

# “A Date, You Say?” Using an Educational Comedy Video to Teach Vroom’s Expectancy Theory of Motivation

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**Abstract.** Vroom’s Expectancy Theory of Motivation represents an influential model in many organizational behavior textbooks and courses, yet one that many students find difficult to grasp. We propose to make it more accessible, engaging, and memorable, by means of an innovative teaching tool: an educational comedy video (“edcom”) and the accompanying teaching note with suggested discussion questions, as well as an annotated script and multiple-choice questions. Teaching Vroom’s theory with these materials can support and enrich the teaching practice of organizational behavior faculty.

**Keywords:** video teaching materials, educational humor, edcom.

## 1. Introduction

Some time ago, one of our co-authors hosted a workshop at the Teaching and Learning Conference held during the Academy of Management Annual Meeting. The workshop was about using humor in teaching by collaborating with comedians and had a standup comedian as a guest. The professor-comedian duo talked about co-creating humorous educational videos (or, as coined by our co-

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author, “edcoms”) and then proposed that they would film an edcom on any organizational behavior topic that participants found particularly difficult to teach. After some brainstorming and voting, it was Victor Vroom’s Expectancy Theory of Motivation (ETM) that won the dubious distinction of being among the most abstruse, hardest to grasp topics for organizational behavior students. Link to the video: <https://youtu.be/gInQQPMG6IM>.<sup>1</sup>

The ETM is commonly taught in management and organizational behavior courses. It can effectively illustrate key motivational concepts for undergraduate, graduate, and executive students (Dwyer 2024; Holbrook and Chappell 2019; Stecher and Rosse 2007). However, teaching ETM faces well-documented challenges. First, the three fundamental components – expectancy, instrumentality, and valence – are abstract concepts that can be difficult for students to fully grasp. Similarly, the seemingly mathematical approach to motivation may pose a barrier for students less familiar with quantitative methods. For these reasons, effectively teaching ETM requires breaking certain cognitive barriers. The edcom approach we propose offers a way to achieve this, particularly, by addressing and circumventing students’ preconceived notions that may exist.

## 2. Background

### *Vroom’s Expectancy Theory of Motivation*

Vroom’s Expectancy Theory of Motivation (“ETM”, also known as Valence – Instrumentality – Expectancy, or VIE theory) is a highly influential approach to understanding individual motivation. According to the ETM, an individual’s motivation (also called “motivational force”, or – in Vroom’s 1964 book – simply “force”) depends on three elements: Expectancy, Instrumentality and Valence.

The concept of expectancy captures the individual’s belief about how likely their effort is to lead to good performance. Instrumentality captures the individual’s belief about how likely good performance is to lead to a reward. Note that both expectancy and instrumentality are framed in terms of likelihoods perceived by the individual, which may be different from objective probabilities. Lastly, valence captures the value of the reward to the individual (Vroom 1964). A common formulation of the theory takes the form of the equation:

$$\text{Motivation} = \text{expectancy} \times \text{instrumentality} \times \text{valence}$$

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1. Related resources are on <https://www.tbs-education.com/expectancy-theory-of-motivation/>. They include a recording of the Academy of Management workshop, a “making of” video about the creative process, and a version of the video showing how a learner’s eye tracks the images.