

Motivation

When someone really wants to do something, we say they are highly motivated. When a person is upset, sad, down, depressed, or unhappy at work, we often say they are poorly motivated. We use the word quite a lot these days. But what do we really mean when we talk about motivation?

What is Motivation?

Motivation is the force or impulse that drives a person to act in a certain way. When someone performs an action, we say that they did so because they were motivated to do it. They wanted to achieve a goal or bring about a new state of affairs. We can't 'see' motivations, but we know about them from how we feel ourselves and from observing a person's behaviour. While an action may require a motivation for its execution, motivation itself is not enough. There must also be the possibility that the action can be carried out.

I might, for example, be motivated to jump up in the air and fly. But the laws of gravity will not allow this to occur. So, we might say that motivation is a **necessary** component of an action, but not a **sufficient** one. Being motivated to carry out an action involves having a reason to do so. The reason may be strong or weak, come from within ourselves, or from elsewhere. A weak motivation may peter out when things get tough, whereas a strong one will persist against the odds. Strong motivations usually involve passion and intensity.

The motivation for an action explains why we did that particular thing. My motivation for getting up early this morning was my desire to begin this piece of writing. The motivation was strong enough for me to get out of my comfortable bed and miss out on a relaxing lie in. Human biology plays a role in motivation.

We are naturally motivated to eat, drink and sleep. We want to keep warm, safe, and have the company of other humans. We each have certain pursuits that we enjoy doing, seemingly naturally, without having been aware that we have decided to like them. The concept of motivation has been explored and analysed during the second half of the 20th century, and a number of theories have appeared to explain it. A major distinction has been identified as that between **intrinsic** and **extrinsic** motivation.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation comes from within. The person wants to do actions for themselves, not for someone else or for a reward or accolade. The action itself provides sufficient gratification, irrespective of its consequences. I may want to learn to play a musical instrument for my own pleasure, regardless of whether anyone else hears or knows about it. Intrinsically motivated actions are often related to self-efficacy, personal competence, problem-solving or attaining knowledge. There may be a desire for greater autonomy, self-control, resilience or capability. Predominately intrinsically motivated persons have a strong **internal locus of control**.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation comes from outside. The consequences, not the action bring satisfaction. Extrinsic motivations include admiration, competition, money, goods, rewards and social status. The predominately extrinsically motivated person has a strong **external locus of control**. Some people more **intrinsically motivated**, while others are more **extrinsically motivated**. Most people have elements of both. Life circumstances, personality, level of personal development and autonomy are factors in the 'locus of control.'

Balance

An appropriate balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is required to be emotionally and mentally healthy. To maintain a solid sense of integrity, responsibility and ethical consciousness, we need a strong element of internal motivation. We also need to be aware of our effect on others and be open to new thoughts and ideas. Without some degree of openness, we could be closed-minded, rigid and obsessive.

By observing others, we may develop new motivations. Initially, they may be extrinsic, such as wanting to please someone to enhance a relationship or for a reward. If the motivation is compatible with our values and world-view, it may become part of our internal motivation just because we believe it is the right thing to do.