

Motivation and Performance: How Do We Connect Them?

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Our society wants quick, easy solutions to everything: instant gratification, instant weight loss, and instant relationships. Although there is no “quick fix” when it comes to human performance, an understanding of motivation and what drives it—internally and externally—can help organizations identify top performers and develop successful strategies for enhancing workplace performance.

Motivation, Performance, and Successful Organizations

Running a successful organization requires a balance of professional, business, and human resource endeavors. From the human resource perspective—whether talking about the C-Suite, first-line supervision, or staff—successful organizations need to be good at hiring, motivating, developing, and retaining talented people.

As Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, said: “First who, then what.” Great organizations focus first on “getting the right people (in the right seat) on the bus,” then on executing strategy.

To this end, our research and applications show that motivation is a critical factor not only in determining individuals’ success but also in hiring, developing, and retaining talent.

Understanding Motivation

There are two ways we use the term “motivation.” One is *external* to the individual. Here, we talk about “motivating people.” Many organizations assume that efforts like incentive or recognition programs have a value-added effect on how employees behave and perform.

The second way we talk about motivation is *internal* to the individual. Here, we say someone “is motivated.” We assume internal motivation when an individual behaves in a certain way or achieves desirable goals (outcomes). In sales groups we might talk about a representative who is “*motivated* to get new business.” Since new business is the economic engine that powers many organizations, this would be considered a good thing.

Although external factors may have a positive impact on some individuals in some contexts and circumstances, unless people are programmable machines or automatons, some internal factors are the real key to motivation.

Motivation and Performance

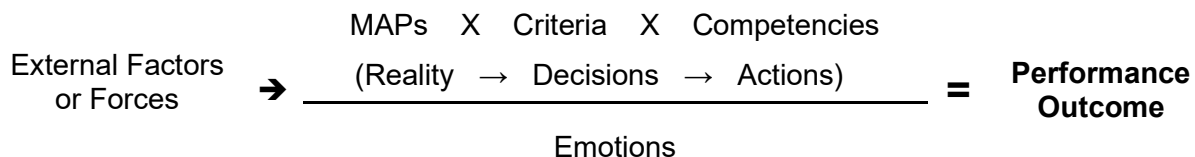
Motivation theorists and researchers such as Abraham Maslow and Frederick Herzberg established that both internal and external factors impact behavior. We do not, however, have good contemporary models or tools for understanding and predicting performance-related motivation.

Assuming there is a critical link between motivation and performance, our approach to understanding the connection between the factors, conditions, and forces that lead to internal motivation and to effective action is critical.

Based on our research and work with individuals and organizations over the last decade, we developed a model that contains the four primary individual variables or factors that seem to have the greatest impact on performance. The four variables, a brief definition of each, and what they influence, or impact, are shown in the following table.

Variable	Definition	Influences
Motivation & Attitudinal Patterns (MAPs)	A set of internal “frames” that help us filter, translate, and connect external reality to our internal databases	Our definition of reality (the world and conditions to which we are responding)
Criteria	The standards we hold based on values, beliefs, goals, etc.	Decisions and judgments
Competencies	What we know (e.g., how to do math formulas or vocabulary) or can do (e.g., speak a foreign language, do a calculus problem)	Actions/Behaviors (they represent the range of alternatives or possibilities available to us)
Emotions	Internal experiences that consist of physiological, behavioral, and psychological or mental components	Emotions can both influence and be influenced by MAPs, Criteria, and Competencies (Actions).

A simple framework for connecting all the elements is:



“External Factors” (Forces) are the conditions around us to which we have the opportunity to respond. They represent an *external reality*. This includes things organizations or individuals do to “motivate” others. External factors and conditions serve as context for and may also trigger the performance process.

The performance process has two characteristics:

1. The Performance Process begins with our MAPs and flows to decisions and actions.
2. Each component is connected to and influences (and/or is influenced by) our emotions.

Because our MAPs are at the front end of the performance process, one key to unlocking motivation begins with understanding an individual’s MAPs.

What’s a MAP?

A *motivational and attitudinal pattern* or MAP is not a personality trait or ability. MAPs are a measure of what we *want to do*, not what we *can do*. MAPs perform three important functions:

1. MAPs filter experience so that we pay attention to some things and not to others

2. MAPs translate the “data” of experience into “information” we use to interpret what we are experiencing
3. MAPs connect the filtered and interpreted experience to our knowledge and experience database.

The end result of the MAPs process is our *reality*. It is what Anaïs Nin meant when she said “we see the world as we are.”

This is a powerful notion because it explains why two people hearing the same speech or having the same experience come away with very different reactions or conclusions. It is not that either is right or wrong (although we often look for people who will “take our side”); their respective conclusions were likely affected by different personal realities.

Most important, research using modeling technologies and methods show that MAPs are a major factor in understanding the characteristics of high performers in a specific role in defined contexts.

How to Use MAPs in an Organization

Here are some ways to use MAPs in an organization:

- The iWAM and performance data for a role provide the basis for creating Models of Excellence which, in turn, are useful in selection processes.
- MAPs have been used as a key source of data in performance coaching.
- Comparison of two individuals’ MAPs has been used to help manage conflict and improve relationships.
- Managers have been trained to use individuals’ MAPs to coach for improved performance.
- MAPs have proven to be a useful base of information from which to improve team performance.
- MAPs have been used to profile organizations’ cultures and to help individuals from one country culture know how to work with those from a different country culture.

In the larger context of business, education, healthcare, and social service, motivational and attitudinal patterns can be used in recruiting, selection, coaching, development, managing, and succession planning.

Conclusion

You now have some food for thought about key factors that contribute to motivation and success, including MAPs, one factor that is not even on the radar of most organizations when recruiting, hiring, or developing talent in their organization.