DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3727/152599515X14465748512803
E-ISSN 1943-4308
www.cognizantcommunication.com

INCENTIVE TRAVEL: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Despite the economic importance of the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) industry, it remains relatively underresearched. The area of incentive travel is particularly lacking in academic research and remains without a strong theoretical foundation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that incentive travel is seen as an important and significant reward by organizations and their employees. However, while considerable research has examined how to motivate employees in the workplace, including the use of incentives, there has been little examination of why travel makes such as good incentive. In an effort to address this gap, this conceptual article integrates tourism motivation literature with the literature on employee motivation, with particular reference to expectancy theory. Expectancy theory suggests that the valence of a reward (its attractiveness) is a key component of motivating employees. Travel motivation theory helps to explain which particular aspects of travel make it an attractive reward. The article presents an introductory conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between incentive travel and employee motivations and acts as a foundation for future research in this area.

Key words: Incentive travel; MICE/business events; Travel motivation; Expectancy theory

Introduction

The business events, or MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions), industry is an important part of the events sector around the world. The business events sector includes meetings, conventions, incentives, and exhibitions. Global figures for the MICE industry are difficult to find, however, there are figures for individual nations that help to illustrate the economic might of this sector. For example, in the UK, more than 1.3 million meetings were held in 2011, attended by 116 million people who spent almost £40 billion (Hall & Ledger, 2013). The American meetings and events industry directly and indirectly supports 6.3 million jobs and generates almost $1 trillion a year in direct, indirect, and induced spending (Sanders, 2011). In the State of the Australian Business Events Industry Report, Deery (2012) noted that the business events industry was worth around $10 billion to the Australian economy. So while the global figures remain speculative, there is ample evidence of the key economic significance of this sector to many countries. The business events

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industry is acknowledged to be underresearched (Rogers, 2013); however, some aspects of business events appear to be better understood than others. The conference and convention sector is probably the best understood, and certainly the most researched (Mair, 2014). However, the incentive sector remains notoriously underresearched (Mair, 2012), with few examples of studies on incentive travel being published in top journals—an exception is the investigation of incentive travel managers' perceptions of environmental change, by Xiang and Formica (2007).

Incentive travel is defined as a global management tool that uses an exceptional travel experience to motivate and/or recognize participants for increased levels of performance at work (Society of Incentive Travel Executives [SITE], 2014a). Incentive travel, often to overseas destinations, is still regarded as one of the best incentives that a company can use to reward and motivate its employees (Rogers, 2013). The incentive travel acts as a reward for recipients who may spend significant time away from work-related activities during their trip. Incentive travel can be individual or group based. When group based, incentive travel is often referred to as "incentive events." Again, global figures for the volume and value of the incentive sector are difficult to find. However, in the US there were approximately 66,000 incentive meetings in 2011 (Sanders, 2011), and international incentive visitors spent AU$210 million while in Australia and domestic incentive visitors spent AU$175 million during the first quarter of 2008 (Tourism Australia, 2008). Therefore, the incentive travel and events sector has a significant economic impact. However, despite a limited amount of information on expenditure and number of incentive programs, there remain numerous gaps in our understanding of this sector of business events.

Interestingly, while much management research has examined how to motivate employees and how to use incentives to improve productivity and job satisfaction, the reasons for choosing travel rather than cash as an incentive do not appear to have been investigated in depth in the management or travel literature. For example, although 80% of the value of incentive rewards in the UK is paid in cash, other research suggests that incentive travel captures the imagination and generates more motivation to succeed (Carter, 2014). Arguably, it is likely that there is something about travel as an experience that would help to shed light on why incentive travel is a successful motivator. This article will consider the existing literature on employee incentives as well as the literature on tourist motivations and will bring together management and tourism theory with a view to creating an introductory conceptual framework for understanding and identifying the underlying dimensions of incentive travel that make it such an effective motivator.

