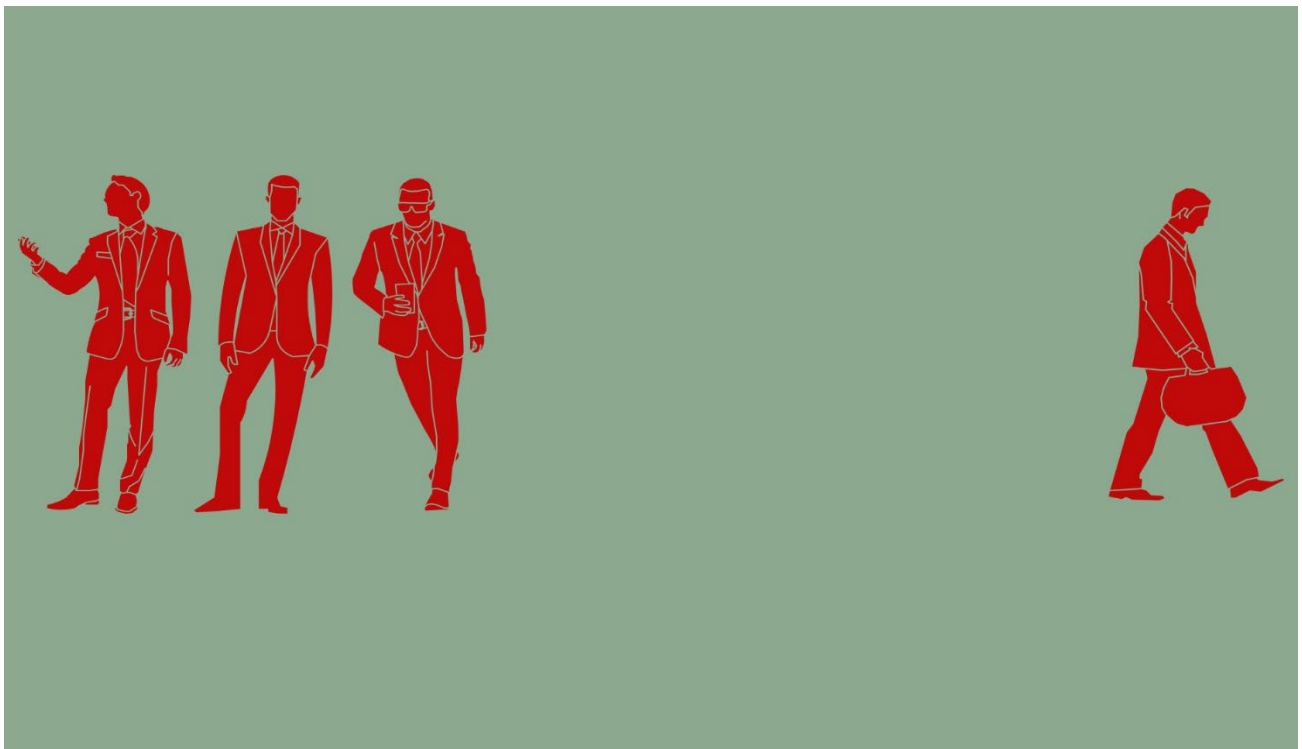




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Motivational Theories Applied

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ABSTRACT

This case recapitulates a previous working experience I was part of in 2016. Motivation has been extensively studied over the decades and many theories have been developed to explain the drives behind employees' behaviors. However, the number of motivational theories keeps on rising as more needs are being uncovered, making it difficult for managers across industries to fully comprehend the wide array of needs and thus more difficult to motivate employees and teams as such. Therefore, it becomes important to have a comprehensive understanding of these theories and how they apply in workplace. This case illustrates the application of five different motivational theories: self-determination, hierarchy of needs, motivation-hygiene, scientific management, and human motivation to four employees working in the same company, at the same time, and under the same situation.

