

What Do we Mean in SDT when We Say that People Are Pro-active and Resilient By Nature?

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The vast majority of previous studies in the field of SDT have shed light on the role of contextual factors that support individuals' basic needs, long-term motivation, and growth. Yet, human beings are not merely passive recipients waiting for contextual activation and support. From an organismic viewpoint, people have a propensity to agentially steer their own functioning, thereby uplifting their own development and well-being. In this keynote address, we discuss two recent lines of research that shed light on, respectively, the pro-active and resilient nature of human functioning. First, individuals can make growth-conducive choices, thereby selecting activities and relational partners or evoking contextual responses that allow them to get their basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness met. Second, confronted with need-frustrating and distressing situations, individuals can display resilience. Whereas recent correlational, diary-based and experimental work on the notion of need crafting and agentic engagement serve as key examples of our pro-active nature, research on self-motivation and the way people cope with threats to their basic needs serve as illustrative examples of our resilient nature. We conclude this keynote by discussing the way how SDT scholars can embody and model such pro-activity themselves by disseminating SDT-based insights to different stake holders in society. The Motivation Barometer (www.motivationbarometer.com), a large-scale monitoring project conducted in Belgium during the COVID-19 crisis, serves as an example.