



Strategic Leadership and Motivation: Exploring Cognitive Theories and GRIT Traits

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Summary

During the 20th century, significant investments were made in the improvement of individuals who would manage change, plan and solve problems well. The development of corporate leaders is becoming one of the priorities, as well as creating individuals who will know how to create and convey the vision and strategy of the company. In this process, it is crucial to select individuals to whom motivational models can be applied and to locate GRIT personality traits. Numerous theorists throughout history have been researching the concept of motivation, defining it and discovering the factors that motivate individuals. The study of motivation encompasses a wide range of assumptions, hypotheses, theories, findings, and areas of application. Understanding them helps the company and managers to understand themselves and others in the workplace better, all with the aim of increasing the chances of success in an individual's career as well as raising the level of success of the company. Different theories try to explain the overall motivation, theoretical questions or motivational problems, and tendencies that concern a certain group of people. We live in times when organisations are under great pressure to reduce costs, improve the quality of products and services, find new opportunities for growth, and increase work efficiency. In this paper, we will consider cognitive theories of motivation and the factors that could be positive and relevant to the success of companies and managers. At the same time, we discuss theories of motivation, such as Weiner's Attribution Theory, Locke's Goal Theory, and Vroom's VIE Model. Before presenting these theories, the theoretical framework of research on motivational dimensions is considered. We also emphasise the GRIT model of traits that we believe are applicable in the development of an individual's career and in raising success at the individual and corporate levels.

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Introduction

Motivation is a key driver of human behaviour and a fundamental component of success in a business environment. Motivational states activate and direct behaviour, resulting from internal factors such as needs and desires and external stimuli. Petz (2005) defines motivation as a state of internal arousal that leads to a goal. Motivation not only determines the goal and intensity of our behaviour but also its durability. In the business world, motivation allows for adjustment in situations where there is a mismatch between the employer's requirements and the employee's well-being (Peterson et al., 1993). When motivation is strong, individuals are more willing to face challenges and thrive within the organisation. Beck (2003) points out that motivation explains why individuals choose certain behaviours in specific circumstances, while Kraljević and Perkov (2014) emphasise the importance of behavioural self-regulation in achieving business goals. Motivation for achievement, according to Bratko (2001), is crucial for the success of an individual and an organisation because motivated employees show greater efficiency and loyalty.

This paper explores various theories of motivation, including GRIT traits that combine passion and perseverance and their application in recognising and encouraging motivated individuals within organisations. The goal is to understand better motivational processes and their effects on business performance, especially in managerial professions where intrinsic motivation is key to achieving high performance.

Understanding motivation as a prerequisite for business success

Motivational states direct and activate behaviour, and they arise from two sources: internal instinct factors and external stimulating factors. Motivation can also be defined as a state in which we are "inside" aroused by some needs, urges, aspirations, desires or motives and directed towards achieving a goal that acts as an incentive to behave from the outside (Petz, 2005). Motivation is the basis of our actions; it stimulates, directs and maintains behaviour that leads to a goal; that is, it determines the goal, intensity and duration of our behaviour. The concept of motivation includes several important parts, namely, a certain subjective experience and state of the organism, needs, urges, aspirations, desires and motives that lead to a certain state of the organism, and the goal that we want to achieve in order to achieve these desires (Peterson et al., 1993).

In the business world, there have been major changes in recent years. Motivational states enable individuals to be mentally organised and adaptable in those life situations when there is a discrepancy between the situational requirements of the employer and our well-being. It is motivation that prepares individuals to undertake corrective activities, and when motivation weakens, it is more difficult to adapt. People who feel helpless in gaining control of their lives are more likely to give up on new personal and business challenges (Peterson et al., 1993). Furthermore, the feeling of

