

# Introduction to Motivation

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll explain motivation and how it is influenced. We will also go over the major theories about motivation. The breakdown of these topics will be:

## 1. Motivation

Motivation to engage in a given behavior can come from internal and/or external factors. There are multiple theories that have been put forward regarding motivation—biologically oriented theories that say the need to maintain bodily homeostasis motivates behavior, Bandura's idea that our sense of self-efficacy motivates behavior, and others that focus on social aspects of motivation. In this section, you'll learn about these theories as well as the famous work of Abraham Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. Why do we do the things we do? What motivations underlie our behaviors?

**Motivation** describes the wants or needs that direct behavior toward a goal. In addition to biological motives, motivations can be **intrinsic** (arising from internal factors) or **extrinsic** (arising from external factors). Intrinsically motivated behaviors are performed because of the sense of personal satisfaction that they bring, while extrinsically motivated behaviors are performed in order to receive something from others.

Intrinsic motivation comes from within the individual, while extrinsic motivation comes from outside the individual.

Think about why you are currently in college. Are you here because you enjoy learning and want to pursue an education to make yourself a more well-rounded individual? If so, then you are intrinsically motivated. However, if you are here because you want to get a college degree to make yourself more marketable for a high-paying career or to satisfy the demands of your parents, then your motivation is more extrinsic in nature.

In reality, our motivations are often a mix of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, but the nature of the mix of these factors might change over time (often in ways that seem counterintuitive). There is an old adage: "Choose a job that you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life," meaning that if you enjoy your occupation, work doesn't seem like . . . well, work. Some research suggests that this isn't necessarily the case. According to this research, receiving some sort of extrinsic reinforcement (i.e., getting paid) for engaging in behaviors that we enjoy leads to those behaviors being thought of as work no longer providing that same enjoyment. As a result, we might spend less time engaging in these reclassified behaviors in the absence of any extrinsic reinforcement.

## IN CONTEXT

Odessa loves baking, so in her free time, she bakes for fun. Oftentimes, after stocking shelves at her grocery store job, she often whips up pastries in the evenings because she enjoys baking. When a coworker in the store's bakery department leaves his job, Odessa applies for his position and gets transferred to the bakery department.

Although she enjoys what she does in her new job, after a few months, she no longer has much desire to concoct tasty treats in her free time. Baking has become work in a way that changes her motivation to do it. What Odessa has experienced is called the overjustification effect—intrinsic motivation is diminished when extrinsic motivation is given. This can lead to extinguishing the intrinsic motivation and creating a dependence on extrinsic rewards for continued performance.

Other studies suggest that intrinsic motivation may not be so vulnerable to the effects of extrinsic reinforcements, and in fact, reinforcements such as verbal praise might actually increase intrinsic motivation. In that case, Odessa's motivation to bake in her free time might remain high if, for example, customers regularly compliment her baking or cake decorating skills.

These apparent discrepancies in the researchers' findings may be understood by considering several factors. For one, physical reinforcement (such as money) and verbal reinforcement (such as praise) may affect an individual in very different ways. In fact, tangible rewards (i.e., money) tend to have more negative effects on intrinsic motivation than do intangible rewards (i.e., praise). Furthermore, the expectation of the extrinsic motivator by an individual is crucial: If the person expects to receive an extrinsic reward, then the intrinsic motivation for the task tends to be reduced. If, however, there is no such expectation, and the extrinsic motivation is presented as a surprise, then the intrinsic motivation for the task tends to persist.



WATCH

Watch this video to learn how Omar Epps uses observational learning in his career as a Hollywood actor when rehearsing a new character. When an emotional connection is created in a learning moment, learning increases. As a father, Epps uses behavioral learning to teach and discipline his children by creating a connection between the behavior and its desired outcome.

In educational settings, students are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation to learn when they feel a sense of belonging and respect in the classroom. This internalization can be enhanced if the evaluative aspects of the classroom are de-emphasized and if students feel that they exercise some control over the learning environment. Furthermore, providing students with activities that are challenging, yet doable, along with a rationale for engaging in various learning activities can enhance intrinsic motivation for those tasks.

## IN CONTEXT

Consider Hakim, a first-year law student with two courses this semester, Family Law and Criminal Law. The Family Law professor has a rather intimidating classroom: He likes to put students on the spot with tough questions, which often leaves students feeling belittled or embarrassed. Grades are based exclusively on quizzes and exams, and the instructor posts results of each test on the classroom door.

