Is There Any Future in Achievement Motivation? 1

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The cognitive elaboration of achievement motivation theory by Raynor is reviewed, and the implications of future orientation and psychological distance are examined. It is suggested that psychological distance is determined by at least the following factors: (a) the expectancy of reaching the goal (attainability of the goal), (b) the distance in time between the present state and the future goal, and (c) the individual's future time orientation considered as a personality trait. It is argued that only the first of these factors is included in Raynor's elaboration. The latter two are assumed to determine the Perceived Goal Distance in Time (PgD), and it is postulated that the arousal of motives increases as PgD decreases. It is concluded that each future goal must be weighted by the corresponding perceived goal distance coefficient.

It is obvious that the definition of achievement motives as capacities to anticipate pleasure or pain in achievement situations (Atkinson, 1958; McClelland, 1955) implies that, to a certain extent, they are directed toward future achievement events or activities: A given performance event at some distance in time might be anticipated as desired (approached) or feared (avoided) depending on the relative dominance of the individual's achievement motive constellation.

It is also obvious that the original test for measuring the achievement motive (the Thematic Apperception Test of n Achievement) has a category for long-term consequences (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). It is therefore surprising, according to Heckhausen (1980),

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that future has been a forgotten variable in achievement motivation research for a long time. Raynor's (1967, 1969, 1974) elaboration of the initial theory (Atkinson, 1957) was supposed to overcome this deficiency by making a distinction between immediate consequences of an activity and effects attributable to anticipated future goals. This new theory stimulated a number of studies and experiments intended to investigate the effects of future consequences upon present motivation and performance (cf. Atkinson & Raynor, 1974). However, is there any future in these investigations, or is the future still the lost dimension in achievement motivation?

The purposes of the present contribution were to (a) examine implications and research based on Raynor's (1974) elaboration of the theory of achievement motivation, and (b) develop a set of additional assumptions regarding psychological distance and future time perspective in achievement motivation.

In the theory of achievement motivation presented by Atkinson (1957), the strength of an individual's resultant achievement motivation is an algebraic summation of the tendency to approach success ($T_s$) and the tendency to avoid failure ($T_f$). Further, the resultant achievement motivation (i.e., $T_s + T_f$) is determined by the individual's motive to approach success ($M_s$), the motive to avoid failure ($M_f$), and his subjective probability of success ($P_s$) in a particular task or activity, in the following way:

\[(1) \quad T_s + T_f = (M_s - M_f) (P_s) (1 - P_s).\]

According to Raynor (1969), however, this theory of achievement motivation (Atkinson, 1957) might be too limited because it does not distinguish between effects attributable to the immediate consequences of an activity and effects attributable to anticipated future goals. The theory focuses attention only on the immediate consequences of an activity. The reason for this might be that the behavior of a subject in a laboratory situation is often not related to the achievement of future goals, and accordingly, there has been no need to account for any immediate implication due to more long-term goals. The performance of an activity was an end goal and not, in addition, a means to some future goal(s). However, life situations often include present performance both as an end in itself and as a means to some distant goal(s). And often the effects attributable to long-term goals are more important as behavior determinants than the immediate consequences of the performance. Thus, a person might engage in an activity because (a) the consequence of the activity is an end goal in itself and (b) the immediate activity is serving as a means to some future steps. In this last case, immediate success must be a distinct possibility since immediate success is necessary to strive for future goals.

Raynor's cognitive extension of the theory of achievement motivation (Raynor, 1967, 1969, 1974) is based on the general principles of