Literature Review

Motivations and Incentives in the Workplace

Motivation in the workplace can be defined as "the set of forces that initiates, directs, and makes people persist in their efforts to accomplish a goal" (Williams & McWilliams, 2014, p. 213). Initiating effort concerns a fundamental decision about how much time and energy to put into achieving a goal at work. Directing efforts focuses on the issue of which part of their job an employee feels should take up most of their time. Finally, persistence refers to how long an employee will continue to try to achieve a goal in the workplace. Management researchers have been investigating motivation and incentives in the workplace for a long time, with some of the key thinkers producing theories that are well known. These include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1968), among others. Maslow's work suggests that humans have a variety of needs, and that basic needs (such as physiological and safety needs) must be met before the higher-order needs (including belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization) can be considered. A similar viewpoint was proposed by Alderfer (1972), who suggested that in fact there are only three basic needs: existence (which relates to safety and physiological needs); relatedness (which is akin to Maslow's belongingness); and growth (esteem and self-actualization). One key difference between Maslow (1943) and Alderfer (1972) is that the former proposed that needs must be met in a hierarchical sequence, while the latter argued that people can be motivated by more than one need at a time. However, in general, it is accepted that higher-order needs will not motivate people as long as lower-order needs remain unsatisfied (Williams & McWilliams, 2014). Little empirical research has confirmed the applicability of Maslow's hierarchy theory; nonetheless, it remains an intuitive and easy to understand model of human motivation (Robbins, Bergman, Stagg, & Coulter, 2012).

Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory, also known as the motivation–hygiene theory, suggests that the factors that lead to job satisfaction are separate and distinct from the factors that lead to dissatisfaction, with the resulting conclusion that there are factors in the workplace that cause dissatisfaction, but that eliminating these factors does not automatically lead to satisfaction (Robbins et al., 2012). These factors named "hygiene factors," while important, are not sufficient to motivate employees. Despite some criticism of the procedures and methods of Herzberg's original research (Robbins et al., 2012), the two-factor theory remains a popular way to identify and differentiate those factors in the workplace that will actually motivate employees, and those factors that simply reduce dissatisfaction.

There is no doubt that these theories have been very influential over the years. Much research in travel and tourism has employed concepts borrowed from Maslow's and Herzberg's theories (D. J. Lee, Kruger, Whang, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2014). For example, Herzberg's two-factor theory has been used to understand motivations of seasonal workers in the travel and hospitality industries (Lundberg, Gudmundson, & Andersson, 2009). Further, Pearce and Packer (2013) note that the diversity of motivations described by Maslow can help to provide a more complete motivational profile, which can be used in tourism research to better understand tourists. Therefore, both these motivational theories clearly have something to offer in terms of elucidating tourist motivations. This will be discussed further in the tourism motivation section of the article.

However, some questions remain as to the applicability of these theories to the motivation of the workforce using incentives (Hastings, Kiely, & Watkins, 1988). Needs theories generally fail to address the fact that different people have different beliefs about what will satisfy them (Hastings et al., 1988). Understanding that needs must be met is simply a basic prerequisite of motivating employees. There are a number of different management theories that attempt to clarify and explain how to motivate the workforce, focusing on goal setting (Latham, 2004), reinforcement (Skinner, 1953), and equity (Adams, 1965). Equity theory in the hospitality and tourism disciplines has been primarily employed to illustrate individuals' attitudes, feelings, and opinions generated in interpersonal relationships such as customer satisfaction and perceptions of service recovery, employee's judgment of fairness, and assessment of collaborations in industry networks (Tang, 2014). However, in order to understand how to incentivize workers to achieve higher performance, it is important to be aware of the importance and significance of rewards. Rewards are usually expressed in terms of the concepts of extrinsic rewards and intrinsic rewards (Lawler & Porter, 1967). Extrinsic rewards are tangible, visible to others, and given to employees contingent on the performance of specific tasks or behaviors; intrinsic rewards refer to those rewards felt naturally by employees as a result of performing a task or activity for its own sake, such as a sense of accomplishment or a feeling of responsibility (Lawler & Porter, 1967). Arguably, both types of rewards are significant for motivating the workforce, but in the context of incentives, extrinsic rewards are more relevant. However, the difficulty arises when trying to ascertain which types of extrinsic rewards are most motivating to different people and different sections of the workforce. This goes to the crux of the question as to why some rewards (i.e., travel) appear to be more motivating for some people than other rewards (i.e., monetary rewards).

