

**Motivation Theory**

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**Authors Note**

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### **Abstract**

Goal setting theory can be summarized as the effectiveness of specific and difficult goals as framework for individuals and organizations to develop a system to reach desired outcomes. (Lock and Latham 2016; 2006) Research suggests that goals organizational members strive to attain are prime determinates of their motivation and performance. (Jones, 2019) Recent studies have concerned goal choice in a variety of context as the theory relates to organizational and industrial psychology, as well a conduit to analysis through biblical scripture. Goal-setting theory has its strengths in that it can be used as a motivator for organizations in developing a path toward achieving prescribed outcomes. The theory also has its limitations in that it may create missed opportunities. Goal-setting theory is relevant to this author's work as a small business owner as he can utilize the theory in developing a management process that he can apply within his organization.

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## **Motivation Theory**

### **Introduction**

Goal-setting theory as outlined by Latham and Locke (1990; as cited in Jones, 2019) is one of the most influential frameworks in motivational psychology. It provides a framework for individuals and organizations to develop a system to reach desired outcomes. The literature is replete with studies and research into this theory and has been studied in a variety of contexts as it relates to psychology, motivation, and organizational performance. Goal-setting theory can also be applied and analyzed through scripture as it relates to developing an outline for Christians towards reaching harmony in their lives and the ability to achieve what they set out to do. Goal-setting theory is relevant to this author as he navigates the development of a proven management system for his small business as he moves forward.

### **Theory Analysis from Literature**

Goal-setting theory is one of the most influential frameworks in motivational psychology. (Nebel, Schneider, Schledjewski, 2016) Literature shows that there are two reasons why some people do better than others at setting challenging goals; (1) higher self-efficacy, and (2) setting goals emphasizes seeking success versus avoiding failure. (Clements & Kamau, 2017). Jones (2019) took this a step further and outlines that goal-setting theory stimulates high motivation and performance. Interestingly, the research of Nebel et al. (2016) applied goal-setting theory to educational video games and they found it was a significant platform to study the theory. The research of Pritchard-Wiart, Thompson-Hodgetts, & McKillop (2019) found that goal-setting theory, which is rooted in neurobehavioral and industrial, organizational psychology, is focused on elucidating relationship between goal qualities. This body of research is based on over 400 laboratory and field experiments and it provides the foundation for workplace performance

research and organizational psychology. (Pritchard-Wiart et al., 2019) With this in mind, goal-setting theory as it relates to motivation and management in an organization is well documented in the literature and provides ample opportunity for analysis.

### **Theory Defined**

Goal setting theory as developed by Locke and Latham (1990; as cited in Clements et al., 2017) proposes that people perform better when they have goals that are specific, challenging and achievable. Locke, et al. (1990; as cited in Clements et al., 2017) argue that these goals should be challenging because this produces high levels of motivation and requires strategies that enhance effort and performance. These strategies allow individuals to monitor their progress and adjust their performance as needed.

### **Purpose and function of the theory**

From a practical matter, the goal-setting theory can be applied in an organization to reach milestones and create a culture within the business that unites and motivates its workers. This goal-oriented process can begin as early as the first day on the job for an employee and allows the management to discuss job expectations, skills and aspirations in order to meet the objectives of the company. By having the employees meet scheduled outcomes their performance can be assessed, and feedback can be given to improve performance and provide quantifiable evidence on their productivity.

### **Strengths and weakness of the theory**

Lock and Latham (2016; 2006) postulate that the general premise of the goal-setting theory was that individuals and groups produce the best output when they are motivated by specific and attainable goals. This theory is based on that a goal can be seen as a path or purpose. A means to an end. Without this clear path, it is more difficult to navigate and attain the outcome

that is prescribed. This process has a commitment requirement. A good example is a quota for sales or increasing customer numbers rather than a less specific, do the best you can approach. Another strength of the goal-setting theory is it drives planning and feedback. By establishing specific goals, it allows an organization to evaluate progress and provide direction. A weakness of the theory is a goal motivated organization can create tunnel vision and missed opportunities can occur. Another weakness is that setting an implanting a goal driven culture creates time and may cause organizations and their employees to avoid them.

### **Summary statement of effectiveness**

A goal is defined as what an individual is trying to accomplish; it is the object or aim of an action. (Locke, Shawm Saari, & Latham, 1981; as cited in Swann, Rosenbaum, Lawrence, Vella, McEwan, & Ekkekakis, 2020) In order for this to be effective the goals must be specific and attainable in a prescribed amount of time. Swann et al., (2020) found, at least from a theoretical perspective that goal-setting practices may provide important insights into how researchers, practitioners and policy makers can work toward best practices on how best to use goal-setting theory in today's organizations and how to incorporate goals into the central focus on implementing change. The goal-setting theory is effective because it provides, clarity, challenge, commitment, and feedback to individuals as they navigate toward pre-determined outcomes in their organization.

