with five job facets:

1. Work itself,
2. Supervision,
3. Pay,
4. Promotion opportunity, and
5. Co-worker

<i>Ability utilization</i>	<i>Moral values</i>
Achievement	Recognition
Activity	Responsibility
Advancement	Security
Authority	Social service
Company policies and practices	Social status
Compensation	Supervision – human relations

Figure 2. Job satisfaction facets from MSQ

The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) measures satisfaction with the 20 work facets in Figure 2. Analysts compute overall measures of individual satisfaction by summing the

individual facet satisfaction levels, or by asking individuals a specific question about their overall satisfaction.

## Process of Job Satisfaction

Why do individuals differ in their job satisfaction?

What processes operate to influence satisfaction with the various faces of work?

Edwin Locke has proposed a discrepancy *theory of job satisfaction*. This theory states that satisfaction is affected by two factors:

1. First – individuals values that define what they want or desire as well as the importance of the desire.
2. Second – perceptions that define how much individuals believe they are receiving. The discrepancy between desired and perceived work facets, as well as the importance of the facet, determines the level of satisfaction.

Pay satisfaction rises as pay increases because an individual can probably never have too much pay, so the discrepancy is always getting smaller as pay rises.

In contrast, temperature satisfaction rises and then falls as temperature increases because there is an ideal temperature level, and both positive and negative differences from it cause less satisfaction.

Equity theory also helps to explain individual differences in work attitudes, by suggesting how individuals decide how much of work facet they desire, or feel would be equitable. Individuals may consider the ratio of the work outcomes and inputs for others, compare that ratio to the levels of inputs the individual provides, and judge what the appropriate level of their own work outcomes should be.

The importance of the work facet may also be partially determined by the importance of the equity perception to the individual.

## 5. Results and discussion

Attitudes surveys typically contain mixtures of multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions allowing employees to write in their responses. Some of the questions are core or standard items included in all surveys.

Others may reflect issues relevant only to a particular time.

Attitude surveys can provide useful information when they are designed to support human resource decisions, but they can be harmful if not carefully used.

As with all information used to make decisions, attitude surveys are more valuable if they improve important decisions and obtain information at low cost.

Attitude data can serve at least six purposes:

1. Identification of trends in employee morale and the degree and trends of specific employee opinions by skill and organizational units.

2. Identification and analysis of key issues that may be common throughout the business units or functions.

3. Feedback to management regarding administration of policies, practices, programs and the effectiveness of business operations.

4. Feedback to managers as a basis for improving working relationships with their subordinates.

5. A process that ensures timely planning and implementation of appropriate corrective actions.

6. Conducting research.

Table 1. Implementing Specialized Attitude Measures

1. Identification of trends in employee morale and the degree and trends of specific employee opinions by skill and organizational units.
2. Identification and analysis of key issues that may be common throughout the business units or functions
3. Feedback to management regarding administration of policies, practices, programs and the effectiveness of business operations.
4. Feedback to managers as a basis for improving working relationships with their subordinates.
5. A process that ensures timely planning and implementation of appropriate corrective actions.
6. Conducting research.

### Using Employees' Attitude Information in Human Resource Decisions

The discrepancy theory of satisfaction suggests that human resource activities affect employee attitudes through their effects on employee values and perceptions. The objective aspects of jobs affect employee attitudes. Discrepancy theory also suggests that individual reactions to work can be different, even when the objective work characteristics are the same.

- First, individuals may place different importance levels on work facets. Employees with children may place greater importance on opportunities for health insurance, college tuition support and day-care centers.
- Second, individuals may differ in the amount of any work facet that they prefer. New employees may find such attention from distracting or unnecessary.
- Third, individuals may differ in the amount of a work facet they perceive themselves as receiving.

Some employees may make an effort to become quite well informed about the amount and value of their fringe benefits, while others may be completely unaware of them.

Individual values are relatively fixed, and are probably most readily changed through staffing activities.

Compared to employee values, employee perceptions are most easily altered by human resource activities, especially communication activities. As noted earlier, the supervisor plays a key role in such communication and therefore in shaping the attitudes of the work force. One of the most important influences on employee motivation is the supervisor.

Supervisors enhance motivation by helping employees see the link between the requirements of the organization, such as performance standards and employees behaviors. Supervisors enhance attitudes by helping employees more accurately perceive the value of the job's returns to satisfying their needs.

The supervisor or manager is directly involved in many of the most significant human resource management activities.

The supervisor and the work group constitute the social environment with which the individual learns the norms and expectations for production.

A negative social environment inhibits motivation, which has an unfavorable impact on performance.

The success of the entire human resource management system depends on how thoughtfully and fairly the supervisor manages it.

Leadership is a mutual process. Not only do leaders affect workers, but workers also affect leaders.

Additionally, other organization factors such as the organization objectives, finances, technology and culture and the nature of work—all factors in our diagnostic model—affect leadership.

Such information would be helpful in selecting supervisors.

One group classified leaders by their decision-making style:

1. Authoritarian style
2. Democratic style
3. Laissez-faire style

Table 2. Classified leaders by their decision-making style:

The leader makes decisions alone and tells subordinates what they are to do.

The leader actively involves subordinates in the decision-making process, sharing problems, soliciting input, and sharing authority.

The leader avoids making decisions whenever possible and leaves it up to subordinates to make individual decisions with little guidance either from the leader or from the rest of the group.

Research on the effectiveness of alternative leadership styles produced some interesting results.

For example, individuals under democratic leadership were more satisfied, had higher morale, were more creative, and had better relationships with their superiors.

However, the quantity of output produced by workers was highest under the autocratic leadership style, slightly lower under democratic leadership and under laissez-faire leadership.

Most researchers now agree that no single leadership style is universally associated with effectiveness. Rather a contingency approach is advocated.

A contingency approach recognizes that effective leadership depends on the circumstances. The nature of the organization, work, and employees all affect what is required of leaders. Effective leadership requires a match between the circumstances and the supervisor.<sup>[4]</sup>

Effective supervisors are able to adapt their style of relating to employees to the employees' abilities and motivation.

They encourage employee participation in key decisions in the work unit, and they help develop effective work groups.

## 6. Conclusion

The basic premise is that differences in employees play a key role in managing human resources.

Understanding and utilizing these differences in personnel decisions helps achieve and organizational objectives.

The concept of individual differences is incorporated into the design and administration of many personnel activities.

Selecting employees with required skills, granting larger pay increases to superior performers, promoting only those employees with the greatest potential, tailoring training



programs to individual needs and offering health insurance options with the flexibility to meet each employee's needs are all examples.

Having examined theories about individual differences, and how human resource activities affect basic individual reactions such as motivation and attitudes.

The results of motivation and attitudes – job performance and attendance.

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<sup>i</sup> Abilities and capabilities to engage in some behaviour.Abilities derive from knowledge (awareness of information,techniques,or facts),skills (proficiency at basic tasks necessary for achieving more complex behaviors),and aptitudes (potential abilities that have not yet been developed or applied)

<sup>ii</sup> Attitudes are emotiond or feelings.They derive from relationships between perceived outcomes and individual values (perceptions of what is required)