Psychology 962: Work Motivation Syllabus

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Office hours: By appointment

Meets: Monday 9:10-12, Room 325 Psychology

Course Overview:

The nomological network of the work motivation construct is broad and fragmented. There is no widely accepted overarching model. Instead, many mid-level theories of motivation have been developed to explain specific aspects of human behavior at work.

This is problematic because an organization is a dynamic system. Everything is related to everything and individuals are exposed to a huge array of organizational policies, practices, and social stimuli. All of these experiences combine in a currently unknown manner to impact the individual’s work motivation and, through composition processes, the organization’s motivational profile.

Course Goals:

This course is structured to support three underlying goals. The first goal is to expose you to the major theories of work motivation with a focus on their strengths and limitations. The second goal is to explore the holistic functioning of the various perspectives on work motivation as they unfold in complex organizational settings. The third goal is to explore work motivation in a practical manner. Given what we know about work motivation, how can we design an organization to maximize its effectiveness?
Course Responsibilities

Participating in this course is a case study of work motivation. Based on a wide variety of factors you chose to invest resources (time, effort, emotional labor, etc...) into this experience rather than pursue a host of alternative experiences. Over the next 15 weeks of this course you will repeatedly evaluate how much of your limited resources you should invest into participating in this course at the expense of other activities you also wish or “need” to pursue. Obviously, the choices you make about your participation will influence your personal outcomes (e.g., enjoyment, learning, understanding, philosophy, etc...). Equally important, we are a system and your choices will influence the outcomes obtained by others in the course. Fun, illuminating perspectives and ideas will be either be developed and shared or not.

I have to choose the formal structure of our temporary organization. Do I legislate the vocalization of words by placing a reward/punishment structure in place for participation? Contingent reward theories demand that I reward the desired behaviors when they occur and punish behaviors I do not desire (e.g., withdraw, avoidance). Intrinsic motivation theories, on the other hand, suggest that contingent rewards may actually undermine the very behavior I hope to obtain. Maybe we should have a “leader board” where we implement a weekly preferential voting technique to induce social motives for participation? Maybe we should set difficult, specific goals for the desired course outcomes, assess the state of each outcome every week, and provide concrete feedback on progress toward the goals? As you can see the motivational structure for our very simple, temporary organization is complex.

Grades

Grades in the course will reflect your performance on three weighted products. The first component focuses on your contributions in class. This is a seminar and everyone is expected to actively engage in sharing thoughts and reactions. The second component is the quality of the question you contribute to the class each week. These questions will be scored anonymously by everyone in the class. The third component is your final class product in the form of either a paper or a computational model.

Grading Criteria:

- Class Participation = 30%
- Questions = 30%
- Paper or Comp Model = 40%

Questions: Each Friday by noon, you will email me 3 questions related to the topic and readings for that week. My hope is that you will work hard to develop probing, insightful questions that stimulate class discussion. I will combine the
de-identified questions and distribute them by the end of the day on Friday. You will provide your grades (0-4 scale, decimals allowed) for all questions that you did not develop by Monday morning prior to class.

**Paper:** The primary goal of this course is to develop a holistic understanding of how formal and informal policies, practices, and social interactions influence how people think, feel, and behave at work. Therefore, your paper will incorporate theory and current best practices to design a motivation oriented intervention targeting a specific problem commonly encountered in organizations. For instance, how will you evaluate and compensate employees? What management structure will you use? How will you handle conflict resolution? How will you select employees in and out of the organization? How would you structure career paths? How will you promote team work and creativity where needed? How will you approach work-life integration and employee wellbeing? The scope of the paper is, obviously, quite large. You’ll need to make decisions on what to include in your perfect organization and what can be left out. To help narrow the scope of the paper, I want us to focus on motivation processes and not training or other forms of skill development. Assume your workforce has the needed knowledge and skills to perform their work.

**Computational Model:** An alternative product for the class is to construct a computational model of multiple goal pursuit. The model should incorporate the key themes and tensions discussed in class. Many models are possible. As an example, you could build a model of an agent navigating through a simulated space (e.g., a 2d matrix of locations) and making choices based on internal states and external threats and opportunities to maximize some “goodness” function or minimize a cost function. You choose what’s is maximized or minimized.

**Academic Honesty:** Article 2.3.3 of the Academic Freedom Report states: “The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards.” In addition, the psychology department adheres to the policies on academic honesty specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide and/or the MSU Web site www.msu.edu.)

