

adams' equity theory

j stacey adams - equity theory on job motivation

John Stacey Adams, workplace and behavioural psychologist, put forward his Equity Theory on job motivation in 1963. There are similarities with Charles Handy's extension and interpretation of previous simpler theories of Maslow, Herzberg and other pioneers of workplace psychology, in that the theory acknowledges that subtle and variable factors affect each individual's assessment and perception of their relationship with their work, and thereby their employer. Awareness and cognizance feature more strongly than in earlier models, as does the influence of colleagues and friends, etc, in forming cognizance, and in this particular model, 'a sense of what is fair and reasonable'.

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We each seek a fair balance between what we put into our job and what we get out of it. Adams calls these inputs and outputs. We form perceptions of what constitutes a fair balance or trade of inputs and outputs by comparing our own situation with other 'referents' (reference points or examples) in the market place. We are also influenced by colleagues, friends, partners in establishing these benchmarks and our own responses to them in relation to our own ratio of inputs to outputs.

Inputs are typically: effort, loyalty, hard work, commitment, skill, ability, adaptability, flexibility, tolerance, determination, heart and soul, enthusiasm, trust in our boss and superiors, support of colleagues and subordinates, personal sacrifice, etc.

People need to feel that there is a fair balance between inputs and outputs.

Outputs are typically all financial rewards - pay, salary, expenses, perks, benefits, pension arrangements, bonus and commission - plus intangibles - recognition, reputation, praise and thanks, interest, responsibility, stimulus, travel, training, development, sense of achievement and advancement, promotion, etc.

If we feel that inputs are fairly and adequately rewarded by outputs (the fairness benchmark being subjectively perceived from market norms and other comparables references) then we are happy in our work and motivated to continue inputting at the same level.

If we feel that our inputs out-weigh the outputs then we become demotivated in relation to our job and employer. People respond to this feeling in different ways: generally the extent of demotivation is proportional to the perceived disparity between inputs and expected outputs. Some people reduce effort and application and become inwardly disgruntled, or outwardly difficult, recalcitrant or even disruptive. Other people seek to improve the outputs by making claims or demands for more reward, or seeking an alternative job.

A [free Adams' Equity Theory diagram](#) (pdf file Acrobat reader required), explaining the theory is available free to view and download at the businessballs [free online resources section](#), which includes many other useful free training materials, management tools, tests and diagrams.

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