### **Theory Evaluation from Scripture**

According to Jones (2019) goals let people know what they should focus their attention on and know what is needed to achieve these goals. For many people they turn to scripture to provide an outline to reaching harmony in their lives and the ability to achieve what they set out to do. The Bible has many names for setting goals. They are often referred to as the "call of

God,” the “will of God,” the “mission,” or “vision” just to name a few. These concepts can be found in several stories in the Bible and they include; Noah saving his family and the animals from the flood (Genesis 6:9), Abigail (1 Samuel 25) had to act quickly in her decision to best save her family and the king, and the story of Nehemiah’s vision (Nehemiah 2:11-20) and how he wanted to see the kingdom of Jerusalem rebuilt and safe.

### **Summary statement of effectiveness**

Using the goal setting theory outlined by Locke and Latham (1990; as cited in Clements & Kamau, 2017) proposes that people perform better when goals are specific, challenging and achievable. The Bible makes it clear to set specific goals and plan for the future while at the same time having a humble attitude and trusting God. By setting a series of specific goals as outlined by Locke and Latham (1990; as cited in Clements & Kamau, 2017) one way that we can achieve this is by becoming a faithful and humble steward of the resources that God provides for us. The submissiveness to our Lord will allow our goals to line up with His plans. We must also be humble in our actions and understand that God may change our plans to accomplish His greater purpose in and through us (Proverbs 3:5-6)

### **Method of evaluation with scripture**

According to Locke & Latham (1990, 2002; as cited in Latham, Brcic, and Steinhauer) goal setting theory emphasized the importance of the goal to an individual in order to ensure goal commitment. When using this strategy as a method in evaluating it to scripture it is important to note that the goal of all Christians is to be more Christ-life in our daily lives. God wants us to move in this direction into eternity and scripture supports an evaluation of goal setting and can be seen outlined in Proverbs 16:3 (NIV) as it says, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.” Proverbs 16:9 (NIV) outlines how to obtain goals with a Christian

worldview as it says, “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the lord establishes their steps.” Lastly, the verse Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV) says “Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Just like the apostle Paul, we must be laser-focused on the race, the goal and the finish line.

### **New Thoughts and Recommendations**

Being self-employed and the owner a small customer service-related business I am focused on goals and goal setting processes each day. As the strategies and principles Schragger (2020) uses to determine the effectiveness of goal setting; (1) they should be specific and challenging, (2) goals should not be too easy or too hard, (3) process versus outcome, and (4) important and attainable. I can use goal-setting theory to help our business make meaningful and healthy change. This management theory can be very effective because it allows our business to step away from our traditional leadership model and implement a management system that is less reliant on inter-company relationship building and rather focus on the daily activities of the business. I have often focused solely on a leadership approach toward our business model and I am finding that a process such as motivation theory as it relates to goal setting will allow us to increase performance and complete challenging tasks. This management theory has allowed me to further recognize that I need to lead people and manage processes. I also recognize that management without leadership can lead toward disengagement. Leadership without execution through solid management can result in poor performance and lackadaisical implementation.

### Conclusion

Goal setting theory as proposed by Latham and Locke (1990; as cited in Jones, 2019) is one of the most influential frameworks in motivational psychology. It provides a framework for individuals and organizations to develop a system to reach desired outcomes. This theory focuses on motivating workers in an organization to contribute in a meaningful way in the workplace and allows members to focus their inputs in the direction of performance and achievement of the organizational goals. (Jones, 2019, p. 302) There have been myriad studies of this theory as it relates to neurobehavioral and industrial, organizational psychology, is focused on expounding the relationship between goal qualities. Many of these studies focus not only on the attainment of a goal but also the feedback, clarity, challenge, and commitment toward the individuals as they work toward attaining the goals that they set forth.

Goal-setting theory can be analyzed using the Bible and relevant scripture. Locke & Latham's (1990, 2002; as cited in Latham, Brcic, and Steinhauer) goal setting theory emphasized the importance of the goal to an individual in order to ensure goal commitment. When using this strategy as a method in evaluating it to scripture it is important to note that the goal of all Christians is to be more Christ-like in our daily lives. God wants us to move in this direction into eternity and scripture supports an evaluation of goal setting and can be seen outlined in Proverbs 16:3 (NIV). By setting a series of specific goals as outlined by Locke and Latham (1990; as cited in Clements & Kamau, 2017) one way that we can achieve this is by becoming a faithful and humble steward of the resources that God provides for us. The submissiveness to our Lord will allow our goals to line up with His plans.

Lastly this author can use the methods obtained in a review of the literature as a basis for implementing a management system that is well suited to the goals and objectives of his

business. This methodology will allow this author to develop an effective and systematic approach to meet the needs of his business that is much different than the current operating system that is in place now. As this author moves forward with a better understanding of how he can motivate his employees through setting realistic and challenging goals it will allow him to provide meaningful feedback and increase performance and productivity in his business.

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