Therefore, you are expected to complete all course assignments without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Students who violate MSU rules may receive a penalty grade, including but not limited to a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Specific to this course, plagiarism of an assignment results in a zero for that assignment.
**Instructor Availability:**

I do not have set office hours but I am available to meet with students by appointment. My schedule is a full one and “dropping by” my office may not be the most efficient strategy. Please email to schedule appointments. I check email frequently and will respond quickly.

**Classroom Rules of Conduct**

Cell phones must be turned off before class starts and put away unless you have been explicitly told to access the internet. The course is structured to encourage discussion and interaction – please treat other members of the class with courtesy and respect. If you are disruptive (e.g., talking when others have the floor, making inappropriate remarks, interfering with others' learning), you will be asked to leave the class. Texting, emailing, game playing, and web surfing during class are counterproductive to learning, lessen your capacity to engage with those around you, and can be rude. Leave the outside world outside of class and be fully present. I reserve the right to confiscate for the duration of class any device that I feel is affecting my ability to teach effectively regardless of whether you think it is not distracting you. If for some reason you must arrive late or leave early (e.g., illness, car trouble), please take a seat near the door and minimize disruption of others with your arrival/departure. Given our early start, feel free to bring coffee/breakfast.

**Online and in-person courtesy expectations**

As a seminar, this is a discussion based class. While I encourage you to be yourself in your expressions, I also expect courtesy and respect for others (online and in person). Please refrain from language that others might find offensive. There are topics we will discuss where individuals may have very different opinions and views – please express your dissenting viewpoint diplomatically.

**Recording**

As members of a learning community, students are expected to respect the intellectual property of course instructors. All course materials presented to students are subject to the following conditions of use: 1. Students may record lectures/classroom activities and use the recordings for their own course-related purposes. 2. Students may share the recordings for others enrolled in this specific course section. Sharing is limited to using the recordings only for course-related purposes 3. Students may not post the recordings or any other course materials online or distribute them to anyone not enrolled in this section of the class without the advance written permission of the course instructor and,
if applicable, any students whose voice or image is included in the recordings.
That means you cannot post a photo or video or other recording of anyone in
the class to any social media site (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) without
their written consent. Violation of this policy may result in a grade penalty up
to a 0.0 in the course. 4. Any student violating the conditions described above
may face academic disciplinary sanctions.

Accommodations

If you have a disability that will require accommodations, please see me the first
week of class. If you will miss class for a religious observance, let me know in
advance.

Grief Absence Policy

Students seeking a grief absence should be directed to the Grief Absence Request
Form found on the RO home page (https://reg.msu.edu/) under ‘Student Services
- Grief Absence Request Form’ OR to StuInfo (https://stuinfo.msu.edu/) under
‘Academics - Enrollment Information and Services - Grief Absence Request
Form.’ Students will be asked to supply information on the nature of the
loss, the date they became aware, and the expected period of absence. Once
completed, the information is routed to the Assoc. Dean of the student’s college
and must be received prior to the student leaving campus. The student will
receive a confidential message confirming the submission and reminding them
that supporting documentation must be provided and who to send it to. In
addition, the appropriate dean’s office will be notified that a request has been
submitted. Once the appropriate administrator has either approved or denied
the request, the student will again receive a confidential message notifying them
of the decision of the dean’s office. If approved, instructors will be notified by
the appropriate dean’s office of the period of absence. Instructors are expected
to arrange for students to make up the missed work.

Emergency Procedures

If an emergency should occur that would require the cancellation of class, I will
send an email via D2L. While an emergency occurring during class is unlikely,
please take time the first day to think through your emergency plans for such
events (e.g., know at least two exits from the building).

Tentative Course Schedule (subject to change)

1/08 - Intro & Core concepts
1/15 - no class
1/22 - Context & Environment
1/29 - Natural selection, heredity, instinct
2/05 - Utility, Valance, Wants, Needs, & Goals
2/12 - Beliefs and Belief updating
2/19 - Reward & Learning (feedback)
2/26 - Time, Discounting, & Planning
3/05 - Spring break
3/12 - Approach & Avoid Motivation
3/19 - States & State dynamics (Self-reg)
3/26 - Action Selection
4/02 - Exploration / Exploitation (Play, curiosity, Fun)
4/09 - Goal Revision & Quitting
4/16 - Social Motivation (cooperation)
4/23 - Social Motivation (teamwork)
4/30 Finals. Please keep this time on your calendar in case we have to make up a class. Otherwise, it is the due date for final products.