Keywords: *motivation, management, self-determination, hierarchy of needs, motivation-hygiene, scientific management, human motivation.*



Karim A. Ardati was raised in the city of Tripoli, Lebanon where he graduated from College-des-Freres school. He is a professional in the fields of project management and civil engineering. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from the American University of Beirut (2013), where he also co-founded the Awareness Club. Karim is currently working towards a Master's degree (ALM) at Harvard University Extension School (expected, 2021). His career focus has been in the construction and infrastructure industries, working in several prestigious projects in the Middle East. Additionally, he holds a Harvard Extension School Project Management certification and a Project Management Professional certification.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of motivation still sparks debates and feeds controversy whenever it is discussed. It is a single topic to which several theories give different explanations. Human beings are driven by so many intertwining needs that form basis for a complex system of emotions, motivations, and behaviors. It is very difficult for me to think about the topic of motivation without resonating with at least one experience from my career. My own personal experience still sparks enthusiasm whenever I remember what happened four years ago, because it is a case of contrast between a single situation and several behaviors. Luckily, motivational theories explain it all, and here's how.

Between the years 2014 and early 2016, the global economy witnessed its largest oil price decline in history. The oil barrel price dropped from a high \$120 to a low \$30. In a country like Kuwait where oil exports account for 95% of total exports, the economy severely contracted, unemployment increased, construction projects suddenly stopped, and uncertainty loomed everywhere.

Back then, I was working in probably the biggest real estate company in the country: La'ala Al Kuwait – Pearls of Kuwait. We were developing the Sabah Al-Ahmad Sea City (SAASC) in the southern part of the country. A \$5 billion megaproject that dragged sea water through man-made lagoons into the desert to add an extra 200 kilometers of artificial shorelines to the country with thousands of new residential plots, that would be later developed into villas and houses by their new Kuwaiti owners.

The top management constituted of Ian (IW), the project director of SAASC, Hanna (HN) project assistant director, and Matt (MR), the project manager of SAASC. As sales declined sharply and prices per square foot followed the same trend, they were challenged by the new economic downturn to find ways to survive. Thus, they decided to cut down the number of staff and terminate many of the project's 6,000 employees.

I wasn't among those whose contract got terminated, but unfortunately I was one of those to witness hundreds of fellow colleagues lose their jobs, make hard decisions, sell some of their belongings, interrupt the school year of their children, and relocate to another country.

LIMITATIONS

In my position as senior project engineer, I was managing three other engineers, (TA), (AT), and (ML). We all survived the terminations round; however, we remained for four months going to the offices only to stare at our computer screens without doing any actual work since all construction works on site were put on hold. I became very uncomfortable with the current situation, I loved my work and appreciated the value of time, and so I hated myself for wasting my time for doing nothing other than showing my face every working day. Maslow's hierarchy of needs describes my motives as the need for *esteem* and *self-actualization*, the drive to achieving our potential and the need for achievement (Robbins & Judge, 2014).

During breaks, I expressed my frustration with the new working environment. I felt insecure and afraid of the possibility of getting terminated the month after. Shockingly, a study shows that three to five employees out of ten are feeling that they are trapped in their jobs, and that their jobs may be lost (Gibaldi & Cusack, 2019). Fear in the workplace is a very common issue that is often overlooked. Surprisingly, AT shared the same frustration, while others on the team didn't; they were scared from changing to another company and felt comfortable at where they were despite the fear from being fired.

AT was planning to get married a few months later and couldn't afford staying without a job for some time. Stability was his priority, he preferred to move to a more stable job than this one and guarantee a sustainable source of income. Frederick Herzberg explains this need in his *two-factor theory*, his study shows that the most deciding factor for job

satisfaction is job security (Pride, Hughes, & Kapoor, 2011) and that's clearly what was driving AT's behaviors.