helplessness weakens a person's ability to do so. Employees to cope with life's challenges. Control by "others" also weakens the self-motivation of individuals. Conversely, when a person's motivation is strong and purposeful, such a person thrives within the corporation. Beck (2003) defines motivation as a theoretical term that explains why individuals choose a certain way of behaving in certain circumstances. Our business environment constantly demands our attention in different ways. Motifs have their way of obtaining and sometimes more energetically attracting our attention by directing us to one aspect of our environment instead of another (Kraljević & Perkov, 2014). This is extremely important in some professions (e.g. in marketing and entrepreneurship) and enables self-regulation of behaviour and motivation. However, self-regulation may not be explicitly mentioned as a concept in some theories; a theory can be considered self-regulatory if it basically uses the assumption of the proactive characteristics of a human being, that is, of a person who perceives his environment, evaluates his relationship with it and reacts in accordance with his cognitive assessment. This is extremely important in the managerial profession because it enables self-regulation of behaviour and motivation. However, in certain theories, self-regulation is not explicitly mentioned as a concept; a theory can be considered self-regulating if it basically uses the assumption of proactive characteristics of a human being, that is, of a person who perceives his environment, evaluates his relationship with it and reacts in accordance with his cognitive assessment.

All theories of human motivation have two features in common (Larsen & Buss, 2008). First, theories of human motivation postulate that personality consists of several general motives. (*general motives*) that all people have or can have. Second, a common feature of the theory of human motivation is that motives can act through mental processes. (*Mental Processes*) Inside or Outside of Consciousness (*Mental Processes awareness*) by creating an intrapsychic influence (Eng. *intrapsychic influenza*) on a person's behaviour (according to Larsen and Buss, 2014). Larsen and Buss (2008) point out that every need interacts with various other needs within each person. This action constitutes the concept of a dynamic motive, which indicates the interaction of various motives within the individual. It is this knowledge that is important when managing employee motivation because if we locate individual motives, we can more easily influence the realisation of individual employee development cycles, and ultimately, all with the aim of improving business efficiency. As for the "motivation of achievement", it refers to the effort of each employee, i.e., an individual, to master the task, achieve excellence, overcome obstacles, perform activities better than others and feel pride in accomplishing tasks. In the challenging times we live in, it is extremely important to locate individuals within the company who emphasise excellence. It is precisely the theories of achievement motivation that suggest that individuals who achieve high or low achievements can differ based on their motives, the tasks they choose to be valued based on them, the effort they make, and their perseverance and performance. It has been shown that individuals who achieve high achievements in terms of motivational orientation show high motivation to achieve success and low motivation to avoid failure and focus on pride in success. In contrast, individuals who achieve low achievement show low motivation to achieve success and high motivation to avoid

failure and worry and preoccupation with thoughts of failure. Bratko (2001) states that the motive for achievement implies the desire to achieve high success in what is done in business. The author believes that individuals with a high motivation to achieve success are ready to put in more effort, and for them, only the achievement causes satisfaction. Also, Bratko (2001) argues that empirical research on the motive for achievement shows that people who have a strongly expressed motive are more intrinsically motivated. Scientific research shows that there is a strong correlation between motivation and the execution of a task. Thus, motivated employees become more efficient in performance and more loyal to their organisations (Colquitt et al., 2010). The literature mentions two phenomena that are highly correlated with a lack of motivation, namely absenteeism and fluctuation. Therefore, it can be considered understandable that in the context of ethical and humane approaches, an even better understanding of the motivational process is needed, especially in areas where intrinsic motivation can only lead to an effect, and one of the professions in which this is the case is managerial (Colquitt et al., 2010). In the following, we will present in more detail the meaning of applying different motivational models and recognising GRIT personality traits, all for the purpose of locating motivated individuals.

The importance of GRIT properties

The human factor is becoming an important segment of every globally oriented management because the challenges in the real sector due to economic, technological and other changes do not give room for a light understanding of human resources. However, for the entire cycle of motivation to take place properly, the important role of the manager must not be forgotten. In some cases, managers can misdiagnose problems of work efficiency and employee motivation. If the manager's assessment is wrong, and if poor performance is related to ability rather than motivation, the reaction of increased pressure will exacerbate the problem. Employees who have poorer results will inevitably feel that management is not insensitive to their problems and that they lack resources, adequate education or a realistic schedule. The consequence of such behaviour is their counterproductive reaction to any tactics aimed at increasing their effect (Duckworth et al., 2007).

