
**Self-determination theory (SDT)**

= grand theory of human motivation and optimal functioning.
= assumption that humans are inherently active organisms.
= vision of general positive movement (focus on strength and development of individuals)

This article: the ‘why’ and ‘what’ of behavior and the concept of ‘basic psychological need satisfaction’

1. **Meta – theoretical assumptions**

SDT – starting point: organismic dialectic meta-theory (< basic psychological need satisfaction)

**Bright Side**

- individuals are growth-oriented organisms who actively interact with their environment
- individuals strive towards an authentic sense of self (self – actualization)
- individuals strive towards an interconnection with other people (integration in the larger social environment)

**Dark Side**

Growth – oriented nature of individuals requires fundamental nutrients to overcome passiveness and counter – productivity

>> provided or not provided by social context.

**Practical implication**

Individuals can best be motivated by supporting their developing potential

>> Optimal performance = when *inherent tendency* is cherished and encouraged)

**Comparison with McGregor (builds on Maslow’s lower needs)**

*Theory X*: people are passive entities which need coercion and top – down control for optimal performance

*Theory Y*: under the right conditions (=provision of self – direction), people want to develop their skills, seek responsibility and take initiative

2. **The Why Of Behavior**

= “Intrinsic motivation and the different types of extrinsic motivation all concern particular reasons for engaging in activities or behavioral regulations.”
= “reasons for acting”

The Interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

*Intrinsic motivation:* engagement in an activity for its own sake, that is, for the satisfaction and enjoyment ‘experienced during the course of the activity itself.

*Extrinsic motivation:* the engagement in an activity to obtain an outcome that is separable from the activity.

**Additive view:**

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\text{total motivation} = \text{intrinsic motivation} + \text{extrinsic motivation}
\]

i.e. providing monetary rewards for doing an inherently interesting task would **increase** individuals’ total amount of motivation. If the reward would be removed, the person’s motivation is expected to **decrease** to the pre – rewarded baseline.

Deci (1971):

External contingencies such as monetary rewards, threats and deadlines **undermine** intrinsic motivation, whereas verbal rewards (i.e. positive feedback) enhanced one’s intrinsic motivation.

**Moderators:**
- interpersonal context: way of administering these external contingencies determines effect on motivation (i.e. was the feedback given in a supportive or controlling way)
- intrinsic motivation is only undermined if the tangible rewards are expected and made contingent upon task engagement, task completion or performance.

**Moderator differences are explained by the meaning attributed to external contingencies**

**LABORATORY STUDIES**

External contingencies:
- **informational** function >> enhances **internal** motivation
  - Verbal Rewards
  - Unexpected tangible rewards
  - feedback
- **controlling** function >> enhances **external** motivation
  - Expected tangible rewards

**OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CONTEXT**

*Negative effects of incentives on intrinsic motivation* are shown to hold for qualitative, **but not for** quantitative aspects of performance and for complex interesting tasks which involve intrinsic motivation **but not for** simple, boring tasks which excite little inherent enjoyment.

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1 Tastbaar
Qualitative different types of extrinsic motivation

Most motivational theories: quantitative point of view
(amount of motivation is a crucial predictor for optimal functioning)

Self – determination Theory: quantitative and qualitative point of view
(extrinsic motivation can also vary in the degree to which individuals have internalized and integrated the reason for behavioral engagement)

4 types of extrinsic motivation (ranging from low to full personal endorsement)

- **External Regulation (external perceived locus of causality > controlled)**: the reason for conducting behavior is situated external to the individual. Pressuring aspects are material (i.e. bonus) as well as social (i.e. recognition supervisor).
- **Introjection Regulation (external perceived locus of causality > controlled)**: behavior is guided by internally pressuring reasons. By internally administering rewards and punishments, individuals try to attain pride and to avoid guilt or shame.
- **Identified Regulation (internal perceived locus of causality > autonomous)**: individuals perceive behavior as their own because they identify with the reason for the activity. The goal of the behavior is personally endorsed and considered important.
- **Integrated Regulation (internal perceived locus of causality > autonomous)**: completion of internalization. Individuals engage in an activity because this activity fits one’s broader set of values and beliefs.