In order to understand the differing perceptions of motivations and rewards, a frequently used concept is expectancy theory, first proposed by Vroom in 1964. Expectancy theory suggests that motivation depends on three key variables: valence, expectancy, and instrumentality (Vroom, 1964). Valence refers to the attractiveness or desirability of the reward on offer. For some employees, a reward will be highly sought after, while for others, the same reward may not offer as much in the way of motivation. The decision as to whether to work harder in order to achieve the reward is made on the basis of how attractive the reward is perceived to be by an individual. Expectancy concerns the perceived relationship between effort and performance (Vroom, 1964). If the employee believes that their hard work will result in good performance, then they will be motivated to work harder. If, however, there are structural barriers or other impediments to achieving success that are outside the control of individual employees (limited resources, lack of access to equipment, etc.), then the employee is likely to assume that they will be unable to achieve success (and therefore the reward on offer) and so they may feel that there is little point in working hard. Finally, instrumentality refers to the relationship that the employee sees between performance and the rewards available. If employees are not convinced that their hard work will result in a better reward, (i.e., instrumentality is weak) then they are unlikely to put in any extra effort. However, if an employee is persuaded that improved performance on their part will result in better rewards, then they are successfully motivated to work harder. In summary, where valence, expectancy, and instrumentality are high, motivation to work harder will increase (Williams & McWilliams, 2014). Although there was some initial criticism of expectancy theory, particularly in terms of how to measure its constructs accurately (see for example, Heneman & Schwab, 1972; Reinharth & Wahab, 1976), it is generally accepted as a useful and validated way to understand how to motivate employees using rewards (Robbins et al., 2012). Although expectancy and instrumentality are very much related to each organization and its managerial policies and practices, valence (referring to the attractiveness of a reward) can be considered to be external to the organization. For example, travel to an exotic and desirable location as part of an incentive reward is likely to be perceived as having a higher valence than other possible rewards, such as white goods or company-branded gifts (Hastings et al., 1988).

Travel as an Incentive

As noted, there is very little definitive information available on the incentive travel market. However, according to SITE, incentive travel appears to be popular in many regions of the world, with particular emphasis on incentives both originating from and traveling to North America and in Asia, especially China (SITE, 2014b). Some of the world's top companies use incentive travel as an employee motivation tool, including IT companies, oil and gas companies, the automotive industries, and the banking and insurance sectors (SITE, 2014b).

Research has shown that incentive programs offering non-cash rewards (mostly travel experiences) are becoming more popular with today's highly educated workforce, and that while salary remains of course the primary pact between employer and employee, "the personalisation of rewards is crucial to individual effort and motivation" (Rogers, 2013, p. 68). It has been argued ("Incentive Travel Does Nothing," 2012) that incentive travel only works as a motivator for the top performers, those who seek the recognition that winning a travel incentive provides. Others suggest that a range of incentive rewards, of which travel is one component, is vital, and that any incentive program should be tailored to individual companies (SITE, 2014a). In either case, incentive programs should be "tailored to create a dream or allure which makes people want to produce that extra effort" (Rogers, 2013, p. 70).

Managers have to believe that the reward an organization is offering aligns with what an individual wants (Robbins et al., 2012). Expectancy theory emphasizes understanding the individual's goals, their perception of the linkage between effort and performance, between performance and reward, and between reward and individual goal satisfaction. As noted before, motivations and incentives are highly individualized and therefore it is not always possible to identify a reward that will be attractive to all employees. However, managers must understand why employees find some rewards more attractive than others (Shinew & Backman, 1995). The notion of valence (or attractiveness) of the reward on offer appears to present an opportunity to understand why travel is perceived as a desirable reward.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that rewards in the form of incentive travel may be attractive to a large number of employees (Carter, 2014). Travel incentives contribute to the need for recognition and achievement, and it is argued (Hastings et al., 1988) that tangible rewards such as money or gifts do not have the same glamour as travel. Travel incentives also provide maximum visibility to award winners, who are "placed in the limelight and become an elite group" (Hastings et al., 1988, p. 45). There is even a suggestion that the incentive destination should be one that will make the winners' friends and colleagues envious (Clayton, 1985).

