

Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation

Scene

Motivation is the experience of wanting something or wanting to avoid it.

When we study how we get motivated to learn, develop, and succeed, we can identify two contrary forces: extrinsic and intrinsic ones.

Scene

On the one hand, we want to belong, desire to be loved and seek to get the attention we think we deserve. We are motivated extrinsically by rewards, in order to progress socially.

Scene

On the other hand, we strive to explore things that are satisfying in themselves, disregarding rewards. We are motivated intrinsically, by a natural curiosity which we follow because it feels right. The opinions of others don't matter.

Scene

To understand why we probably need a good mix of both, let's imagine two four year-old children. Both grow up in families that want only the best for their kids but have completely opposing views on how to motivate them to succeed.

Scene

Tom's parents believe that all their boy needs is love. To not undermine his intrinsic interests, they never praise him, or use rewards. Eventually they decide to not give him any feedback at all, fearing it could corrupt his free mind.

Scene

Over the years Tom develops an immense capacity to imagine, spending most of his time playing by himself. By being allowed to follow his passions, he learns what he likes and what he doesn't. But Tom doesn't learn what others expect and gets easily irritated when he's asked to do something in a particular way.

Scene

Mira's parents believe that their precious little girl needs clear rules about what's good and what's not. They see it as their duty to help Mira learn by providing precise and actionable feedback on all aspects of her young life.

Scene

Mira spends her days in preschool, music and ballet classes. Over the years she gets exceptionally good at the things that please the adults around her. However, since there is neither time to play nor to relax, she doesn't discover her own interests. Being alone bores her.

Scene

At 14, Tom is independent and begins writing science fiction. He realises that he isn't quite like his friends and spends most of his time at the library. When he shares his writing, others can't quite relate.

Scene

At the same age, Mira is at the top of her class and has plenty of friends and admirers. She knows what is expected of her and makes sure to meet those expectations. Sometimes the pressure becomes unbearable, although that's her secret.

Scene

By the day he turns 21, Tom has a unique perspective of the world. He is intelligent, but doesn't like to work for money and hence is often broke. He hates the idea of conforming to conventional norms and is annoyed if someone interferes with his creative expression.

Scene

At this point Tom knows a lot about himself but doesn't connect well with others. To him, people seem to follow rules without questioning them— just like sheep. Integrating into the society is difficult at this point and he begins to search for utopia.

Scene

Mira makes it into a top medical school where she realizes, she'll never be top of the class again. Once that place seems out of reach, her motivation drops and she wonders if medicine actually interests her. Since quitting is no option, she takes up a second major and runs for student council president.

Scene

Soon Mira will know everything about what others expect, but nothing about what she likes for herself. All her life she has just listened - driven by external feedback loops. At this point she's also lost the ability to question the norms of the society she grew up in.

Scene

Listening to our heart can tell us who we are, but not how to be happy among others. Listening to others can motivate us to be a part of their world, but doesn't teach us if that world is ours.

This is why it's probably good for the two to go together. Then we can learn what we want, and get the feedback that we need in order to stay motivated to explore new roads into a better society.

Scene

A large body of research shows that balancing the two forces is not straightforward. One meta-analysis of 128 studies examined the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic

motivation. While most rewards significantly undermined our intrinsic interest, positive feedback — which is an extrinsic motivator — inspires us to keep going.

Scene

Put simply, honest words of encouragement get us going, while money or gifts undermine our inner drive.

Scene

What about you? Do you listen to your heart or to the voices of society? And from your personal experience, which of the two eventually takes your decision? Share your thoughts and check the description to dive deeper into the topic.

Description

Motivation is the experience of wanting something or wanting to avoid it. When we study how we get motivated to learn, develop, and succeed, we can identify two contrary forces: extrinsic and intrinsic ones. Extrinsic motivation drives your thinking and behavior from the outside, through rewards such as money or fame. Intrinsic motivation comes from within in the form of natural curiosity. Each of the two helps us achieve different things, which is why we want a healthy balance of both in our lives.

Useful links

Link to full script:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DkJq2R4rs7aqEL1eAwPDdDHcoP XK1AzrQbHODNjLAoQ/edit?usp=sharing>

Link to our website: www.sproutsschools.com

Link to our Patreon: www.patreon.com/sprouts

Sources

Meta Analysis

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/12712628_A_Meta-Analytic_Review_of_Experiments_Examining_the_Effect_of_Extrinsic_Rewards_on_Intrinsic_Motivation

Motivation on Wikipedia

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motivation>

Extrinsic Motivation

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-extrinsic-motivation-2795164#:~:text=Extrinsic%20motivation%20refers%20to%20behavior,fame%2C%20grades%2C%20and%20praise.>

Intrinsic Motivation

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-intrinsic-motivation-2795385>

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