According to SDT, adopting an autonomous versus controlled regulation style yields positive effects in terms of higher well-being and better performance. Autonomous versus controlled regulation might also be seen as a personal resource that helps one to shape the environment.

The differentiation between these qualitative types of motivation is considered useful to understand why employees could be qualitatively motivated for both intrinsically and extrinsically motivation tasks.

Practical implication: individuals can best be extrinsically motivated by stimulating their autonomous instead of their controlled motivation. This can be achieved through emphasizing the personal importance and significance of tasks, such that employees will begin to identify with these tasks and might integrate them.

3. **The What Of Behavior**

= “the content of goal striving”

**Goal Setting Theory**: individuals will best be motivated if they pursue specific rather than general goals, goals of optimal difficulty, and self-set rather than other – imposed goals.

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2 Bekrachtiging
SDT: individuals will best be motivated if they strive towards optimally challenging goals and when they are autonomously instead of controlled motivated to obtain a particular goal.

- Pursuit of Intrinsic Goals (inward orientation) such as contributing to the community, affiliation, and self-development...
  >> likely to yield more adaptive outcomes
  >> long – lasting sense of psychological well being
- Pursuit of Extrinsic Goals (outward orientation) such as accumulating wealth, acquiring fame and pursuing attractive physical looks
  >> detract individuals from their inherent growth orientation
  >> short – lived satisfaction, hedonic feelings of happiness and contentment quickly disappear, such that again extrinsic goals need to be set

The pursuit of extrinsic goals at the expense of intrinsic goals is therefore hypothesized to be detrimental for employees’ well-being and performance.

Thus, goal content has implications for employees’ well-being and job experiences as well as for unemployed individuals.

MODERATORS

- Differences in attainability and attainment of types of goals
- Person – environment fit: the degree to which one’s personal goals match with the values that are promoted in the context is also be assumed to moderate the impact of extrinsic versus intrinsic goals pursuit.

In sum, from a SDT – perspective, the content of employees’ goals matters and the pursuit of intrinsic goals had been shown to be more strongly associated with optimal functioning than the pursuit of extrinsic goals

4. Basic Psychological Needs

Needs:

- Maslow (inborn needs for self-actualization and social recognition)
- Murray (needs for achievement, power and affiliation)
- Cognitive psychology (internal mental processes such as expectations, self-efficacy or attributions rather than needs or desires as the key variables to understand individuals’ motivation)

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3 Opbrengen, opleveren
4 Bereikbaarheid
5 Het bereiken van

- SDT (both individual’s regulatory style and goal directed behavior cannot be understood completely without addressing the process that energizes and directs behavior // this process = satisfaction of the basic psychological needs)

Basic Needs in SDT:

- ‘Those nutrients that must be procured by a living entity to maintain its growth, integrity and health’ // Crucial for one’s optimal functioning

- ABC – Needs
  o **Need for Autonomy**: inherent desire to act with a sense of choice and volition\(^6\), that is, to be the author of one’s actions and to feel psychological free
  o **Need for Belongingness**: inherent propensity to feel connected to others, that is, to be a member of a group, to love and care and be loved and cared for (i.e. social support, relatedness, attachment theory)
  o **Need for Competence**: desire to feel capable to master the environment and to bring about desired outcomes (i.e. self – efficacy (Bandura)), that is, to explore and actively seek out challenges in which one can extend one’s psychical and psychological skills.

- Construct of needs:
  o **McClelland**: focus on need strength
    >> there are interpersonal differences in the value attached to different needs (this due to personal socializing processes during personal development)
  o **SDT**: focus on need satisfaction
    >> needs are postulated to be primary, innate propensities // not the degree to which individuals express a particular need, but the degree to which one is able to satisfy each of one’s basic psychological needs is considered important // In contrast with Maslow, SDT does not assume any hierarchical relationship between the 3 composed basic needs.

