

# Optimal Motivation at Work

## Self-Determination Theory:

### An Approach to Enhancing Employees' Motivation and Wellness

Christopher P. Niemiec  
University of Rochester

# Structure of the Colloquium

- Your perspectives on motivation in the workplace
- An overview of self-determination theory
- An application of self-determination theory to organizational behavior
- Creating need supportive workplace climates



# **Your Perspectives on Motivation in the Workplace**

# Employees' Perspectives on Motivation



- What types of experiences motivate you in the workplace?

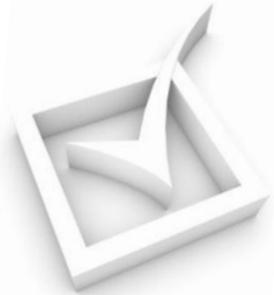


# Why We Do What We Do at Work

- **Employees complete their tasks at work for a variety of reasons:**
  - **Andy** completes tasks to earn a merit-based bonus or to avoid reprimand
  - **Barb** completes tasks to feel pride for being a “good employee” or to avoid guilt for not having worked hard enough
  - **Chris** completes tasks because he finds his work to be valuable and important
  - **Dom** completes tasks because doing so allows him to help those who are in need, which aligns with his life values
  - **Ed** completes tasks because doing so is inherently satisfying and enjoyable

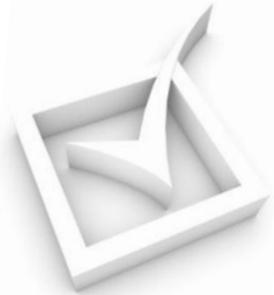
# Why We Do What We Do at Work

- Who do you think will perform best at work?
  - **Andy** completes tasks to earn a merit-based bonus or to avoid reprimand
  - **Barb** completes tasks to feel pride for being a “good employee” or to avoid guilt for not having worked hard enough
  - **Chris** completes tasks because he finds his work to be valuable and important
  - **Dom** completes tasks because doing so allows him to help those who are in need, which aligns with his life values
  - **Ed** completes tasks because doing so is inherently satisfying and enjoyable



# Why We Do What We Do at Work

- Who do you think will be happiest at work?
  - **Andy** completes tasks to earn a merit-based bonus or to avoid reprimand
  - **Barb** completes tasks to feel pride for being a “good employee” or to avoid guilt for not having worked hard enough
  - **Chris** completes tasks because he finds his work to be valuable and important
  - **Dom** completes tasks because doing so allows him to help those who are in need, which aligns with his life values
  - **Ed** completes tasks because doing so is inherently satisfying and enjoyable



# **An Overview of Self-Determination Theory**

# A Focus on Human Motivation

- Motivation has been a long-standing topic of inquiry within psychology
- Applications cut across psychological sub-disciplines and domains of life
  - Including organizational behavior
- Two views on motivation:
  - The “traditional” view
  - The “differentiated” view



# Intrinsic Motivation



- Doing an activity because it is inherently satisfying and enjoyable
  - No separable outcomes or contingencies
  - Behavior occurs spontaneously (exploration, play)
- Think about those times in *your* life when you experience intrinsic motivation. How does it feel?
- The prototype of autonomous, self-determined behavior

# Effects on Intrinsic Motivation

- Rewards, threats of punishment, deadlines, surveillance, and evaluations undermine intrinsic motivation
- Providing choice enhances intrinsic motivation
- Negative feedback undermines intrinsic motivation, whereas positive feedback enhances intrinsic motivation



But why?!?



# Extrinsic Motivation

- Intrinsic motivation tends to decline with age



- Extrinsic motivation refers to doing an activity because it leads to a separable outcome or consequence, such as obtaining a reward or avoiding a punishment



# Can Extrinsic Motivation be Internalized?

- The process of internalization
- People tend to internalize aspects of the environment that are endorsed by important others



But why?!?



# A Continuum of Internalization

## Regulatory Styles

External Regulation

Introjected Regulation

Identified Regulation

Integrated Regulation

## Associated Processes

Salience of external rewards or punishments

Satisfy internal contingencies; Ego involvement

Find value/ importance in an activity

Synthesize identifications with other aspects of the self

## Perceived Locus of Causality

External

Somewhat External

Somewhat Internal

Internal

**Continuum of Relative Autonomy** 

# Autonomous Versus Controlled Motivation

- Autonomous motivation
  - To endorse one's behavior fully
  - Accompanied by experiences of choice and volition
  - Intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, and identified regulation
  
- Controlled motivation
  - To be coerced into behavior by external or internal forces
  - Accompanied by experiences of pressure and obligation
  - External regulation and introjected regulation



# Correlates of Autonomous Motivation

- Across a variety of important life domains, autonomous motivation is associated with higher levels of:
  - Task persistence and performance
  - Task interest, enjoyment, and creativity
  - Relationship quality
  - Psychological and physical health



For reviews, see:

Niemiec, C. P., Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2010). Self-determination theory and the relation of autonomy to self-regulatory processes and personality development. In R. H. Hoyle (Ed.), *Handbook of personality and self-regulation* (pp. 169-191). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Vansteenkiste, M., Niemiec, C. P., & Soenens, B. (2010). The development of the five mini-theories of self-determination theory: An historical overview, emerging trends, and future directions. In T. C. Urdan & S. A. Karabenick (Eds.), *Advances in motivation and achievement*, v. 16A—*The decade ahead: Theoretical perspectives on motivation and achievement* (pp. 105-165). London: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

# Review of Self-Determination Theory

- Focuses on the *type* of motivation, rather than on the *amount* of motivation
- Intrinsic motivation is supported by choice and positive feedback, and is undermined by external contingencies and negative feedback
- Extrinsic motivation can be internalized to varying degrees and, as a result, can be experienced as more or less autonomous
- Autonomous (relative to controlled) motivation is associated with positive outcomes across a variety of life domains



# **An Application of Self-Determination Theory to Organizational Behavior**

# Autonomous Motivation at Work

- **Family alienation, emotional exhaustion**
  - Senecal, Vallerand, & Guay (2001)
- **Work satisfaction**
- **Emotional exhaustion, turnover intention**
  - Richer, Blanchard, & Vallerand (2002)
- **Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization**
- **Personal accomplishment**
  - Fernet, Guay, & Senecal (2004)
- **Job satisfaction, job commitment**
  - Lam & Gurland (2008)
- **Autonomous: Job search intensity, self-actualization**
- **Controlled: Negative experience, general health, life satisfaction, self-actualization**
  - Vansteenkiste, Lens, De Witte, De Witte, & Deci (2004)



# **Creating Need Supportive Workplace Climates**

# Different Types of Managers

- Think about your **best** manager
  - How does (s)he relate to you?
  - What types of opportunities does (s)he afford you?
  
- Think about your **worst** manager
  - How does (s)he relate to you?
  - What types of opportunities does (s)he afford you?



# My Best Manager

- My *best* manager does the following in the workplace, most of the time:
  - Tries to see things from my perspective
  - Encourages me to do my best
  - Strives to create a warm, caring interpersonal environment



# My Worst Manager

- My *worst* manager does the following in the workplace, most of the time:
  - Tries to see things from my perspective
  - Encourages me to do my best
  - Strives to create a warm, caring interpersonal environment



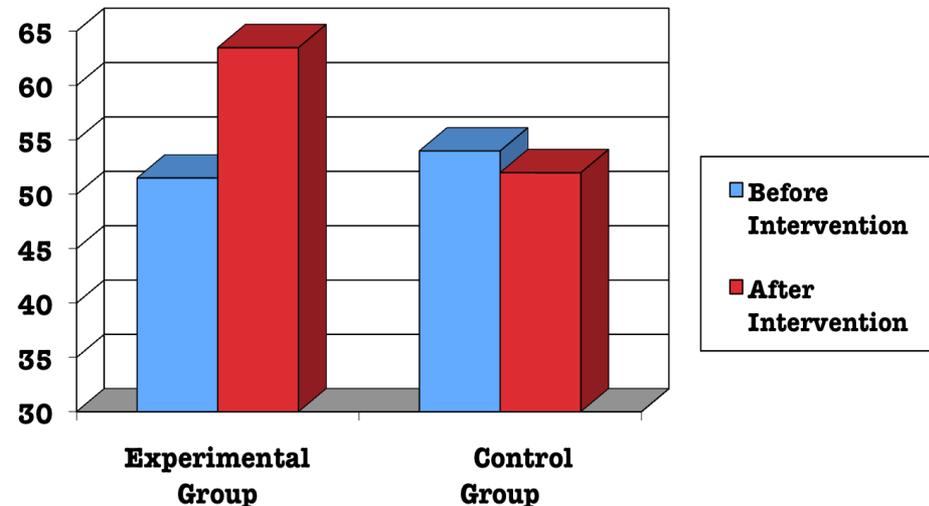
# Need Supportive Techniques at Work

- It is critical for managers to provide support for their employees' autonomy, competence, and relatedness
  - **Support for autonomy:**
    - Relate from the employee's perspective
    - Encourage self-initiation and choice
    - Provide a rationale for requested behavior
    - Minimize use of controlling language
  - **Support for competence:**
    - Be positive that the employee can succeed
    - Create optimal challenges
    - Give accurate, effectance-relevant feedback
  - **Support for relatedness:**
    - Develop a warm, empathic, non-judgmental relationship



# An Intervention Study

- Involved training managers in a Fortune 500 Company to be more need supportive
  - Worked with branch manager for 1 day
  - Worked with management team for 5 days
  - Worked with field managers for 7 days
- Managerial need support
- Ripple effect to employees
  - Higher trust in corporation
  - Higher job satisfaction



# Conclusion

- The *quality* of employees' motivation matters
- Autonomous (relative to controlled) motivation is associated with higher levels of employee health and work-related functioning
- Managers can facilitate autonomous motivation in the workplace by providing support for their employees' autonomy, competence, and relatedness



**Thank You!!!**