

PSYCHOLOGY OF ACTIVITY AND MOTIVATION: AN INTEGRATIVE STAGE
MODEL OF THE PATH FROM MOTIVE TO RESULT

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Annotation. *This article examines the relationship between activity and motivation by integrating the theory of activity developed in Soviet psychology with contemporary Western motivation psychology. It is argued that the gap between the two traditions is largely terminological: the distinction between motive and goal in A.N. Leontiev's theory corresponds to the distinction between motivational and volitional processes in the Rubicon model, and the "shift of the motive to the goal" corresponds to the internalization of extrinsic motivation described by self-determination theory. On this basis, a four-stage model of the path from motive to result is proposed – the formation of a motive, the choice of a goal, the transition from intention to action, and the regulation of activity until its completion – and the psychological mechanisms and meta-analytic evidence relevant to each stage are summarized. The model is used to formulate recommendations for diagnosing and supporting motivation in educational and work activity.*

Keywords: *activity theory, motive, motivation, goal, volition, Rubicon model, implementation intentions, self-determination theory, goal setting, educational psychology.*

INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of human activity depends not only on knowledge and skills but also on what sets activity in motion, directs it and sustains it in the face of difficulties. For this reason the relationship between activity and motivation is one of the central questions of general, educational and organizational psychology. Its practical importance is growing in Uzbekistan as higher education institutions move to the credit-module system, in which the share of independent study increases and the student's capacity for self-motivation becomes decisive.

In practice, however, motivation is often treated as a single quantity that a person either "has" or "lacks", and the means of influencing it are reduced to rewards and sanctions. Research contradicts both assumptions. A meta-analysis of 128 experiments showed that tangible rewards made contingent on engaging in, completing or performing well on an interesting task reduced subsequent free-choice intrinsic motivation [1], and a meta-analysis of experimental studies showed that even a medium-to-large change in intentions produces only a small-to-medium change in behaviour [2]. Motivation, therefore, does not end with wanting: between the motive and the result lies a sequence of processes, each of which can fail for its own reasons.

Psychology has accumulated two large bodies of knowledge about this sequence. The theory of activity developed by S.L. Rubinstein and A.N. Leontiev explains how motives arise in activity and give it personal meaning [3; 4], while Western motivation psychology has produced detailed models of goal choice, volition and self-regulation [5–8]. These traditions are rarely connected, and in teaching practice they are often presented as unrelated theories. The aim of the article is to integrate the two traditions into a stage model of the path from motive to result and to derive from it practical recommendations for educational and work activity.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

S.L. Rubinstein formulated the principle of the unity of consciousness and activity, according to which mental properties are both manifested and formed in activity [3]. A.N. Leontiev distinguished the levels of activity, actions and operations, corresponding respectively to motives, goals and conditions, and separated sense-forming motives, which give activity personal meaning, from motive-stimuli, which only add incentive [4]. In the Western tradition, J. Atkinson described the strength of achievement-oriented tendencies as a function of the motive, the expectancy of success and the incentive value of success [5]; V. Vroom applied the logic of expectancy to work motivation [9]; H. Heckhausen and P. Gollwitzer separated the motivational phase of deliberation from the volitional phase of implementation [6]; P. Gollwitzer introduced implementation intentions as a tool of volitional control [7]; and E. Locke and G. Latham generalized several decades of research on goal setting [8]. R. Ryan and E. Deci's self-determination theory described the internalization of extrinsic motivation along a continuum from external to integrated regulation [10]. H. Heckhausen's monograph remains the most complete attempt to systematize these approaches [11], while in the national literature the psychology of motives is covered mainly in textbooks of general psychology [12]. What remains insufficiently developed is a model that connects the activity-theoretical account of the formation of motives with the experimental evidence on volition and self-regulation.

The study applied theoretical analysis and comparison of the concepts of the two traditions, systematization of the results of meta-analyses and theoretical modelling. Meta-analyses rather than individual experiments were chosen as the evidence base because they provide the most reliable quantitative estimates of the effects of motivational factors and interventions and reduce the influence of the results of single studies.

RESULTS

The first result concerns the conceptual correspondence between the two traditions. The comparison shows that several of their key concepts describe the same phenomena in different terms. Leontiev's distinction between the motive, which determines why an activity is carried out, and the goal, which determines what a particular action must achieve [4], corresponds to the distinction between the motivational and volitional phases in the Rubicon model, where the choice of what to strive for is separated from the regulation of how to achieve it [6]. Leontiev's "shift of the motive to the goal", whereby an action initially performed for an external reason gradually acquires independent motivating force [4], corresponds to internalization in self-determination theory, whereby externally regulated behaviour becomes identified with and integrated into the self [10]. Finally, the distinction between sense-forming motives and motive-stimuli [4] corresponds to the distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation [10]. This correspondence makes it possible to combine the explanatory strength of activity theory, which shows how motives arise, with the empirical precision of Western research, which shows how motivation is converted into results.

The second result is a four-stage model of the path from motive to result, the first two stages of which precede the decision to act. At the first stage, the formation of a motive, a need meets its object and acquires personal meaning [4]. The key mechanism here is the person's own experience of activity: a motive cannot be transmitted verbally but takes shape when a person is involved in meaningful activity and experiences satisfaction and success in it.