- Positive versus negative consequences of the satisfaction versus frustration of the basic psychological needs.
  o Within occupational health context: research results are in line with the claim that satisfaction of these needs yield universal positive associations
  o Positive relationship between need satisfaction and employees’ optimal functioning

- Need for competence and need for autonomy as explanation for the differential effects of external contingencies (such as monetary and verbal rewards) on intrinsic motivation
  o **Informational function of rewards**: relates to individuals’ competence
  o **Controlling function of rewards**: relates to individuals’ need for autonomy

\(^6\) Wil
- **Satisfaction of the need for belongingness** may facilitate internalization of social norms and values to the degree of introjection. The transition from external regulation to introjection, however, also requires some understanding of the meaning of the behavior and feelings of competence to engage in the activity. **Satisfaction of the need for competence** thus also represents a necessary condition for introjection to occur. True internalization in terms of identification and integration requires support for the need for autonomy.

- **Satisfaction of the needs for competence and relatedness** relates positively to employees’ autonomous versus controlled work regulation, which in turn predicts well-being, willingness to follow job training and reduced turnover.

- **Intrinsic goals** comprise the pursuit of affiliation and personal development, which are likely to go along with the satisfaction of the needs for belongingness and competence respectively. As intrinsic goals align with the inherent tendency for personal development and affiliation, they are furthermore likely to be executed volitionally and hence satisfy the need for autonomy.

- **Extrinsic goals** for status, wealth and power, in contrast, are more likely to be associated with interpersonal comparison and competition, which are likely to forestall the needs for autonomy, belongingness and competence.

5. **Organizational Factors Stimulating Motivation**

Supportive work contexts are beneficial for employees’ optimal functioning.

Job design and leadership style from a SDT – perspective:

**Job (re)design (structural aspect)**

Also: ERI (Siegrist), JD-C (Karasek), JC-R >> little attention to the processes (SDT) underlying the relationship between job characteristics and employees’ well – being.

- **Autonomous (versus controlled) job regulation**: positive relation with task significance, feedback and skill variety to employees’ work satisfaction and negative relation with emotional exhaustion.

- **Basic need satisfaction**: meaningfulness, autonomy, impact and competence played an explanatory role in the association between stimulating job characteristics such as task significance and feedback, and intrinsic motivation.
Leadership Styles (social/inter-personal aspect)

Supervisors can stimulate employees by adopting an autonomy-supportive supervisory style which comprises a. the acknowledgement of subordinates’ feelings b. the offer of choices and c. the provision of rationales for requests

Autonomous leadership style >> increase in subordinates’ satisfaction with supervisors, job design, pay, benefits and enhances their trust in the organization

controlling leadership style >> direct employees’ behavior and intrude upon their thoughts and feeling. Manipulation of psychological functioning. This style decreases subordinates’ motivation.

→ explained by need satisfaction: stimulate autonomy and competence satisfaction vs. thwarting subordinates’ needs

6. Conclusion

SDT and its applicability to the context of occupational health psychology.

SDT considers need satisfaction as the underlying process of optimal functioning
SDT is a coherent grand theory of motivation and serves a general framework for the study and practice of employees’ optimal functioning.

SDT: assumption that individuals are endowed with a natural tendency to grow and develop (INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED). This behavioral inclination manifests itself in individuals’ behavioral regulation (WHY) and the type of goals they pursue (WHAT). This tendency is thwarted by the provision of external contingencies (EXCEPT IDENTIFIED AND INTEGRATED EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION). Thereby, SDT pledges to move from more controlled to more autonomous types of behavioral regulation. Internalization of reasons for performing fosters optimal functioning and well-being.

Individuals’ natural growth orientation must, however, be nurtured for individual to flourish and to actualize their potential.

- The social context must satisfy the inherent basic psychological needs for autonomy, belongingness and competence.
- This can be achieved through autonomy supportive leadership and stimulating job design