



About Motivation*

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/motivation.pdf>)

External reinforcement may indeed get a particular act going and may lead to its repetition, but it does not nourish, reliably, the long course of learning by which [one] slowly builds in [one's] own way a serviceable model of what the world is and what it can be.

Jerome Bruner

From the perspective of addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development, motivation, and especially *intrinsic* motivation, must be considered in all facets of an intervention. What's required is

- C developing a high level of *motivational readiness* (including reducing avoidance motivation) so participants are mobilized
- C establishing *processes that elicit, enhance, and maintain motivation* so that participants stay mobilized
- C *enhancing motivation as an outcome* so that the desire to improve oneself and address problems increasingly becomes a positive intrinsic attitude that mobilizes activity outside the intervention situation

An increased understanding of human motivation clarifies how essential it is to avoid processes that make people feel controlled and coerced, that limit the range of options, and that limit the focus to a day-in, day-out emphasis on short-term outcomes. From a motivational perspective, such processes often can produce avoidance reactions and thus reduce opportunities for positive learning and development of positive attitudes.

Valuing and Expectations

Two common reasons people give for not bothering to do something are "It's not worth it" and "I know I won't be able to do it." In general, the amount of time and energy spent on an activity seems dependent on how much the activity is valued by the

person and on the person's expectation that what is valued will be attained without too much cost.

About Valuing. What makes something worth doing? Prizes? Money? Merit awards? Praise?

Certainly!

We all do a great many things, some of which we don't even like to do, because the activity leads to a desired reward. Similarly, we often do things to escape punishment or other negative consequences that we prefer to avoid.

Rewards and punishments may be material or social. Rewards often take the form of systematically giving points or tokens that can be exchanged for candy, prizes, praise, free time, or social interactions. Punishments include loss of free time and other privileges, added work, fines, isolation, censure, and suspension. Grades are used both as rewards and punishments.

Because people will do things to obtain rewards or avoid punishment, rewards and punishment often are called *reinforcers*. Because they generally come from sources outside the person, they often are called *extrinsics*. Extrinsic reinforcers are easy to use and can have some powerful immediate effects on behavior. Therefore, they have been widely adopted in the fields of special education and psychology as "incentives" for those with behavior and learning problems. Unfortunately, the immediate effects are usually limited to specific behaviors, rote learning, and outcomes often last for a short duration. Moreover, extensive use of extrinsics seems to have some undesired effects. And sometimes the available extrinsics simply aren't powerful enough to get the desired results.

Although the source of extrinsic reinforcers is outside the person, the meaning or value attached to them comes from inside. What makes some extrinsic factor rewarding to most people is the fact that it is experienced as a reward. And what makes it a highly valued reward is that the person highly values it. If you don't like candy, there is not much point in our offering it to you as a reward.

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Furthermore, because the use of extrinsics has limits, it's fortunate that humans sometimes do things even without apparent extrinsic reason. In fact, a lot of what people learn and spend time doing is done for intrinsic reasons. Curiosity is a good example; it leads to a great deal of learning. Curiosity seems to be an innate quality that leads all of us to seek stimulation and avoid boredom.

People also pursue some things because of what has been described as an innate striving for competence; humans seem to value *feeling competent*. We try to conquer challenges, and if none are around, we often seek one out.

Another important intrinsic motivator appears to be an internal push toward self-determination. People seem to value *feeling that they have some degree of choice* and freedom in deciding what to do.

And people seem to be intrinsically moved toward establishing and maintaining relationships with others. That is, people tend to value *feelings of being interpersonally connected*.

About Expectations. We may value something greatly; but if we believe we can't do or obtain it without paying too great a personal price, we are likely to seek other valued activities and outcomes. Expectations about these matters are influenced by previous experiences.

Areas where we have been unsuccessful are unlikely to be seen as paths to valued extrinsic rewards or intrinsic satisfactions. We may perceive past failure as caused by our lack of ability or effort or due to the unavailability of needed help. If we think little has changed with respect to these factors, our expectation of succeeding now will be rather low.

Interventions that provide a good match increase expectations of success by providing a person with the support and guidance he or she wants and needs.

Expectancy times Value

In general, then, what we value interacts with our expectations, and motivation is one product of this interaction. Motivation theory captures the sense of this as $E \times V$. If this equation stumps you, don't be surprised. The main introduction to motivational thinking that many of us were given in the past involves some form of reinforcement theory. Thus, even though motivational theorists have wrestled with intrinsic motivation for a long time, and

intuitively, you probably understand much of what they are talking about, you may not have read much of what has been written on the topic.**

For our purposes here, the E deals with an individual's expectations about outcome (e.g., success or failure). The V deals with valuing, with valuing influenced by both intrinsic values and extrinsic reinforcers, albeit in a complicated way. Such theory recognizes that human beings are thinking and feeling organisms and that intrinsic factors can be powerful motivators.

Motivational theory has immense implications for learning, teaching, parenting, and psychosocial interventions. For example, high expectations and high valuing tend to produce high motivation, while low expectations (E) and high valuing (V) produce relatively weak motivation. High expectations paired with low valuing also yield low approach motivation. Thus, the oft-cited remedial strategy of guaranteeing success by designing tasks to be very easy is not as simple a recipe as it sounds. Indeed, the approach is likely to fail if the outcome is not valued or if the tasks are experienced as too boring or if doing them is seen as too embarrassing. In such cases, a strong negative value is attached to the activities, and this contributes to avoidance motivation.

In sum, motivation is not something that can be determined solely by forces outside the individual. Others can plan activities and outcomes to influence motivation, learning, and behavior change. However, how the activities and outcomes are experienced determines whether they are pursued with a little or a lot of effort and ability or are avoided.

* From the Center's inservice curriculum: *Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling*.

** In addition to our curriculum, a good starting point is a book by Deci & Ryan entitled: *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.

Mother to son: *Time to get up and go to school.*

Son: *I don't want to go.*

It's too hard and the kids don't Like me.

Mother: *But you have to go – you're the teacher.*