TA, on the other hand, had no objection to come to the offices every day if he received his paycheck at the end of the month. He was happy with the salary he received and waited for things to get better in the

future. He probably thought of the situation as an opportunity to get easy money while utilizing his working hours to study for some online courses. He was only ready to consider offers that would pay him greater than what he was earning; meanwhile he lost all interest and love for the job. Money was the main drive for him regardless of the career experience he was losing. Indeed, *cognitive evaluation theory* explains that extrinsic rewards such as money

will reduce intrinsic interest such as passion, job has become something he *has* to do rather than something he *wants* to do. (Robbins & Judge, 2014)

ML was the oldest of us all; he took a day-by-day approach to the problem. He was afraid of getting terminated at any time but was more afraid of changing to another firm. He's been in this company for a long time, longer than any other team member and he felt safe and comfortable in it. And due to loyalty, he felt an obligation towards the company to remain in it and support it in such bad times. McClelland's theory of needs talks about the

need for affiliation (nAff) which is the desire for friendly and close interpersonal relationships (Robbins & Judge, 2014). ML had built strong interpersonal relationships over the years with other employees in the company that it was so difficult for him to abandon.

"Three to five employees out of ten are feeling that they are trapped in their jobs, and that their jobs may be lost. "

(Gibaldi & Cusack, 2019)

CONCLUSION

Obviously, each team member had different needs and motives; hence each one was motivated to behave in a different way. While AT and I wanted to move to another company to get rid of this fear of getting terminated and from this great level of uncertainty, TA thought to take advantage of this easy money, no work situation, and ML preferred to stay in the company due to his feelings of loyalty towards it.

Eventually, AT and I resigned from the company and moved to another one. TA is still in the same company and moved to another project which started recently. ML was off-hired and is working in rice fields in the Philippines. The table below summarizes the motivations behind everyone's behavior.

Name	Emotions	Need	Behavior
Me	Fear of being off hired Frustration	Self-determination: I was frustrated that I wasn't in control of my future. Maslow's need for self-esteem and actualization: I wanted a job in which I can perform and achieve my career goals, and that recognizes my performance. McClelland's need for achievement: I wanted a job in which I can drive and excel.	Resigned
AT	Fear of being off hired Frustration	Herzberg's need for job security. Wanted a stable job and a sustainable source of income.	Resigned
TA	Lost love for the job Motivated by the money	Herzberg: People may be motivated by extrinsic factors such as money. Taylor's theory: People are motivated by money and only money.	Stayed
ML	Loyalty	Maslow's need for belonging: He felt love and belonging to the company and resisted change. McClelland's need for affiliation (naff): The desire to be loyal to the company.	Stayed

It would be unfair to judge the impact of the decision made by each person now. However, I can speak of my own experience. Since I resigned back in early 2016, I've worked on 3 other major projects in Kuwait. My expertise in construction has improved vastly and I continue to reap the results of that decision I took and pursue my career achievements. For me, the need to achieve and to participate in the most challenging construction projects has always been the drive behind my career decisions. Through analysis of the table above, one can conclude that no motivational theory is entirely correct in its own. Indeed, each theory is explanatory of a specific behavior only. To be able to understand everyone's behaviors, one must be aware of all the motivational theories in the literature and analytically correlate each person's behavior to his or her specific need and applicable theory.

Human beings are a mix of drives, and that is interesting. First, we have the biological drive: we eat when we're hungry. We also have the reward drive; we respond well to rewards or punishments. Then we have the drive to do things because they're interesting and because we like them (Pink, 2010). For me, I quit that job in 2016 because it wasn't interesting anymore. But human beings are so complex that several theories are needed to understand their behaviors and making sense out of this complexity and setting theories to rationalize it may seem like a mission impossible. But motivational theories have significantly evolved over the years and succeeded in uncovering the basics that would explain human complexity and by being aware of these theories, one can make better decisions and form educated opinions that would refine his or her behavior at workplace and eventually help achieve more and perform better.

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