Findings of one of the few studies to examine the efficacy of incentive travel as an employee motivator suggest that employees valued incentive travel more highly than other possible extrinsic motivators such as cash or white goods (Hastings et al., 1988). Sheldon (1995) also confirms that incentive travel is popular among large companies as it is seen to foster a strong sense of corporate culture within an organization. Hastings et al. (1988) highlight the "trophy value" of incentive travel, and further suggest that the reward of travel is not simply the trip itself (an extrinsic reward), but also the networking opportunities offered (Sheldon, 1995) and the intrinsic attributes contained within the trip (such as the experience, and feelings of accomplishment and public recognition). Shinew and Backman (1995) also stress the intrinsic benefits enjoyed by participants during the incentive trip, including camaraderie and enjoying the experience, and also point to the company loyalty generated by the trip. Rubin (1986, cited in Shinew & Backman, 1995) argues that travel has been shown to be a more effective motivator than cash or merchandise. Work by Hastings et al. (1988) and Caballero (1988) also provided some evidence of this. However, there is little empirical research at present to underpin this assertion. Indeed, as Shinew and Backman (1995) point out, intuition is the most common form of measuring the success of incentive travel programs. Given the lack of research in this area, an understanding of the components of travel that may be perceived as attractive by employees is an important first step to research in this area.

Tourism Motivations

The main focus of this article is to consider whether some, all, or none of the foundational tourism constructs also apply in the incentive travel area. It is acknowledged that tourism motivation constructs are numerous, and as such, a full review of the complete body of knowledge is beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, the article will review the formative literature and seminal works in the field of tourist motivation, with a view to identifying the key original dimensions of tourist motivations.

As Crompton (1979) pointed out, it is possible to describe the who, when, where, and how of tourism, but it is much harder to understand the why. Understanding why people travel is a vital, yet complex area of research, rooted in sociology and social psychology (Hsu & Huang, 2008). Travel motivations are acknowledged to be multidimensional and individual and have been demonstrated to be strongly related to the satisfaction of needs (Pearce & Lee, 2005). A range of leisure travel motivations have been identified over the years, including escape, novelty, relaxation, prestige, and socializing (e.g., Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Iso-Ahola, 1980; Pearce, 1993; Plog, 1973).

Cohen (1972) undertook one of the earliest studies investigating travel motivations. According to Cohen, travel motivations were synonymous with purpose of travel. However, Crompton (1979) argued that a distinction between travel motivations and purpose of travel is essential. His investigation revealed that purpose of travel was to satisfy certain needs and wants. Many of the theories of tourism motivation are based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, suggesting that travel needs and motives can be positioned on a hierarchy, with some needs being more fundamental than others. Maslow identified further human needs (the aesthetic need and the need to know and understand) in later work (1970), but these are often left out of tourist motivational theories based on his work (Hsu & Huang, 2008). Pearce (1982) proposed that tourists are attracted to holiday destinations if they are perceived to offer opportunities to fulfill love and belonging, physiological, and self-actualization needs. The Travel Career Ladder (TCL) (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983) suggested that traveler needs and motivations are placed in a hierarchy, with relaxation needs being at the lowest level, followed by safety/security needs, relationship needs, self-esteem and development needs, and finally fulfillment needs. The general thrust of this ladder theory is that most people move upwards through the levels of motivation as their travel experience increases (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983). However, the possibility of travelers remaining at certain levels was also acknowledged. Following criticism of the TCL concerning a lack of empirical research (Ryan, 1998), an extension to this theory, the Travel Career Pattern (TCP) was proposed by Pearce and Lee (2005). The TCP identified a range of motivations and needs that were illustrated as three layers—the core motivations (novelty, escape/

relax, and enhancing relationships), then surrounding them, a range of other important motivations (inner directed motivations such as self-actualization and externally directed motivations such as culture, nature, and host site involvement). Finally, the outer layer of the TCP consists of less common or important variables, such as nostalgia and social status. Debates continue as to the operationalization of the TCP, however, it is broadly accepted to represent many key aspects of tourist motivations (Hsu & Huang, 2008).