GRIT traits are defined as possessing strength of character that is primarily determined by two traits: passion and perseverance. Individuals with pronounced GRIT traits have the courage and perseverance to show their character and are distinguished by passion and perseverance in their actions. The GRIT feature shows that the human potency, with enough effort, is almost infinite. GRIT was conceived by author and psychologist Angela Duckworth, who persisted in the opinion that perseverance is a combination of passion and perseverance for an extremely important goal, and this is exactly the characteristic of those who achieve high success in every field. Organisations can harness this potential by using a variety of opportunities to foster passion and perseverance. People who show determination are considered highly motivated and able to maintain their effort and interest in their goals over time, even

in the face of setbacks and challenges. Boldness can be characterised as persistence and a desire for long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007).

GRIT has been proposed as a powerful concept related to academic achievement and success. Persistence is one of the traits that has received significant attention in the past for several years (Soutter & Seider, 2013). Persistence is perhaps just as crucial to success as IQ, making it a key metric in the educational field. Courage has been found to be associated with academic success (Kelly et al., 2014) and all academic achievements (Pate et al., 2017). A tough individual not only completes the tasks in front of him but also pursues the set goal for years. Boldness also differs from the reliability of conscientiousness, including self-control, in terms of its specification of consistent goals and interests. An individual's high self-control but moderate determination can, for example, effectively control his or her nature. Galton (1892) suggested that a sustained commitment to a particular calling (or calling) does not arise from overcoming the "hourly rate of temptation." Perseverance is also distinct from the need for achievement, which McClelland (1961) described as striving to achieve manageable goals that allow for immediate performance feedback. While individuals are high in their need for achievement to pursue goals that are neither too easy nor too difficult, individuals with high persistence deliberately set ultimate long-term goals for themselves and do not deviate from them even in the absence of positive feedback. Secondly, boldness implies hard work towards challenges and maintenance. Effort and interest over the years despite failure, adversity and lows in progress. A tough individual approaches achievement like a marathon; his or her advantage is durability. While disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut down on losses, the stubborn individual stays the course. Our hypothesis that determination is key to high achievement developed during interviews with professionals from investment banking, painting, journalism, academia, medicine, and law. When asked what qualities distinguish star performers in their fields, these individuals cited courage or a close synonym just as often as talent. In fact, many have been amazed by the achievements of peers who, at first, did not seem as gifted as others but whose constant commitment to their ambitions was exceptional. Likewise, many were surprised to note that incredibly gifted peers did not end up in the higher echelons of their field. More than 100 years before our work on grit, Galton (1892) collected biographical information about prominent judges, politicians, scientists, poets, musicians, painters, wrestlers, and others. The ability itself, he concluded, did not bring success in any field. Instead, he believed that high achievers were triple blessed with "ability combined with zeal and capacity for hard work" (p. 33).

Cognitive theories of motivation and attribution theory

Cognitive theorists point out that people mentally represent their worlds and seek to understand the world in order to be able to predict and control events. According to social-cognitive theorists, expectations motivate people. Based on experience and reasoning, people expect that a certain behaviour will lead to a certain outcome. Therefore, they do what will allow them to achieve (or avoid) certain outcomes. Critics

of this approach believe that it relies too much on concepts and behaviours that cannot be directly perceived, such as expectations. It also remains an open question about the processes through which people understand and evaluate individual influences. Leon Festinger (1957) believed that people are motivated to justify their behaviour and harmoniously harmonise their beliefs. For this reason, we are more likely to appreciate what we must put effort into.

Furthermore, attribution theories deal with the way individuals interpret events and how they relate to their thinking and behaviour. The term attribution refers to the conclusions we draw about our own and others' dispositions, about the causes of our own or someone else's behaviour, or the causes of various events. Attribution theories assume that people will try to determine why they do what they do. A person who seeks to understand why another person has done something may attribute one or more causes to a particular behaviour.

