
Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

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Synonyms

Intrinsic motivation – interest, enjoyment, inherent satisfaction

Extrinsic motivation – instrumental motivation, noninherent motivation

Definitions

Intrinsic motivation (IM) refers to engagement in behavior that is inherently satisfying or enjoyable. IM is noninstrumental in nature, that is, intrinsically motivated action is not contingent upon any outcome separable from the behavior itself. Rather, the means and end are one and the same. For example, a child may play outdoors – running, skipping, jumping – for no other reason than because it is fun and innately satisfying.

Conversely, Extrinsic motivation (EM) refers to performance of behavior that is fundamentally contingent upon the attainment of an outcome that is separable from the action itself. In other words, EM is instrumental in nature. It is performed *in order to* attain some other outcome. For instance, a teenager might wash dishes at home *in order to* receive an allowance. Similarly, a student may

study for a test *in order to* receive an A. Extrinsic motivation is multidimensional and varies from completely external (e.g., washing dishes to get an allowance) to completely internal (e.g., engaging in recycling because one perceives oneself to be an environmentally responsible citizen).

Introduction: The Intrinsic-Extrinsic Distinction

Early research on intrinsic motivation (IM) began with the investigation into how extrinsic rewards affected intrinsic motivation for an interesting task. Initial studies found that if an individual engaged freely in an activity (out of interest) and was subsequently offered an external reward such as money (Deci 1971) or points (Lepper et al. 1973) for engaging in that activity, then intrinsic motivation toward the activity declined. Although these initial findings were controversial because they challenged operant theories of behavioral reinforcement, a subsequent meta-analysis affirmed that when extrinsic rewards are *expected* and *tangible*, they indeed undermine intrinsic motivation for an activity (Deci et al. 1999). The main reason for this undermining effect is because extrinsic rewards tend to shift the individual's reasons for performing the behavior from internal (e.g., interest, fun) to external (e.g., to receive the reward), thus changing the source of the motivation and *locus of causality* for action.

Although intrinsic motivation is considered the most optimal form of motivation and is associated with various benefits – including enjoyment, persistence, and psychological well-being (Deci and Ryan 2008), extrinsic motivators are sometimes thought to be helpful to promote action for behaviors that are not intrinsically interesting (e.g., recycling, doing homework, obeying traffic laws). In other words, the desire to entice or compel people to comply with standards of socially desirable behavior is sometimes at odds with the preservation and promotion of individual autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Mounting evidence suggests, however, that despite the initial ease and allure of extrinsic motivators, they carry a substantive cost to learning and the development of autonomous self-sustaining behavior (Kohn 1999). After all, the use of incentives and rewards to motivate people decreases the likelihood that genuine interest and self-generated motivation will develop and persist.

Influences on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is a natural human tendency – in other words, people will actively strive toward doing the things they find interesting or enjoyable. However, in order for intrinsic motivation to flourish, the social environment must nurture it. Social contexts exert an influence on the experience of intrinsic motivation by affecting perceived *autonomy* and *competence*.

In general, when the social environment supports autonomy by increasing an internal perceived locus of causality (i.e., the behavior stems from personal choice and internal causation rather than external pressure), then intrinsic motivation is enhanced. In contrast, when the social environment neglects or thwarts autonomy by increasing an external perceived locus of causality (e.g., by offering extrinsic rewards or making demands), then intrinsic motivation is undermined. Thus, to the extent that the social environment uses controlling behavioral strategies and external constraints, reinforcers, and punishers, then motivation will become less intrinsic and more

extrinsic – because personal autonomy is compromised. For instance, it has been found that threats of punishment (Deci and Cascio 1972), deadlines (Amabile et al. 1976), and surveillance (Plant and Ryan 1985) all work to diminish intrinsic motivation and increase extrinsic motivation.

Perceived competence also affects intrinsic motivation. When the social environment undermines perceived competence, intrinsic motivation decreases; in contrast, when the social environment increases perceived competence in an activity, then intrinsic motivation rises. For instance, positive feedback (e.g., verbal praise) tends to fuel perceptions of personal effectance and bolster intrinsic motivation. Interestingly, however, this strengthening effect of positive feedback on intrinsic motivation requires that the individual also experience autonomy in performing the action, in addition to feeling competent.

