Motivation and Internal Frames of Reference: Do We Have the Wisdom to Help Employees Flourish at Work?

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Motivation lies at the heart of many of the problems that both leaders and human resource development (HRD) practitioners face within the daily events of their work. They may ask themselves such questions as how can they become motivated and stay motivated or, perhaps more importantly, how can they more effectively motivate others. The importance of motivation in human functioning and flourishing is well documented. Yet, the understanding and effective use of sound motivational principles within organizational settings often remain elusive, confusing, and at best sporadically applied.

When we review the history of academic studies and publications on motivation and behavior, we might notice that a strange thing happened on the way to understanding human motivation. Much of the early literature and research was concerned with studies that used animals as the basis for understanding and learning human motivation. We remember the Pavlovian studies with dogs, or, more recently in the 1950s, the Skinnerian studies with pigeons. These studies gave rise to classical and operant conditioning theories presently seen in the *carrot-and-stick*, or reinforcement mentality used in corporations today. As a result, today, most corporate decision makers believe that external reinforcement, if applied correctly, will increase the rate of desired behavior.

Over the last 50 years, other motivational theories besides classical operant conditioning have emerged, such as expectancy theory (i.e., Vroom, 1964; Vroom & Deci, 1992) and achievement motivation theory (i.e., McClelland, 1961, 1987). These theories take into consideration human capacities for cognitive thought, and they

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acknowledge preferences, attributions, and expectancies that can be used to shape and predict the direction of persistent *human* behavior. While these theories have been applied in various forms within corporations, the *everyday* mentality of most leaders and corporate decision makers still tends to lie predominantly in a behavioral conditioning approach to motivating others (Stone, Deci, & Ryan, 2009).

However, the times seem to be changing. The evolution of psychological and sociological thought now focuses on the potential for individuals to flourish. Positive psychology inspires renewed focus on the potential of human beings, rather than the deficiency of human beings (e.g., Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011). Simultaneously, and in concert with a positive psychology emphasis, a motivational theory called self-determination theory (SDT) has emerged and is impacting the study of organizational research. The application of SDT has resulted in formidable empirical evidence that warrants greater examination in organizational settings (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Purpose of This Issue

We hope the contents of this issue of *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, which is singularly dedicated to SDT and its relevance to HRD, will prove to be a stimulating and helpful aid to HRD practitioners in using the principles of SDT to think differently about their organizational cultures, for the better. We hope this issue will encourage further investigation and application of vital SDT motivational concepts and that it will influence the future goals, values, and actions of HRD practitioners.

To achieve the general purpose of this issue, we present both theoretical and empirical studies, which are provided to help readers who are unfamiliar with the general ideas and framework of SDT. By presenting empirical studies that show the significant impact of SDT ideas on important work outcomes such as positive job affect (Lion & Burch), work intentions (Shuck, Roberts, & Zigarmi; Thibault-Landry, Egan, Crevier-Braud, Manganelli, & Forest), and psychological safety climate (Huyghebaert, Gillet, Lahiani, Dubois-Fleury, & Fouquereau), this issue should aid HRD practitioners in the application and promotion of these ideas in their own organizations. The reader can further see that the empirical studies are concerned with two major conceptual pillars in the SDT literature: (a) basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (see Huyghebaert et al.; Thibault-Landry et al.) and (b) motivational outlooks (see Lion & Burch; Shuck et al.).

There are four conceptual, or theoretical, articles concerned with suggestions and ideas for the application of SDT concepts in a work setting (see Fowler; Manganelli, Thibault-Landry, Parenteau, and Forest; Rigby & Ryan; Sipe). These four conceptual pieces outline how basic psychological needs and motivational outlooks have implications for leadership competencies (see Fowler; Rigby & Ryan), job design (see Manganelli et al.; Rigby & Ryan), reward and compensation systems (see Manganelli et al.; Rigby & Ryan), and creativity and innovation (see Sipe).

We have intentionally not given much space in this preface to the major SDT concepts and have asked the authors of the articles to explain the specific SDT concepts

they are either empirically or theoretically addressing in their unique piece. We have also requested that our authors apply their SDT concepts specifically to HRD values and contexts.

Contribution of Articles

Self-Determination Theory in Human Resource Development: New Directions and Practical Considerations

Authored by Rigby and Ryan, this theoretical article examines some of the basic broader principles of SDT and gives examples of how HR initiatives using SDT principles within their organizations can be successfully promoted. Rigby and Ryan also point out some pitfalls that have happened in the past in the implementation of various strategies.

An Empirical Investigation of the Employee Work Passion Appraisal Model Using Self-Determination Theory

Authored by Thibault-Landry, Egan, Crevier-Braud, Manganelli, and Forest, this piece shows an empirical relationship between the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence as mediators between perceived organizational factors and employee intentions to actively serve their organizations.

