

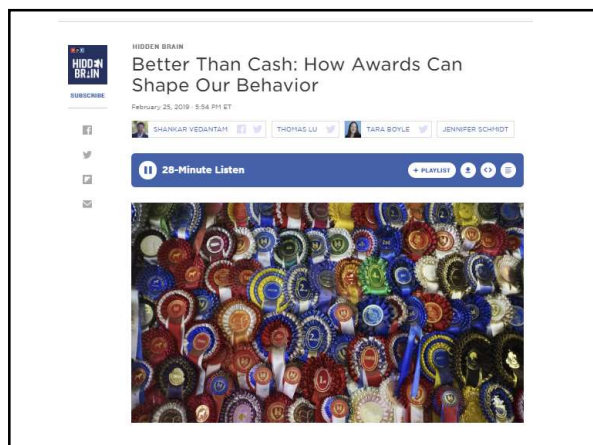


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How can we know if awards work?

What does “work” mean here?

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Compare

- Hidden Brain presentation
- Academic article

Which is more

- Accessible
- Allows you to critique the evidence
- Leads to firm conclusions
- Better to assign to undergraduate students

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Motivate
before
award

Recognize
top
performers

Motivate
after
award

- Nobel Prize
- Stanley Cup
- Faculty tenure
- Academy Award

- SURG grant
- Phi Beta Kappa
- Best booth
- Summa cum laude

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Reasons why awards might not motivate behavior

Why not just use a monetary incentive?

- Hard to titrate to behavior level
 - Money is better for that
- Just recognizes past success
 - E.g., posthumous awards
- No real (aka monetary) value to recipient

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Benefits of Awards

- Boosts intrinsic motivation
 - Unlike monetary rewards that may "crowd out" intrinsic motivation
- Social aspects (awards made in public)
- Prestige/glory
- Creates bond of loyalty between giver and awardee

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How to devalue an award

- Give it out too often
- Give it to people who don't deserve it
- Awardee declines/ignores the award (Bob Dylan)

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Effects of awards on

Before awardee is selected	After awardee is selected
People working toward the award	Winners
• Motivation	• Recognition
	• Future work
	Losers
	• Resentment, jealousy
Prospective award	Retrospective award

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Types of Awards

- Confirmatory Awards
 - Given automatically based on pre-defined criteria
 - Induces decision makers to achieve the criteria but neglect other aspects of their work
 - Cheat or fake to make criteria
- Discretionary Awards
 - Giver has leeway in selecting recipient
 - Giver motivated to give award to cronies
 - But value of award erodes if it is not given to high merit recipients

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informs

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Fostering Public Good Contributions with Symbolic Awards: A Large-Scale Natural Field Experiment at Wikipedia

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This natural field experiment tests the effects of purely symbolic awards on volunteer retention in a public goods context. The experiment is conducted at Wikipedia, which faces declining editor retention rates, particularly among newcomers. Randomization assures that award receipt is orthogonal to previous performance. The analysis reveals that awards have a sizeable effect on newcomer retention, which persists over the four quarters following the initial intervention. This is noteworthy for indicating that awards for volunteers can be effective even if they have no impact on the volunteers' future career opportunities. The awards are purely symbolic, and the status increment they produce is limited to the recipients' pseudonymous online identities in a community they have just recently joined. The results can be explained by enhanced self-identification with the community, but they are also in line with recent findings on the role of status and reputation, recognition, and evaluation potential in online communities.

Data, as supplemental material, are available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2016.2540>.

Keywords: economics; behavior and behavioral decision making; public good provision; awards and motivation; natural field experiment; Wikipedia; online community management

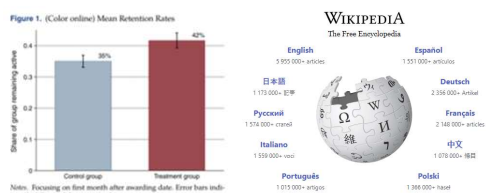
History: Received October 31, 2014; accepted April 11, 2016, by John List, behavioral economics. Published online in *Articles in Advance* September 30, 2016.

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Wikipedia Experiment

Retrospective!
Discretionary?