Furthermore, attribution theories in the context of motivation psychology primarily consider interpreting the causes of an event or situation arising from an individual's behaviour. Heider (1958) considered what he calls "*naïve*" or "*common-sense*" psychology. In his view, people are like naïve scientists; they seek to understand behaviour. Larsen and Buss (2008) state that many researchers today apply the concept of locus control in certain life domains and also state that organisational psychologists and human resources have focused on specific aspects of the explanations that people attach to some phenomena, depending on whether the cause is internal or external, stable or unstable, global or specific (Peterson et al, 1992) According to Heider (1958), the success or failure of an individual on a task can be attributed to ability, effort, luck, and the difficulty of the task. Bernard Weiner (1972; 1974; 1986) developed a theoretical framework that became one of the main research paradigms of social psychology. Weiner took over from Heider the basic attributional dimension, the one related to the locus of the cause. Accordingly, a person can thus derive two types of attributions: (a) internal attribution, i.e., the conclusion that a person behaves in a certain way because of his or her attitudes, character or personality, or (b) external attribution, i.e. the conclusion that a person behaves in a certain way because of the situation in which he or she finds himself.

Weiner expanded the interpretation of dimensions by adding the dimension of globality and stability of attribution. Although most empirical research supports Weiner's attribution theory, Wimer and Kelley (1982) have shown in their research how individuals can benefit from additional attribution dimensions, finding five relevant factors. The first factor is internality, followed by stability, then good-bad, simple-complex and finally motivation. Attribution theory is also used to explain the differences in motivation between low-achieving and high-achieving individuals. According to Weiner (1972; 1974), *high-achievers are more likely to approach a task that is associated with success than to avoid it* since they believe in success because they rely on their high abilities and effort. In case of failure, the outcome will be attributed to bad luck and not to personal failure. In this way, failure does not affect their self-esteem, but success builds pride and self-confidence. On the other hand, *low-achieving individuals avoid success-related tasks* because they doubt their abilities and assume

that success is related to luck, another person, or some factors beyond their control. In this way, even if they experience success, it does not represent such a reward to an individual with low achievement since they do not feel responsible for it. Therefore, their pride and self-confidence do not grow. Attributions that attribute success to good abilities and failure to insufficient effort are called mastery-focused attributions. Such attributions lead to high self-esteem and a willingness to approach challenging tasks. The attribution approach is applied to a number of areas. Studies have shown that different respondents show a preference for one cause over others when attributing, which enters the realm of individual differences. The expression of the motive for achievement is one of the very important individual differences and has a specific influence on the causal attribution of achievement. Namely, Weiner believes that people with a high motivation for achievement attribute success to their abilities and their activity and explain failure by a lack of activity. As a result, they persist longer in activities and put in relatively more effort. Unlike people with a low motivation for achievement, they do not have a pronounced attribution preference for success, but they interpret failure as a lack of ability. The consequence is that they quickly give up activities and put relatively little effort into their work. Another very important independent variable is gender. Although the results of research on this problem are not consistent, the authors agree that men's success is more often attributed to ability and women's success to happiness or activity. Accordingly, men's failure is more often attributed to a lack of activity, and women's failure to a lack of ability (Weiner, 1979). Causal attribution of achievement affects our emotional experience and expectation of future success and, through them, our future achievement-oriented behaviour (Krapić et al., 2011). It is assumed that expectation and affective reaction determine subsequent behaviour in terms of readiness to approach the next task, perseverance, and intensity of the performance.

Today, this theory is applied in many areas and helps to understand the social relationships and determinants of a person's behaviour in a given context. Other people by piecing together information until they come to a reasonable explanation or cause of the behaviour. Heider (1958) was, therefore, the first to propose a psychological theory of attribution by putting forward the concept of the perceived locus of causality, which refers to the perception of whether a particular behaviour is dispositionally (internally) or situationally (externally) determined. His four classic attributional explanations of the successful or unsuccessful performance of a task are still most commonly present in empirical research (Rathaus, 2000).

