

Getting the most out of motivation

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Leaders in early and middle years settings often ask how they can motivate their teams. Edward Deci, who together with Richard Ryan developed Self-Determination Theory, argues that this is the wrong question. He suggests a more helpful question is: 'How can you create conditions within which others will motivate themselves?' (Deci, 2012). Let's take a step back and explore some of the key components of self-determination theory before going back to the Deci's question.

Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory is an evidence-based theory of human motivation, which recognises that people are moved to act (or not act) for different reasons, with motivation being the driving force behind these actions or inactions. Accordingly, motivation can be described as existing along a continuum from autonomous motivation to controlled motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

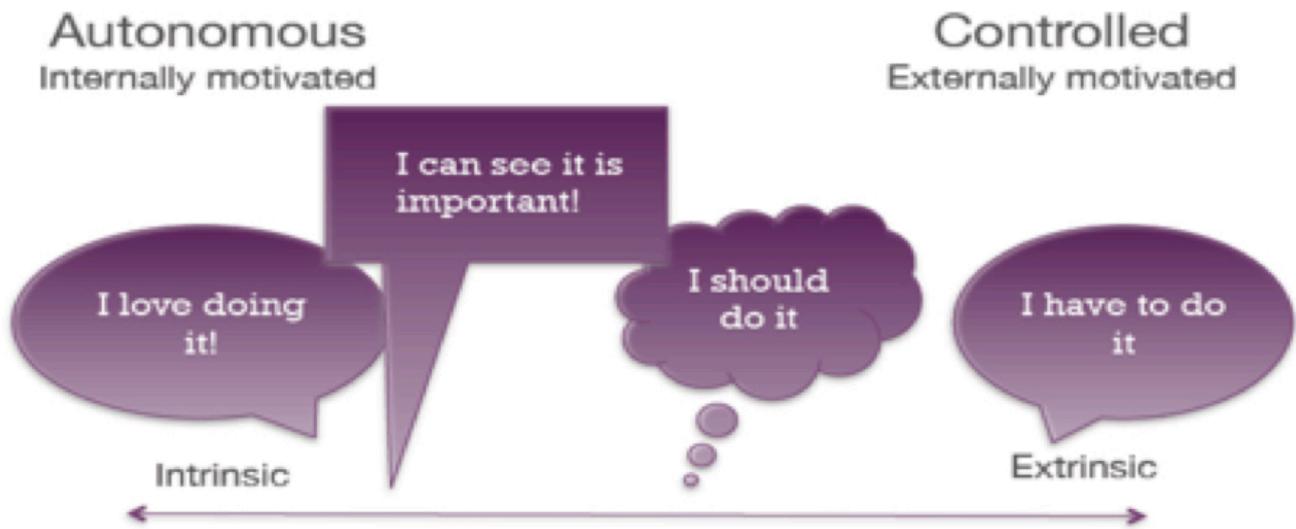
Autonomous motivation

Autonomous motivation refers to the pursuit of goals or activities that align with our values and that we identify with as important, that is, they are internally motivating. In autonomous motivation there is an element of willingness and choice, and interest and enjoyment. There is also a greater sense of purpose, meaning and satisfaction ("I love doing it"). Autonomous motivation can also occur when there is a conscious valuing of a goal or task, such that it is accepted or owned as being personally important ("I can see it is important").

Controlled motivation

Controlled motivation refers to the pursuit of goals and activities for extrinsic or externally motivated purposes. In controlled motivation, people may feel pressured or forced to act in a particular way, such as to avoid guilt or embarrassment, or to gain a sense of importance in the eyes of others ("I should do it"), or to gain a reward or avoid a punishment ("I have to do it").

This continuum of motivation, detailing the different types of motivation, from intrinsic to extrinsic, is detailed below:



Adapted from Ryan & Deci (2000)

Understanding what motivates you

Think about something you do:

- For the pure joy of doing it
- Because you have to do it
- Because you think you should.
- For what you will gain

How does this play out in how you engage in these experiences and how you feel while doing them and afterwards?

Providing autonomy support

So back to our original question: How can you create conditions within which others will motivate themselves? Deci argues that the answer is to provide autonomy support to assist people to motivate themselves.

Deci (2012) proposes that to provide autonomy support we need to:

- Consider people's perspectives - Ask yourself how do they see the situation in order to better understand where they are coming from
- Provide choice - Involve people in decision-making processes
- Promote self initiation - Allow people to be self starters
- Support exploration - Provide opportunities for people to try out new ideas and ways of doing things

- Provide a meaningful rationale - When people understand the purpose of something they are more able to identify with it as being important.

Benefits of autonomous motivation

Deci (2012) also highlights a number of benefits associated with autonomous motivation. When people are autonomously motivated, he argues, they perform better, are more creative, better problem solvers, have more positive emotions, and better physical and psychological health.

A final word

By changing the question, from 'How can I motivate others?' to 'How can I create conditions within which others will motivate themselves?' we can take on a different role that is within our control in motivating others. This can lead to benefits for the individual while also having a flow on effect for the team and organisation.

References

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