It is important to distinguish between those needs, which if unmet may lead to a desire for a vacation, and those needs or desires that travelers seek in particular destinations. This relates to the concept of "push" and "pull" highlighted by Dann (1977) and used in a range of motivational theories (e.g., Crompton, 1979). Push factors are those forces that cause a potential tourist to seek out a vacation, while pull factors are attributes or qualities of a destination that makes it attractive to potential tourists. Push factors are often considered to be intrinsic to each individual (desire for escape, or rest and relaxation) and help to explain why an individual desires to travel, while pull factors are more likely to be external to the individual, including features of a destination, such as cultural attractions, climate, and environment, that help to explain destination choice (Crompton, 1979). Daily stress and pressure of work, particularly the feeling of being inundated with work commitments, have been suggested to be important push factors (Fodness, 1994; Mansfeld, 1992). At the same time, most destinations invest heavily in marketing collateral such as brochures and websites to portray their attractions in the best possible light, and thereby pull visitors in (Mansfeld, 1992). Despite the identification of push and pull factors as distinctive motivators, it has been demonstrated that both forces operate concurrently to drive tourism behavior (Dann, 1981; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987). However, some theorists argue that pull factors are not true motivators, but rather simple explanations of why tourists prefer some destinations and activities over others (e.g., Pizam, Neumann, & Reichel, 1978).

Using the push–pull concept, Crompton (1979) identified two clusters of motives, which he classified as sociopsychological motives and cultural motives. Those in the sociopsychological cluster were considered to be push motivations: escape from a perceived mundane environment; exploration and evaluation of self; relaxation; prestige; regression; enhancement of kinship relationships; and facilitation of social interaction. The cultural motives (which he related to pull motives) were novelty and education (Crompton, 1979). Further sociopsychological motives were the notions of anomie and ego enhancement, proposed by Dann in 1981. Anomie refers to the idea of "getting away from it all" while ego enhancement could be considered to be a desire for recognition, or having an ego boost (Hsu & Huang, 2008).

In an attempt to understand tourist motivation using leisure theories, Iso-Ahola (1980) and Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) proposed that taking a vacation could be considered as a function of two key concepts—escaping and seeking. These appear similar to the push and pull motives identified earlier; however, Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) argue that people choose leisure and tourism activities in order to both leave behind personal and interpersonal problems and everyday life, and to seek personal and interpersonal rewards. Their argument is that the psychological benefits sought by individuals are a result of the interplay between the escaping and seeking dimensions. The personal rewards are related to self-determination, a sense of competence or mastery, a challenge, opportunities to learn, and relaxation, while the interpersonal rewards consist of those arising from social interaction, such as interacting with old friends in a new place, or interacting with members of a travel group. Further to this, T. H. Lee and Crompton (1992) highlight the importance of novelty seeking in tourism, noting that a key reason for traveling is to experience something new or different—this may be attractions, destinations, environments, cultures, or other people. The novelty construct emphasizes the importance of a change of routine, a thrill, a surprise, and the alleviation of everyday boredom (T. H. Lee & Crompton, 1992). Novelty may also incorporate the need for status or recognition from others.

More recent work in tourism motivation studies has tended towards increasing our understanding of motivations in specific settings, for example in wildlife tourism settings (D. J. Lee et al., 2014); cruise tourism (Fan & Hsu, 2014; Hung & Petrick, 2011); recreational vehicle holidays (Wu & Pearce, 2014); and cycle tourism (Ritchie, Tkaczynski, &

Faulks, 2010). However, as discussed previously, the focus of this article is on the foundational constructs of tourist motivation, and a full review of all the studies that have considered tourist motivations is outside the scope of this article.

