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What Is Extrinsic Motivation? Definition and Examples



Photo by Victor

Extrinsic motivation is a behavior driven by a desire to receive external rewards. These rewards can include money, fame, praise, and recognized educational achievement.

To be extrinsically motivated means that you become more motivated to do something when external rewards are placed in front of you.

Extrinsic motivation is a common motivational factor in our lives from a young age. From being given a small (often sweet) reward for finishing your homework on time, to telling yourself you'll finally purchase that new pair of shoes or video game if you get the promotion at work that you've been working towards, extrinsic motivation is focused on gaining external rewards for a job well done.

In this article, I'm going to look into what is extrinsic motivation, look at the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and look into extrinsic motivation examples in the workplace, in the classroom, and at home. Let's dive in.

How Does Extrinsic Motivation Work?

For extrinsic motivational techniques to work (and for them to help you [break bad habits](#)), you must be consistent in providing a reward if the action is completed.

Returning to the example of giving a sweet reward to your child for completing their homework, this behavior will only persist so long as the reward is consistently forthcoming upon them holding on to their side of the bargain (completing their homework on time). The same is true for the extrinsic reward of being paid to go to work, or receiving a customer loyalty discount. As soon as these extrinsic rewards go away, it's unlikely that you will stick around much longer, either.

For more extrinsic motivation examples, scroll down to the "Extrinsic Motivation Examples" section below.

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

The opposite of extrinsic motivation is intrinsic motivation. While they sound similar, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation work very differently from one another.

Unlike extrinsic motivation, which focuses on external rewards, intrinsic motivation comes from the inside. If you are an intrinsically motivated individual this means that you can (more often than not) become motivated to do something on the strength of your will alone.

While the forces of intrinsic motivation are different for all of us, common forms of this type of motivation include a desire to succeed and show yourself that you can do something, a will to grow (intellectually, spiritually, or otherwise) as a human being, and a desire to push yourself.

The one thing that all forms of intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation have in common is they do not involve external rewards. For this reason, it is believed that over the long term, intrinsic motivation incentivizes behavior change to a greater degree than extrinsic motivation. While this may be true, it does not discount extrinsic motivational techniques as a way to create a desired behavior.

Beware the Overjustification Effect

As we have discussed, extrinsic motivation is a very real way to get ourselves or others to do something that we otherwise may not be intrinsically excited to do.

There is a potential pitfall to extrinsic motivation that you should be aware of. The [overjustification effect](#) occurs when extrinsically motivated individuals cannot be motivated to do a particular task without receiving an external reward because they have become reliant on receiving a reward for performing the task.

This is to say, consistency receiving an award for doing something decreases a person's intrinsic motivation to perform that task.

This can happen in a variety of ways. If you turn your hobby, such as writing, drawing, or another creative outlet into a job, there's a good chance that as soon as you start being paid for your efforts (an extrinsic reward), the work itself will start to become less intrinsically motivating. Similarly, if you consistently reward your children with money, gifts, or other promised treasures in exchange for

them receiving good grades in high school and college, if they later take on extra schooling in adulthood, they may soon find that, sans your extrinsic rewards, they are less intrinsically motivated than they originally thought.

While you should keep the overjustification effect in mind when looking into different examples of intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation, don't let it put you off from giving the following external motivation examples their dues.

Extrinsic Motivation Examples

Examples of extrinsic rewards are all around us. From customer loyalty points to a standing ovation, from sports trophies to an annual bonus, the following external motivation examples are some of the most common:

- Getting paid to go to work (other extrinsic motivation examples in the workplace include annual bonuses and vesting periods for company stock)
- Praise and public acclaim (from making others proud, to having the world at your feet)
- Prize money, trophies, and awards
- Buy one, get one free sales
- Customer loyalty points and discounts
- Getting paid for getting good grades
- Doing something so you don't look bad

I hope the above definition of extrinsic motivation and examples of extrinsic rewards has helped to not only show you what extrinsic motivation is, but has convinced you that it is not a bad thing. Like anything, extrinsic rewards are a tool that can be deployed—whether for your own sake, or someone else's—to help you work towards doing what you really want, or need, to do.

If you're interested in hearing more from me, be sure to subscribe to my [free email newsletter](#), and if you enjoyed this article, please share it on social media, link to it from your website, or bookmark it so you can come back to it often. ■



Benjamin Spall

Benjamin Spall is the co-author of *My Morning Routine* (Portfolio). He has written for outlets including the New York Times, New York Observer, Quartz, Entrepreneur, Business Insider, CNBC, and more.

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