

Commentary:

**A REPLY TO BRUCE G. GILLIES' COMMENTARY:
UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION THROUGH
MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION USING EXPECTANCY-
VALENCE THEORY**

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Abstract

In the article “Understanding employee motivation through managerial communication using expectancy-valence theory” (2016; see this present issue of JISS) I address employees’ expectations of performance rewards and their motivation by understanding communication with their managers through the use of Expectancy-Valence Theory. Gillies (2016; see this present issue of JISS) provides a commentary about the article that furthers the understanding of expectancy-valence theory through describing accompanying models. In this point by point reply, I address Gillies’ additional comments and described models from a communication perspective as a means to further understand expectancy-valence theory.

Keywords: Employee Motivation, Manager Communication,
Expectancy-Valence Theory

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COMMENTARY REPLY

The article "Understanding employee motivation through managerial communication using expectancy-valence theory" (2016; see this present issue of JISS) addresses employees' expectations of performance rewards and their motivation by understanding communication with their managers through the use of Vroom's (1964) Expectancy-Valence Theory. A commentary by Gillies (2016; see this present issue of JISS) furthers the understanding of expectancy-valence theory through describing accompanying models. These additional models described by Gillies (2016) can advance the understanding of employee motivation because expectancy-valence theory is not completely addressed nor understood (Yuan, & Woodman, 2010). Previously, research addressed these areas independently rather than as interacting together (Honeycutt, 1989; Le Poire & Burgoon, 1994; Lunenburg, 2011). By giving special attention to the role of communication between supervisors and employees in this reply, these models can advance from a communication perspective.

Additional Motivation Models

The first model Gillies (2016) presents as an additional means of understanding employee motivation is Goal Setting Theory (Locke, 1968). The five components of goal setting theory are clarity, challenging, commitment, feedback, and complexity. The supervisor should clearly communicate specific goals for their employees. These goals should also challenge employees. When employees invest more to achieve a goal they become more committed to the goal. For commitment, personal goals usually have more investment. It is therefore, important for supervisors to set goals that are specific to their employees that they value. The supervisor can provide communicative feedback to their employees for them to better understand their progress toward their goals. Complex goals can become problematic for employees to understand. Supervisors should break down complex goals to smaller easier to understand specific goals. For each of these steps it is essential for accurate communication from the supervisor to their employee concerning employee goals and from the employee to the supervisor to understand each employee individually and communicate goals aligned with each employee's talents and interests.

Gillies (2016) also describes equity theory as a means to better understand employee motivation. Equity Theory introduced by Adams and Rosenbaum (1962) asserts that employees weigh the inputs that they put into their job with the outputs that they receive from the organization in relation to other employees' inputs and outputs. This comparison by employees to other employees influences employees' perceptions of whether they feel their supervisor and organization is treating them fairly. The role of communication is essential for an accurate understanding. For example, an employee may see another employee with a similar salary show up to work thirty minutes late each day. The employee may think that they are working more for the same pay as the employee

showing up late. However, they may not know that the other employee is showing up thirty minutes late each day to the office because they are working an hour earlier on an offsite location. This example, illustrates the importance of supervisors to clearly communicate to employees a more complete picture of fair treatment between employees.

Gillies (2016) even introduced Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943) as an approach to understanding employee motivation. Maslow's hierarchy of human needs consist of physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Supervisors can better understand employees' physiological needs when performing their jobs. Often, repetitive motions can pose a long-term risk to employees' health. Supervisors need to understand what possible physical problems and risks their employees' jobs pose. For example, a supervisor in a meat packing plant can talk with employees about the tools their employees use, the repetitive motions throughout a day, and the time demanded on their completion of tasks. The employee may give valuable feedback to their supervisor of possible changes to promote their physical health. A supervisor who asks for this feedback and makes adjustments can serve to meet the employees' second level of needs, safety, along with the third level of love and belongingness from the human personal relation connection developed between the supervisor and employee. The supervisor can also provide positive feedback to employees about smaller goals achieved on the path to bigger goals. This can help employees understand that they are on the right path and feel valued which can help their esteem. This feedback can also help employees learn how they can strive for their full potential, thus addressing the last step of Maslow's hierarchy of needs of self-actualization.

Employee Expectations

Gillies (2016) introduces the notion that another model labeled leader member exchange theory (LMX) introduced by Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Rouer, and Ferris (2012) can help understand employee motivation through expectancy-valence theory but has not been fully utilized in this fashion. Therefore, Gillies (2016) brought up a psychological contract developed by Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000). Of particular notion to communication is the psychological contract of expected communication behaviors between supervisors and employees. Employees have communication expectations for their supervisor's communication behaviors (Gorges, & Kandler, 2012). The employees expect their supervisor to communicate in a particular way based upon past experiences (Becker, Leitner, & Leopold-Wildburger, 2009; Koermer & Petelle, 1991). Gillies (2016) also brought up that when employee expectations for their supervisor's communication is violated, then the psychological contract is breached and the communication process between the employee and supervisor is less likely to be successful and employee motivation is likely to be negatively impacted. This is consistent with Burgoon's (1978) expectancy violations theory. However, expectancy violations theory also takes into consideration that violations of communication expectations can also be positive. For instance, a supervisor who communicates to their employee better than what

the employee expected can serve as a positive violation of communication expectations of the employee. This is likely to lead to better motivational outcomes of the employee. Hence, communication expectations that are violated between employees and their supervisors can influence employee motivation both positively and negatively more than communication behaviors that are aligned with expectations (Afifi & Burgoon, 2000; Burgoon & Hale, 1988).

Gillies (2016) further the discussion on expectations and communication between employees and supervisors by introducing self-efficacy within a context. Expectancy violations theory takes into account context when determining positive and negative violations of expectations. Burgoon (1978) describes in the formation of expectancy violations theory that the location of the communication interaction, relationship between the individuals communicating, and the power difference between the individuals communicating all influence the expected communication behaviors between the individuals communicating. These factors determine the normative communication behaviors that each person expects from the other person. It is when these normative expected communication behaviors are not displayed that positive or negative violations of communication behaviors occur and can influence employee motivation (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Roese, & Sherman, 2007).

Conclusion

Gillies (2016) brought attention to different models and concepts for a more expanded understanding of employee motivation based upon Furlich's (2016) article addressing expectancy-valence theory and employee motivation. This reply to Gillies' (2016) commentary addresses some of his additional models and concepts introduced by understanding them from a communication approach. Communication interactions between employees and their supervisors play an important part with all of these models and concepts addressing employee motivation. Addressing the role of communication concerning the different models highlighted in this paper can enable future researchers to expand knowledge and understanding of employee motivation.

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