By contrast, the Criminal Law professor facilitates classroom discussions and respectful debates in small groups. The majority of the course grade is not exam-based but centers on a student-designed

research project on a crime issue of the student's choice.

Research suggests that Hakim will be less intrinsically motivated in his Family Law course, where students are intimidated in the classroom setting, and there is an emphasis on teacher-driven evaluations. Hakim is likely to experience a higher level of intrinsic motivation in his Criminal Law course, where the class setting encourages inclusive collaboration and a respect for ideas, and where students have more influence over their learning activities.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Motivation**

The wants or needs that direct behavior toward a goal.

##### **Intrinsic Motivation**

Motives arising from internal factors.

##### **Extrinsic Motivation**

Motives arising from external factors.

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## 2. Theories About Motivation

William James (1842–1910) was an important contributor to early research into motivation, and he is often referred to as the father of psychology in the United States. James theorized that behavior was driven by a number of instincts, which aid survival. From a biological perspective, an **instinct** is a species-specific pattern of behavior that is not learned. There was, however, considerable controversy among James and his contemporaries over the exact definition of instinct.

James proposed several dozen special human instincts, but many of his contemporaries had their own lists that differed. A mother's protection of her baby, the urge to lick sugar, and hunting prey were among the human behaviors proposed as true instincts during James's era. This view—that human behavior is driven by instincts—received a fair amount of criticism because of the undeniable role of learning in shaping all sorts of human behavior. In fact, as early as the 1900s, some instinctive behaviors were experimentally demonstrated to result from associative learning (recall when you learned about Watson's conditioning of fear response in "Little Albert").

Another early theory of motivation proposed that the maintenance of homeostasis is particularly important in directing behavior. You may recall from your earlier reading that homeostasis is the tendency to maintain a balance, or optimal level, within a biological system. In a body system, a control center (which is often part of the brain) receives input from receptors (which are often complexes of neurons). The control center directs effectors (which may be other neurons) to correct any imbalance detected by the control center.

According to the **drive theory** of motivation, deviations from homeostasis create physiological needs. These needs result in psychological drive states that direct behavior to meet the need and, ultimately, bring the system back to homeostasis.

➞ **EXAMPLE** For example, if it's been a while since you ate, your blood sugar levels will drop below normal. This low blood sugar will induce a physiological need and a corresponding drive state (i.e., hunger) that will direct you to seek out and consume food. Eating will eliminate hunger, and, ultimately, your blood sugar levels will return to normal.

Interestingly, drive theory also emphasizes the role that habits play in the type of behavioral response in which we engage. A **habit** is a pattern of behavior in which we regularly engage. Once we have engaged in a behavior that successfully reduces a drive, we are more likely to engage in that behavior whenever faced with that drive in the future.

Extensions of drive theory take into account levels of arousal as potential motivators. Just as drive theory aims to return the body to homeostasis, arousal theory aims to find the optimal level of arousal. If we are underaroused, we become bored and will seek out some sort of stimulation. On the other hand, if we are overaroused, we will engage in behaviors to reduce our arousal.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Most students have experienced this need to maintain optimal levels of arousal over the course of their academic career. Think about how much stress students experience toward the end of spring semester. They feel overwhelmed with seemingly endless exams, papers, and major assignments that must be completed on time. They probably yearn for the rest and relaxation that awaits them over the extended summer break. However, once they finish the semester, it doesn't take too long before they begin to feel bored. Generally, by the time the next semester is beginning in the fall, many students are quite happy to return to school. This is an example of how arousal theory works.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Instinct**

A species-specific pattern of behavior that is not learned.

##### **Drive Theory**

A theory of motivation that states deviations from homeostasis create physiological needs.

##### **Habit**

A pattern of behavior in which we regularly engage.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson you learned what motivation is, how it can be internal or external, and theories about how it works.

Motivation gives us the drive to take action toward a goal. Intrinsic motivation comes from internal factors like enjoying learning, while extrinsic motivation comes from external factors like wanting to build your career.

Theories of motivation range from James' early concepts about instincts, to the idea of drive theory and trying to maintain homeostasis or a balanced or optimal level in a biological system.

Good luck with your learning!

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