In the following text, we will continue to connect motivational theories that can affect employee motivation.

The link between the motivational theories of Edwin A. Locke and Victor H. Vroom and employee motivation

Edwin Locke assumed that the intention to achieve a goal is the main source of work motivation (Moorhead & Griffin, 2004). The basic assumption of the Goal Setting

Theory, set by Edwin A. Locke (1968) and expanded by Gary Latham (Locke & Latham, 1990), is that setting clear, well-elaborated and achievable goals has a motivating effect and increases efficiency. An individual sets a goal for himself and behaves persistently to achieve it. An individual evaluates the result of behaviour according to a set criterion and his values. If an individual is not satisfied with the discrepancy between what has been set and what has been achieved, he will set a new goal. Within the framework of research related to goal theory, most are dedicated to determining the characteristics of goals that lead to increased motivation and better performance in academic, business and sports contexts.

Locke and several other researchers have thus identified some significant characteristics of the goals that we will try to summarise briefly here. *Specific but difficult goal standards* result in better performance (Locke & Bryan, 1966). Nevertheless, the weight must be relative to an appropriate individual level. The goal must be specific so that the aspirations are clear and understandable, observable and estimable. If the performance focuses on a specific goal in behavioural terms, more is invested in the task (Harackiewicz et al., 1985). Goals must be demanding and challenging, but they must not be considered impossible (Locke, 1966). Individuals also strive to improve a task when there is a norm of high achievement in the group (Locke, 1968). Goal setting directs attention. The more specific and concrete goals are, the greater the degree of control that an individual has over them (Locke et al., 1981). This is especially evident in a competitive context when victory is set as a goal versus a specific task that needs to be done. It is necessary to pair goals with feedback. Knowing the successful results of a goal is not as effective as applying concrete, specific goals and feedback at the same time.

Locke (1991), based on a review of the existing literature on goal theory, concluded that the fact that goal setting improves task performance is one of the best-established findings in management. Nevertheless, for goal setting to be effective, the following conditions must be met: First, *personal and actual goals must be measured*. Goal theory assumes that assigned goals affect performance through the impact on personal goals. It is necessary, therefore, to know the intrinsic goals of the individual. Furthermore, specific objectives must be difficult. Specific goals that are easy actually lead to lower levels of performance. It is necessary to ensure that individuals are *truly committed to achieving the goal*. Moreover, ultimately, it is necessary to measure self-efficacy, not subjective weight or effort. Self-efficacy is the confidence that an individual will be able to carry out a given sequence of events. In short, the goal must be clear, measurable, challenging, realistic, and worthwhile, and must have a deadline for completion (Locke, 1991).

Research in the organisational context shows that goal setting increases the work performance of employees (Locke et al., 1981). In the original theory, two main characteristics of targets were emphasised – weight and specificity. If we summarise all of the above, we can conclude that managers can motivate their employees by meeting their needs, setting goals, enabling equality in the organisation, increasing expectations from employees and making work more interesting and challenging. A well-known acronym derived from this theory is SMART, which means that goals should

be specific, measurable, *attainable, realistic, and time-related*. This theory has been mainly tested on short-term goals, so it remains unclear to what extent it has been applied to long-term goals as well. However, little is disputed about the fact that clear and difficult goals lead to a higher level of employee productivity, which is also one of the important explanations for this dependent variable.