In summary, despite a range of different approaches, a relatively small number of travel motivations have been identified and appear to be consistent across studies. These are novelty; escape/relaxation or anomie; kinship or relationship; self-actualization, learning, and challenges; and prestige or ego enhancement. Any or all of these may arguably be of relevance in the incentive travel context. The next section will propose a conceptual framework that may help to explain how travel motivations, and the benefits sought from travel, can act as powerful motivators of employees when offered as an incentive reward.

Introductory Conceptual Framework

The proposed introductory conceptual framework represents an initial attempt to fuse managerial and tourism theory with a view to developing a deeper understanding of why travel works as an incentive for employees (see Fig. 1). Naturally, empirical testing of this framework will be required in order to assess its effectiveness and usefulness in understanding the phenomenon of incentive travel; however, the framework is arguably a foundation for future research in this area.

Travel incentives are a practical way of implementing many of the ideas and concepts illustrated by expectancy theory (Hastings et al., 1988). As discussed, expectancy theory consists of valence, expectancy and instrumentality. Of these, only valence refers specifically to the attractiveness of the reward on offer—expectancy concerns the relationship between effort and performance, and instrumentality relates to the perceived relationship between performance and likelihood of achieving the reward. Both of these constructs are dependent on the context of the workplace—for example, levels of training and resources available to staff and the absence of any structural barriers that would prevent the employee from achieving targets and goals. Therefore, arguably only valence is relevant when it comes to assessing which reward (of a possible range of different rewards) is most likely to incentivize and motivate employees.

One potential way of understanding travel as a motivator would be to consider the push and pull aspects of travel. Push factors include those elements that make someone want to travel, such as the desire to escape. However, in terms of understanding why travel might motivate someone to work harder, it is difficult to see why the simple desire to get away from it all would encourage extra effort at work – after all, almost everyone (in most countries where incentive travel is offered) is entitled to leave from work, and if the desire to escape is strong, then any holiday would meet that need. Indeed, if the employee feels a substantial need to escape from the workplace, or enjoy some rest and relaxation, it could be argued that this may reflect a level of dissatisfaction, which in turn is unlikely to lead to extra effort. Pull factors, on the other hand, are those features of a destination which make it attractive to potential travelers. For example, exotic, luxury destinations, which may well be out of the normal range of holiday possibilities for some people, may arguably represent a powerful motivator. Perhaps the concepts of escaping and seeking (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987) are a better representation of this dichotomy—individuals want to escape from daily life, and seek rewards. Such rewards are argued to include competence, challenge and opportunities to learn, as well as interacting with friends or members of a travel group. It seems likely that these kinds of factors will have more explanatory power when it comes to discerning why employees are motivated by travel as a reward.

Motivations can also be extrinsic or intrinsic, extrinsic rewards being those that are tangible and visible, and intrinsic being those that are felt by an individual as a result of performing an activity for its own sake. In terms of incentives, extrinsic motivations are often considered to be related to the "trophy value" (Hastings et al., 1988) of incentive travel, while the intrinsic motivations of an incentive trip include the experience and feelings of accomplishment. These concepts resonate with the notions of core travel motivations (novelty and enhancing relationships) and innerdirected motivations (e.g., self-actualization) identified by Pearce and Lee (2005) in their TCP.

Finally, it seems that for an incentive to act as a reward and motivator, not only should it be attractive in itself, but it should also represent prestige or ego enhancement for the recipient. Travel

