

Impacting Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation: Some Quick Thoughts Kurt Nelson

Abstract

Is it possible to change an individual's intrinsic or extrinsic motivation? Is an individual's motivation one style or the other? Are individuals able to be more intrinsic in one setting and extrinsic in another? These are questions that have been asked by psychologists and organizational executives for decades. This paper quickly reviews some of the evidence surrounding this issue.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are both adaptable and change in response to specific situations and life occurrences. While not easy to define, intrinsic motivation can be described as an internal drive to perform an activity. While extrinsic motivation is ascribed to an external motivating source that drives action. It is postulated that people attribute their behavior either to an internal or external source. Intrinsic motivation correlates positively to when people attribute their motivation to internal sources, while extrinsic motivation is correlated to belief in an external source for their behavior (Wiersma, U. J., 1992).

Extrinsic motivation, by definition, is changeable since it is an external motivator – one can change the reward or external source (i.e. amount of money offered to do a job, feedback on performance, etc.). Meta-analysis of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational research by Deci, Koestner and Ryan (1999) found that intrinsic motivation is negatively affected when tangible extrinsic motivation is attached to the behavior. This undermining of intrinsic motivation is postulated to be the result of a perceived decrease in autonomy and competency by the individual receiving the extrinsic reward. Self-determination Theory states that humans have three inherent needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Of these, autonomy and competence are the main drivers of intrinsic motivation (Franken, 2002). Thus we see that intrinsic motivation can be changed by adding an extrinsic motivating component. Deci, et al. (1999) state that intrinsic motivation can also be enhanced by increasing an individual's perceptions of autonomy and competence. Deci, et al. (1999) also showed that research supported the idea that extrinsic motivations impact on intrinsic motivation was influenced by the controlling nature of those extrinsic rewards. For instance, positive feedback that is not considered controlling would likely add to an individuals perceived competence and have a positive effect on their intrinsic motivation.

Vallerand (2000) looks at motivation in a multidimensional manner that encompasses more than the dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. He states that motivation for both is on a continuum that ranges from a high to low

level of determination and that operates on three distinct levels: global (one's overall general motivation), contextual (in a specific domain or field such as education or sports), and situational (the here and now). At each of these levels individuals can have different motivation levels (both intrinsic and extrinsic). For example, one could be highly intrinsically motivated to participate in sports, but less intrinsically motivated regarding education (contextual). However, if a person is feeling ill or tired, they may not have the same intrinsic motivation to participate in sports activities that day (situational). Extrinsic rewards could be applied to both and impact situational motivation in both the short and long term. For example, that individual might be highly motivated to do well on a test and receive a good grade (extrinsic motivation) so that they can be eligible to play on their sports team (intrinsic motivation). Vallerand (2000) postulates that repeated levels of low levels of situational intrinsic motivation will likely have a diminishing effect on the larger contextual intrinsic motivation. He highlights research done on motivation to play basketball where intrinsic motivational levels were affected by situational motivational levels during tournament games.

This research has many implications for organizations and educational situations. While understanding that extrinsic motivation is one of the main drivers of the business world, compensation and other incentive packages need to address their impact on intrinsic motivation and be developed in ways that will reduce the adverse affects or possibly even add to the intrinsic motivational levels. More research on real life situations would be beneficial.

References:

Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., and Ryan, R. M., (1999). Meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic reward and intrinsic motivation. *Psychological Bulletin* (125). Retrieved on August 21, 2003 from EBSCOhost.

Franken, R. E., (2002). *Human Motivation*. Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.

Vallerand, R. J., (2000). Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory: A view from the Hierarchical Model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Wiersma, U. J., (1992). The effects of extrinsic rewards in intrinsic motivation: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* (65). Retrieved on August 21, 2003 from EBSCOhost.