

Mitchell T R. Expectancy models of job satisfaction, occupational preference and effort: a theoretical, methodological, and empirical appraisal.

Psychol. Bull. 81:1053-77, 1974.

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The development and refinement of expectancy theory is described and its empirical support is reviewed. A number of methodological, empirical, and theoretical issues are raised and discussed. The general conclusion is that the theory has been inappropriately and insufficiently tested, and a variety of remedies are suggested. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 145 publications since 1974.]

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Expectancy theory is one of a class of theories that are based on the idea of expected value: that people choose to behave in a way that maximizes the expected payoff of the consequences of their actions.

My interest in expectancy theory started when I was a graduate student at Illinois and was exposed to the work of Don Dulany and Martin Fishbein. Dulany's theory of learning¹ and Fishbein's attitude theory² were based on expectancy notions. I soon discovered there were similar models in the areas of social power and decision making and, of particular interest, in the work of Vic Vroom³ using expectancy ideas to predict job effort, job satisfaction, and occupational choice. It occurred to me that so many prominent researchers coming up with similar ideas in different areas wasn't a chance event—there was undoubtedly some wisdom in what they had to say.

There are three somewhat personal aspects of the writing of the paper that are very salient for me. First, it was my initial "five-year plan"—a research pattern that I have followed ever since. First, I did an initial review of expectancy models.⁴ Then, for the next three to four years, I did a number of empirical studies on the topic, focusing on the models developed by Vroom. The *Citation Classic* represents the culmination of that work—a review and a critique of theory and method—with suggestions for further work. This review, research, review process has been a research strategy I have used repeatedly since then.

A second personal recollection was the amount of thinking and organizing that went into the paper. I remember literally pacing for hours working on some of the methodological and theoretical issues—what precisely were the problems and what to do about them? Finally, this paper, along with only one other paper in my career, was one I wanted to publish first and have the ideas clearly be identified as mine. So, in 1972 a shorter version of this paper was published in the *Journal Supplement Abstract Service Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*.⁵ In 1973 I presented a version of this paper at the national meeting of the Academy of Management.

Why has it been frequently cited? I suspect a variety of reasons. First, it was one of the first comprehensive reviews of the expectancy literature. Second, it covered three different behavioral criteria and reviewed issues of theory and method. Finally, it suggested areas where more research was needed—for example, the difference between a within-subjects choice model (where the subject selects an alternative from a set of alternatives) versus an across-subjects model (a correlational approach with each subject having one expectancy value score for a particular behavior—e.g., high effort). Other issues like the multiplicative assumptions of the model; the number of outcomes used; whether negative outcomes were included; and how expectancies, instrumentalities, and values were measured all led to subsequent research by other authors.⁶⁻⁹ A recent update of my review indicated that substantial progress has been made in understanding the strong and weak points of using the expectancy approach.¹⁰ To the extent that the original review prompted this progress, I am pleased with its contribution to the literature.

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