The undermining effect of rewards shows the limits of external stimulation at this stage: in the meta-analysis by E. Deci, R. Koestner and R. Ryan, engagement-contingent, completion-contingent and performance-contingent tangible rewards reduced free-choice intrinsic motivation ($d = -0.40, -0.36$ and -0.28 respectively) [1]. At the second stage, the choice of a goal, the decisive factors are the subjective probability of success and the value of the outcome. According to J. Atkinson, the incentive value of success increases with the difficulty of the task, so that success-oriented individuals prefer tasks of intermediate difficulty, whereas individuals dominated by the fear of failure tend to choose either very easy or extremely difficult tasks [5]. In V. Vroom's theory, motivation to work likewise depends on the expectation that effort will lead to performance and that performance will lead to valued outcomes [9].

The third result concerns the transition from intention to action, the stage most often neglected in practice. In the Rubicon model, the motivational phase ends with the formation of an intention, after which the person "crosses the Rubicon" and enters the volitional phase, in which thinking is oriented towards implementation rather than deliberation [6]. Empirical data confirm that this transition is not automatic: interventions that change intentions have only about half as large an effect on behaviour as on the intentions themselves ($d = 0.66$ for intentions and $d = 0.36$ for behaviour) [2]. The most thoroughly studied means of bridging this gap is the implementation intention – a plan in the form "if situation X arises, I will perform behaviour Y", which delegates the initiation of action to situational cues [7]. A meta-analysis by P. Gollwitzer and P. Sheeran covering 94 independent tests found a medium-to-large effect of such plans on goal attainment ($d = 0.65$) [13].

The fourth result concerns the regulation of activity until its completion. E. Locke and G. Latham showed that specific and difficult goals lead to higher performance than vague exhortations to "do one's best", because goals direct attention, mobilize effort, prolong persistence and stimulate the search for task strategies; these effects depend on commitment to the goal and on feedback about progress [8].

Feedback, however, is not beneficial in every case: in the meta-analysis by A. Kluger and A. DeNisi, feedback interventions improved performance on average ($d = 0.41$), but over one-third of them decreased performance, which the authors explain by feedback shifting attention from the task to the person's self [14].

The intensity of motivation must also be regulated: the regularity first observed by R. Yerkes and J. Dodson and later generalized to motivation indicates that the optimal level of arousal decreases as task difficulty increases, so that excessive pressure impairs performance on complex tasks [15].

The fifth result is a typology of motivational difficulties derived from the model. Since each stage has its own mechanism, the same outward picture – a student who does not complete assignments or an employee who does not achieve the expected results – may have four different psychological causes: the absence of a personally meaningful motive (first stage), a low expectancy of success or a mismatch between task difficulty and ability (second stage), a failure to initiate action despite a formed intention (third stage), or a failure of self-regulation caused by vague goals, inappropriate feedback or excessive pressure (fourth stage).

Each type requires a different response: involvement in meaningful activity and support for autonomy; adjustment of task difficulty and accumulation of experience of success; volitional planning; or specific goals, task-focused feedback and moderate pressure.

DISCUSSION

First, the integration proposed here does not eliminate the differences between the traditions. Activity theory regards motivation as a product of the person's life activity and social relations, whereas most Western models describe processes within the individual and rely on laboratory experiments.

The stage model therefore does not claim to be a new theory; its purpose is heuristic – to organize the existing evidence in a form that can be used in practice.

Second, the model explains why universal “motivational” measures often fail. Rewards and sanctions act mainly on the value of outcomes and on the level of pressure, that is, at the second and fourth stages, but they do not create sense-forming motives and may even undermine them [1]; motivational talks raise intentions but do not guarantee action [2].

Effective support of motivation thus requires identifying the stage at which the process breaks down, rather than applying the same incentive to everyone.

Third, the evidence summarized here comes mainly from studies conducted in Western countries, and the effect sizes cannot be transferred automatically to the educational and organizational environment of Uzbekistan, where the role of the family in educational and career choices and the hierarchical character of organizational relations may influence the meaning of motives and the acceptance of goals. Empirical verification of the model on samples of Uzbek students and employees is therefore a task for further research.

CONCLUSION

The study leads to the conclusion that activity and motivation form a single process in which motivation operates not only at the start of activity but at each of its stages. The theory of activity and Western motivation psychology describe this process in complementary terms, and their integration makes it possible to distinguish four stages – the formation of a motive, the choice of a goal, the transition from intention to action and the regulation of activity until its completion – each with its own mechanisms and evidence-based means of support.

On this basis, the following recommendations are put forward: psychological services of higher education institutions and human resources units should assess motivational difficulties by stage, distinguishing the absence of a meaningful motive, low expectancy of success, failure to initiate action and failure of self-regulation; teachers and managers should reveal the professional and personal meaning of tasks and avoid tangible rewards made contingent merely on engaging in activities that are already interesting; tasks should be set at a level of difficulty slightly above the person's current level, increasing it gradually for individuals who fear failure; students and employees should be taught to formulate implementation intentions and to divide large tasks into intermediate goals with fixed deadlines; goals should be specific and measurable and accompanied by task-focused feedback and a level of pressure appropriate to task complexity; and a practical module on the psychology of activity and motivation should be included in professional development courses for university teachers.

The implementation of these recommendations will help to shift the management of motivation from occasional stimulation to the systematic support of each stage of activity.

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