

Commentary:

**A COMMENTARY ON STEPHEN FURLICH'S
“UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION
THROUGH MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION USING
EXPECTANCY-VALENCE THEORY”**

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Abstract

The article by Furlich (2016) “*Understanding employee motivation through managerial communication and the use of expectancy-valence theory*” (see this present issue of JISS) provides several propositions to further the original work by Vroom (1964) on Expectancy Theory. His discussion of specific aspects of the model included within the theory provides key propositions that further the insight into the salience of the model. However, some key models which have also contributed to and align with the Expectancy theory could have been discussed further. The concept of the psychological contract and furtherance of the positive integration of LMX theory (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Rouer, & Ferris, 2012) within the communication process are discussed in this commentary. The article does provide application within multiple contexts and environments as noted.

Keywords: Motivation, Leadership, Expectancy Theory

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COMMENTARY

Motivating employees to perform at high levels has been and continues to be one of the most challenging of leadership functions (Tampoe, 1993). Indeed, research on leadership and motivation has been plentiful with its recommendations, but in many cases lacks empirical validity and reliability. Furthermore, the challenges of improving employee productivity beyond motivation to engagement is even more mysterious (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011). One of the broader purposes behind applying leadership and motivational techniques is to have followers and employees become involved and excited about working for the leader and the organization. This also may contribute to increased commitment by the followers with its attending positive attributes while reduced ability to manage the engagement, commitment, and motivation of followers results in less desirable outcomes of turnover, apathy, defiance, and protest (Meyer, Becker, and Vandenberghe, 2004).

The following commentary will integrate additional models of leadership and provide new hypotheses related to the leadership-motivational linkage. The work by Furlich (2016; see this present issue of JISS) provided several propositions regarding Expectancy Theory as related to the outcomes of employee expectations of performance rewards. Specifically, the article under consideration looks at communication flow from both an upward and downward leader-follower direction. As noted in the article, both motivation and demotivation may stem from communication interactions as noted by Mayfield, Mayfield & Sharbrough (2015).

Furlich (2016) noted that Vroom (1964) is recognized as the originator of the Expectancy Theory model. At that particular time in our history we also had several other models of motivation including Goal Setting Theory (Locke, 1968), Equity Theory (Adams and Rosenbaum, 1962), and even earlier with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943) among others.

Related closely to external motivational sources is the concept of leading and motivating followers. The literature is full of theories, studies, and models of how highly effective leaders motivate employees. Among the more contemporary models are the Transformational Leadership model proposed by Burns (1978), further developed by Avolio, Bass, and Jung (1999). Each of the leadership models also addresses the notion of motivating followers through any variety of leader behaviors such as providing a vision, developing followers, removing obstacles to success, and as mentioned, goal setting.

The synthesis of the leadership and motivational models are well developed in the article by Furlich (2016) in which the author develops additional constructs and propositions surround the ideas of the effort-performance-outcomes process in Expectancy Theory. Each of the 9 propositions identified further the theoretical relationship between communication, motivation, and performance/productivity of followers.

Of particular positive note was the discussion of the lack of holistic integration between the Leader Member Exchange theory (LMX) as promoted by Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Rouer, & Ferris (2012) and the Expectancy Theory. In this aspect the linkage in the identified leader-follower is the medium for the communication flow between leader and follower. The quality of this interaction is one of the basic tenets of the LMX model. The article did indeed provide insight into this element of the model.

However, some key models and theories seem to have been neglected in this discussion of the linkage. Of particular note is the concept of the psychological contract. Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) posit that a breach of the psychological contract, as may be found in the expectations of communication between leaders and followers, can lead to multiple negative consequences for both the leader and the follower. One of the aspects of a communication process may be that the expected communication style and flow, if violated, might result in a perceived breach of the psychological contract. It is the felt obligation from one or both of the parties in the leader-follower dyad that need be upheld to support the psychological contract and successfully complete the process of communication. As noted by Furlich (2016, p. 29), a leader or manager who can master this communication process can grasp a better understanding and application of the process of motivation through evaluating the followers' readiness to accept the responsibility to put forth the effort to perform and achieve the desired outcomes.

The discussion in the principle article of behaviors on both the part of the leader and follower could have had additional portrayal of the importance of improving follower self-efficacy by the leader may also have implications on the fulfillment of follower expectations by the leader. As noted by Mayfield and Mayfield (2012), the language and context used by the leader when encouraging performance by the follower can be attributed to improved self-efficacy on the part of the follower, leading to more effort in the belief that they can actually achieve the level of performance the leader has outlined in the communication process.

The above leads us to the natural progression of asking "What else on the part of the leader might contribute to higher performance, improved commitment, and satisfaction on the part of followers?" Leadership communication strategies, additional organizational investment in the follower and leader, and follower motivation prior to the leader-member exchange may all be contributing factors. These notions, as well as the original author's ideas of communication style and expectations can lead to overall high satisfaction on the part of all three parties in an organization-leader-follower triad. Absent the "meeting of the minds" of all three, achieving full potential would be difficult if not impossible.

Overall, the propositions within the study provide direction for future evaluation of the link between not only the Exchange Theory and Motivation, but also various aspects of leadership. The changing world of organizational leadership not only benefits from these new propositions, but demands it.

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