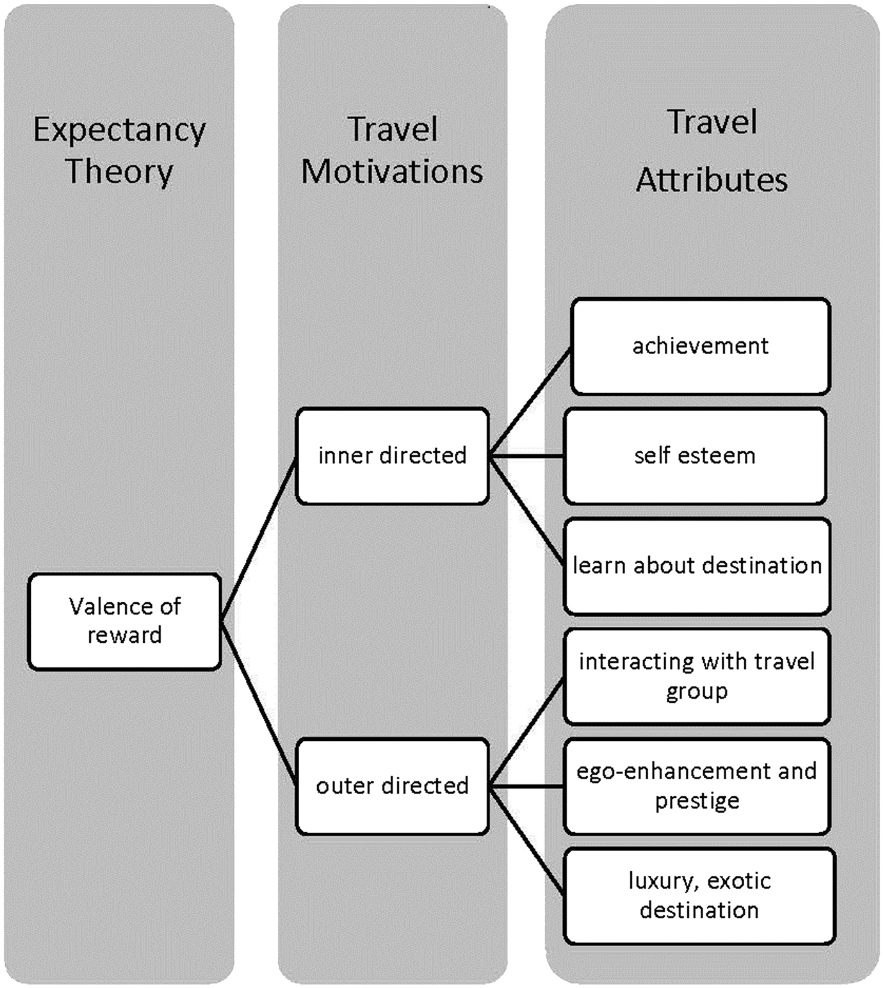

Figure 1. Introductory conceptual framework for incentive travel as an employee motivation tool.

motivations literature suggests that the prestige of a destination is an important component of destination choice in the leisure context, and therefore it seems likely that this would also act as a motivator in the incentive travel context. A prestigious destination (overseas, famous, or highly expensive) is likely to act as a stronger motivation than a domestic or local destination.

Conclusions

Although there is little research on incentive travel per se, there is nonetheless general agreement that incentive travel is about creating a dream that will encourage employees to work hard to achieve challenging targets or goals (Rogers, 2013). It is important to understand the attractiveness of travel and the incentive destination, because expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) has identified the valence, or attractiveness of the reward as being a key component of motivating employees. The attractiveness or desirability of a travel reward can be a reflection of the benefits offered by the destination, or the location of the travel.

The tourism motivation literature helps to explain why some destinations or types of incentive programs can create that dream, and act as a motivator. Key concepts from travel motivation that appear to be of relevance in the incentive travel context have been proposed to include both inner and outer-directed motivations, including sense of achievement; self-esteem; opportunities to learn about the travel destination; interacting with the travel group; prestige and ego enhancement for the incentive travel recipient; and the chance to visit an exotic, luxury destination that may well be unaffordable to the recipient under other circumstances. If it can be demonstrated through research that some of these concepts are particularly useful in motivating employees, this will allow organizations and employers to design incentive travel rewards that tap into the fundamental needs and wants of their employees, thereby creating truly inspiring incentive rewards.

It is important to acknowledge that as a conceptual article, the limitations are clear—the introductory conceptual framework proposed above will need substantial empirical testing before any firm conclusions about its applicability to incentive travel can be drawn. Nonetheless, it offers a foundation for future research in an area which, until recently, has remained without a strong theoretical underpinning. Future research could investigate the different dimensions of this framework and test the relationships between the proposed components. This would represent a significant advance in our understanding of the value of incentive travel as an employee motivator.

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