The theory of expectations by Victor H. Vroom (1964) was created under the auspices of research on motivation in *management*. One of the most widely accepted theories of motivation is the theory of expectation by Victor Vroom (1964). Vroom's theory assumes that behaviour *results from conscious choices between alternatives aimed at maximising pleasure and minimising discomfort*. Vroom suggested that the relationship between goals was not as simple as Locke (1967) imagined it. Expectations theory argues that individuals have different sets of goals and can be motivated if they believe (a) that there is *a positive correlation between effort and performance*, (b) *how the required performance will lead to the desired objective*, (c) *the reward will satisfy an important need*, and (d) *the need is strong enough* to make the effort meaningful. Vroom's (1964) VIE model of motivation is based on three beliefs that an individual can form about Valence, *i.e. the emotional significance of the goal*, Expectance about the possibility of performing the necessary task, *i.e. the subjectively estimated probability that a certain effort or behaviour will lead to the desired outcome*, Instrumentality (*Instrumentality*), which refers to the perception of the connection between performance and goal, *i.e. whether the performance will really lead to the goal*. Vroom (1964) suggested that these three beliefs interact psychologically, forming a motivational force that ultimately drives behaviour.

To sum up, it is necessary first to determine the global goal that is being pursued. Subsequently, it is necessary to establish a number of specific goals in order to achieve the global goal (Locke et al., 1990). Then, for each of the sub-objectives, the value and instrumentality are determined. The value of the goal is expressed on a scale from -1 (extremely undesirable goal) through 0 (the goal is not of interest to the individual at all) to 1 (the goal is extremely desirable). The instrumentality takes values from 0 (there is no connection between the goal and the performance) to 1 (there is an absolute connection between the goal and the performance). However, numerous studies, especially those summarised in the meta-analysis conducted by Van Eerde (1996), indicate that there is no consistent support for the application of this mathematical formula or a single interpretation regarding the inclusion of certain motivational elements in the equation. At the very least, this formula gives very short-term and specific motivational predictions. Although Vroom's model can be applied to various forms of behaviour in organisations, it is the most empirically tested on work behaviour and the execution of work tasks. It has been shown that if a person does not expect that high commitment will lead to a high level of work or that a high level of work will not lead to the achievement of the desired goal, the perceived instrumentality will be low. The person will not make a special effort at work. In light of the above, Watanabe et al. (2024) showed, however, that emotional intelligence can affect the success of a project in the long term, while Pejić Bach et al. (2023) indicate that training through simulation games can develop managerial skills.

In conclusion, we can say that this model shows that for positively motivated action in terms of greater work engagement and activity at work, it is important that a person can work to ensure the achievement of the goals they want and that are valuable to them (Ahmić & Čizmić, 2021; Debelak et al., 2024). It is the managers of the future who will have to deal with complex goals as a consequence of the complexity of the organisations of the future (Kotter, 2001).

Conclusion

Understanding the motivational process is especially important in areas where intrinsic motivation can only have an effect and one of the professions in which this is the case is managerial. When managing employee motivation, it is necessary to locate individual motives to influence the realisation of individual employee development cycles easily and ultimately, all with the aim of improving business efficiency. A common feature of all the theories we have presented is the assumption that the individual can control personal and environmental variables. It is a control that enables the self-regulation of behaviour and motivation. Although self-regulation may not be explicitly mentioned as a concept in some theories, the theory can be considered self-regulation if it basically uses the assumption of the proactive characteristics of the human being, that is, of a person who perceives his environment, evaluates his relationship with it and reacts in accordance with his cognitive assessment. Motivation occupies an important place in the professional life of every individual and certainly plays an important role in professional activity in the field of management.

This paper aims to present those theories of motivation that start from the assumption that an individual can control personal and environmental variables. The paper also emphasised the GRIT traits that clearly show that human potential becomes endless with a sufficient amount of effort. GRIT is designed with the aim of recognising individuals in whom perseverance is a combination of passion and perseverance for an extremely important goal, and this is exactly the characteristic of those who achieve high success in every field. Organisations can harness this potential by using a variety of opportunities to foster passion and perseverance. People who show determination are considered highly motivated and able to maintain their effort and interest in their goals over time, even in the face of setbacks and challenges. Boldness can be characterised as persistence and a desire for long-term goals. In further research, it would certainly be interesting to combine GRIT traits with some of the motivational and personality models because the interdisciplinary approach of economics and psychology is a step towards a better understanding of employee needs.

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