Different Forms of Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation characterizes behaviors that are fun, interesting, and optimally challenging. When activities are void of these qualities, there will be little motivation to engage in them – unless incentives are available or external/social contingencies are made salient, that is, unless there exists extrinsic motivation. Not all extrinsic motivation is the same, however, and some forms of extrinsic motivation feel more self-endorsed and self-concordant than others. Rather than being a one-dimensional construct, extrinsic motivation is a broad class of motivations that range in the extent to which they are autonomous, that is, the extent to which they stem from an internal perceived locus of causality and sense of personal volition. Therefore, even if an activity is not fun or enjoyable (and thus not intrinsically motivated), it may nonetheless be internally regulated as opposed to externally controlled.

Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1985) proposes a continuum of extrinsic motivation that ranges in terms of the level of internalization – that is, the degree to which behavior is self-determined (see Fig. 1). The

Type of Extrinsic Motivation	Nature of External Contingency	Underlying Reason for Behavior	Example
External Regulation	Consequences, incentives, compliance	To receive or avoid a consequence; to fulfill an external requirement	"I avoid making prejudiced comments so that other people will think I'm nonprejudiced"
Introjected Regulation	Feelings of internal pressure; to avoid guilt or to boost the ego	Because it "should" be done	"I avoid acting in a prejudiced manner because I would feel bad about myself if I didn't"
Identified Regulation	Personal valuing of a behavior, sense of importance	Because it is important	"I avoid being prejudiced because it is an important goal"
Integrated Regulation	Expression of self and identity; congruence with self and other values	Because it reflects core values and self/identity	"I avoid being prejudiced because I see myself as a nonprejudiced person"

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation, Fig. 1 Types of extrinsic motivation applied to the example of motivation to regulate racial prejudice (Adapted from Legault et al. 2007)

most external form – *external regulation* – refers to behavior that is controlled mainly through external factors (e.g., deadlines, rewards, directives, punishers). This type of behavior serves mostly to satisfy external demands, and so the source of motivation and causality for behavior is external rather than internal. *Introjected regulation* refers to behavior wherein external pressures have been partially deflected inward, but not truly adopted or internalized. This type of motivation feels quite controlling, but more from a sense of internal rather than external pressure. *Identified regulation* is a more autonomous form of extrinsic motivation and denotes the point at which behavior becomes internally governed and self-endorsed. This type of regulation occurs when the individual values or identifies with the outcome of the activity. Although identifications feel autonomously chosen, they may nonetheless be separate from the individual’s other values and beliefs and thus may not reflect the person’s core self or overarching value system. Finally, the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, *integrated regulation*, refers to behavior that is fully internalized. At this point, identifications have been merged with other deeply held beliefs, values, and needs. Integrated motivation feels consonant with the self; such behavior serves almost a means of self-expression and identity.

Because of this, integrated behavior is associated with feelings of self-integration and psychological well-being (Weinstein et al. 2011). Despite being highly internalized, integrated regulation is nonetheless extrinsic because it serves the expression of something other than pure enjoyment or interest (i.e., deeply held values or beliefs, core identity).

Conclusion

Whereas intrinsic motivation denotes the performance of an action out of interest or enjoyment, extrinsic motivation arises from an externally or socially created reason to perform an action. Extrinsic motivators such as money or other rewards can produce extrinsic motivation due to the fact that they generate desire for the consequence of the activity; they do not produce desire to engage in the activity for its own sake. When people engage in activities for extrinsic rewards, their motivation is entrenched in the environment rather than within themselves. Conversely, intrinsic motivation exists within the individual and can be harnessed and enhanced by environments that support the individual’s autonomy and competence. Intrinsic motivation underlies people’s natural inclinations to seek out novelty and

challenge, as well as to learn, develop, and grow. Unlike extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation is associated with creativity and vitality (Deci and Ryan 2008).

Cross-References

- ▶ [Self-Determination Theory](#)
- ▶ [The Need for Autonomy](#)
- ▶ [The Need for Competence](#)

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