What is Motivational Intelligence?

The Power Within®

Motivational Intelligence

The Power Within Training & Development conceptualises Motivational Intelligence as "the ability to motivate oneself and others". Research conducted by The Power Within Training & Development on Motivational Intelligence has identified the following major scientific subject areas as key literature that can help explain and teach us how to practice Motivational Intelligence:

- **The Predictive Brain Models**
- **Implicit Theories**
- **Needs**
- **Motivational Models of Needs**
- **Personality**

To address the question of what motivates oneself and others, a mutual understanding of **'What is motivation?'** must first be answered. The following definitions adequately conceptualise motivation, and while they are different, they mirror each other at their foundations and present different perspectives and insights into the same dynamic of motivation.

- Kast and Rosenzweig (1985) describe a motive as what prompts an individual to enact certain behaviours or at least have an inclination for specific behaviours.

- Similarly, Dweck (2017) subscribes to a common conceptualisation of motivation as "the forces that drive and direct behaviour" (see also Hebb 1955; McClelland, 1987; Myers, 2012; Reeve, 2005).

- Additionally, Dessler (1986) described motivation as the force that occurs when one or more of our important needs are unsatisfied.

Considered together, Dessler's (1986) emphasis on needs suggests that unresolved needs are "the forces that drive and direct behaviour" (Dweck, 2017) or Kast and Rosenzweig's (1985) motives.

Ultimately, The Power Within Training & Development proposes that an awareness and understanding of our needs, how our needs motivate us, how our beliefs shape the way we act to achieve these needs, and how we can directly change our beliefs and behaviours contributes to our ability to motivate ourselves and others towards desired outcomes. This proposal is supported by extensive research on **Implicit Theories (aka Growth vs. Fixed Mindsets)**, which demonstrate that people with growth mindsets achieve better outcomes in education and work (Burnette et al., 2023; Han & Stieha, 2020; Sisk et al., 2018).

Research has also shown that **growth mindsets** are associated with **stronger self-esteem** (Dweck, 2013; Gál & Szamosközi, 2021; Zhao et al., 2023), **greater life satisfaction** (Lam & Zhou, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; King, 2016), **life adaptability** (Lee et al., 2020), **relationship satisfaction** (Van Tongeren & Burnette, 2018), **wellbeing** (Van Tongeren & Burnette, 2018), **healthy perfectionism** (Chan, 2012), and **decreased negative affect** (King, 2016; Lam & Zhou, 2020).

The Predictive Brain Model

The contemporary theory that the brain is a '**prediction-making machine**' highlights that the brain is continually engaged, consciously and unconsciously, in predicting optimal future circumstances so that we can adjust our behaviours accordingly (Nave et al., 2020; Steffen et al., 2020). It also brings attention to evolutionary-inherited motives such as the desire for connection, stability, and mating. Highlighting these core needs emphasises that our higher-order motivations all funnel back to these core needs. So, with this general understanding of what motivates us, we gain an awareness of whether our current world views adaptively serve these core needs or if they need to be changed. To quote the eminent psychologist William James (1842-1910), **"The greatest revolution in my generation was the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of mind can alter the outer aspects of their lives."**.

Implicit Theories

A guiding principle of Motivational Intelligence is that one's beliefs and attitudes towards certain abilities determine whether they will perform positive behaviours that engage with that ability or avoid it. This principle is thoroughly researched under the subject known as **Implicit Theories or Growth vs. Fixed Mindsets**. A growth mindset about an ability is associated with believing that one can improve their competence and embracing challenges to this ability so they can learn (Dweck et al., 1995). Conversely, a fixed mindset is associated with believing that their ability cannot be improved and avoiding situations where they must use this ability alongside any learning opportunities. When this understanding of implicit theories is coupled with the predictive brain model, namely, that our brain predicts future outcomes and ways to adjust behaviour to achieve optimal future life conditions, then goal-oriented behaviours can be thought of as a product of the interaction between our core needs and subjective beliefs around how we can meet them.

Needs

Models of needs such as **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** (Maslow & Lewis, 1987), **Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory** (Herzberg, 1987), and **McClelland's Theory of Acquired Needs** (de Andrade Baptista et al., 2021) provide a framework for understanding what people are motivated to do. Therefore, Motivational Intelligence requires an awareness of people's needs so that complementary goals can be created, which one will be **intrinsically motivated** to achieve, can be created.

Personality

Personality is relevant to Motivational Intelligence because it provides insight into how an individual is intrinsically motivated to perform different behaviours. For example, **conscientiousness** is strongly associated with **greater performance and attainment** in education and work (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004). This is significant because research has shown that conscientiousness can be improved by purposefully engaging in more conscientious behaviours such as staying organised (Hudson et al., 2021). Therefore, someone that is interested in realising the benefits of motivation, advancement towards desired goals, can practice more conscientiousness. Similarly, the personality trait **openness** is associated with a greater desire to be **creative** (McCrae & Costa, 2008; Sung & Choi, 2009). Therefore, a leader that wants their organisation to be more **innovative** might allocate people with high openness to creative projects.

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