Psychological Safety Climate as a Human Resource Development Target: Effects on Workers' Functioning Through Need Satisfaction and Thwarting

Authored by Huyghebaert, Gillet, Lahiani, Dubois-Fleury, and Fouquereau, this empirical study explores how perceptions of met basic psychological needs and perceptions of need thwarting, effect psychosocial safety climate and employee adaptive and maladaptive behaviors.

Toward a New Curriculum of Leadership Competencies: Advances in Motivation Science Call for Rethinking Leadership Development

Authored by Susan Fowler, this theoretical paper describes the development of leadership curriculum to improve individual or group effectiveness and performance by using autonomy-supportive leader competencies, relatedness-supportive leader competencies, and competence-supportive leader competencies.

Employee Perceptions of Work Environment, Motivational Outlooks, and Work Intentions: An HR Practitioner's Dream or Nightmare?

Authored by Shuck, Roberts, and Zigarmi, this empirical article presents evidence that various motivational outlooks (autonomous regulation, controlled regulation, and

amotivation) partially mediate the relationship between employees' perceptions of various work environmental factors and employees' intentions to act constructively on behalf of the organization's desired outcomes.

When Feelings Matter: Affect as a Mediator Between Motivational Regulation and Work Intentions

Authored by Lion and Burch, this empirical study examines the five motivational outlooks of SDT (motivation, extrinsic, imposed, identified, and integrated) that correlate with the five work intentions: intent to endorse, to remain, to use discretionary effort, to perform at a higher than average level, and to be an organizational citizen.

Self-Determination Theory Can Help You Generate Performance and Well-Being in the Workplace: A Review of the Literature

Authored by Manganelli, Thibault-Landry, Parenteau, and Forest, this theoretical paper, using a SDT perspective, discusses specific practices that foster need satisfaction or need thwarting (e.g., compensation practices, organizational support practices, job design) in an effort to provide alternatives to present HRD practices.

Connect, Refresh, and Energize: Enabling Organizational Innovation Capacities From a Self-Determination Theory Perspective

Authored by Lori Sipe, this theoretical paper provides strategies and mini case studies to demonstrate how the principles of SDT can be used to enhance organizational innovation outputs.

A Postscript to the Future

The technology of work, the conditions of work, and the levels of work productivity mandate that leaders and those who can influence conditions of the work environment find more humane and effective approaches to facilitate and liberate human energy in their organizations. In many ways, the predominant use of the carrot-and-stick mentality reminds us of someone driving down the road with one foot on the gas pedal and the other foot on the brake at the same time. Does it work? Yes, but not efficiently and—certainly not in the long run—effectively, not to mention the wear and tear it puts on the car.

Strategic and operational organizational leaders must understand that to influence someone to be passionate, persistent, and excellent in accomplishing a task or goal over a long period of time involves understanding the performer's motivation to do so. It involves the leader understanding the performer's internal frame of reference. It is shortsighted for a leader to rely on their own frame of reference as to what may be motivating but, rather, it is much wiser for a leader to curiously consider their employee's motivational outlook

as that employee approaches the challenge of achievement. Both the leader and the employee must clearly understand the employee's reason for accomplishing a given outcome over time.

After consulting in organizations all over world, it has been our experience, and those of our contributing authors, that most strategic and operational leaders are quick to pull the incentive trigger and use money, rewards, and promotions as a mechanism for increasing employee motivation to perform. Our fear is that with the advent of the use of SDT theoretical ideas, leaders may try to keep the emphasis on external reward systems in place and at the same time try to adapt the SDT theories to the work setting. They may expect both approaches to work side by side, but without understanding the implications. In an SDT consulting engagement of ours, one executive was heard to say, "Now we have two ways of motivating our workforce—if one doesn't work, the other will!"

An often-overlooked strand of research by Deci and Ryan (2008) shows that "external rewards are not additive to internal psychological needs" (p. 15). In other words, extrinsic rewards may, in most cases, decrease intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). While it is not our role, nor do we have the space, to fully explain the limiting conditions that cause these phenomena, suffice it to say that a paradigm shift away from using external rewards and pressures to motivate a workforce, toward using an internal frame of reference that supports basic psychological needs, will take thought and dedication on the part of the HR practitioners, the strategic and operational leaders, and the employees.

There is a promise of a future "practitioner's dilemma" for anyone courageous enough to see the wisdom of incorporating SDT ideas into the work setting. Anyone who has tried to significantly change an organization's culture knows the difference between desired ideal possibilities, and the realities of everyday organizational life. It will take planning, hard work, and in-flight adjustments, over time, to change policies, procedures, and leadership behaviors. We agree with Rigby and Ryan (see this issue); this paradigm shift or *Copernican Turn* that is beginning to happen holds more promise than problems and is therefore worth doing. We believe that the evidence is there in support of SDT's value in the workplace, and we are optimistic about the potential for practitioners to take this to heart. While we now have a promising direction forward through the application of SDT, in some organizations, its successful implementation by those who dare to strive for something greater will undoubtedly require significant courage and wisdom.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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