- New Edelweiss award given to continuing contributors
- 35% continuation among those not given award
- 42% continuation among those given the award



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Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/obhdp

The demotivating effect (and unintended message) of awards

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Abstract

It is common for organizations to offer awards to motivate individual behavior, yet few empirical studies evaluate their effectiveness in the field. We report a randomized field experiment ($N = 15,329$) that tests the impact of two common types of symbolic awards: pre-announced awards (prospective) and surprise awards (retrospective). The context is U.S. schools, where we explore how awards motivate student attendance. Contrary to our pre-registered hypotheses and organizational leaders' expectations, the prospective awards did not on average improve behavior, and the retrospective awards decreased subsequent attendance. Moreover, we find a significant negative effect on attendance after prospective incentives were removed, which points to a crowding-out effect. Survey experiments probing the mechanisms suggest that awards may cause these unintended effects by inadvertently signaling that the target behavior (perfect attendance) is neither the social norm nor institutionally expected. In addition, receiving the retrospective award suggests to recipients that they have already outperformed the norm and what was expected of them, hence licensing them to miss school. Exploratory analyses shed further light on differential effects of awards by age and performance.

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Students with perfect attendance during a fall month

Prospective Award
(confirmatory)

Retrospective Award
(confirmatory)

DV = attendance during February

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A) Prospective Award Letter

Dear Sammy,

You can earn an award if you have perfect attendance in February!

If you have zero absences* in February, you will receive the Perfect Attendance Award (like the one below). The award will be sent to you in the mail, and it will not be offered again this school year.¹

Sincerely,
George Washington
American County Superintendent

Sample Perfect Attendance Award:



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B) Retrospective Award Letter and Award Certificate

Dear Sammy,

You have earned an award for having perfect attendance! You attended school every day for one month this school year during the fall semester.

To recognize that you had zero absences for one month, we present you with the Perfect Attendance Award, enclosed with this letter. The award will not be offered again this school year.

Sincerely,
George Washington
American County Superintendent



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Retrospective award backfires

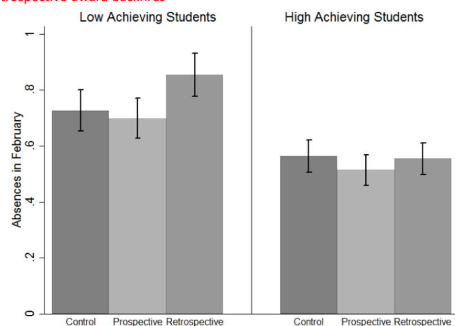


Fig. 2. Heterogeneous treatment effects on student absences in February (Prospective vs. Control and Retrospective vs. Control) by median split of academic performance. Predictions from OLS regression with strata fixed effects and student covariates as controls (Table 3, Column 1).

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Why the Backfire?

- Signaled that perfect attendance is above and beyond normal expectations.
- Prospective award had no effect either way

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Prizes and Productivity

How Winning the Fields Medal Affects Scientific Output

George J. Borjas
Kirk B. Doran

Award is
Prospective: contenders know about it in advance
Is it also **retrospective?** Does it motivate
performance post-award among winners?

ABSTRACT

Knowledge generation is key to economic growth, and scientific prizes are designed to encourage it. But how does winning a prestigious prize affect future output? We compare the productivity of Fields Medal recipients (winners of the top mathematics prize) to that of similarly brilliant contenders. The two groups have similar publication rates until the award year, after which the winners' productivity declines. The medalists begin to "play the field," studying unfamiliar topics at the expense of writing papers. It appears that tournaments can have large postprize effects on the effort allocation of knowledge producers.

"I look forward to proving more theorems. I hope the weight of this prize doesn't slow me down."

—Stanislav Smirnov, Fields Medal recipient, 2010

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Papers published

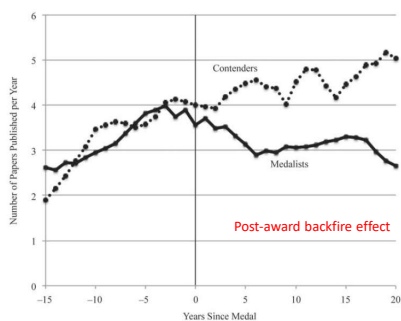


Figure 1
Average number of papers published annually by the Fields Medal recipients and the contenders (three-year moving average)

Notes: The group of "contenders" is composed of persons who were awarded at least one of six other mathematics prizes (the Abel, Wolf, Cole Algebra, Bôcher, Veblen, and Salem Prizes) and have above-median per-year citations during the eligibility period for the Fields Medal, but were not awarded the Fields Medal. We smooth out the trend by using a three-year moving average centered on the middle year in the interval.

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Switching to new/riskier topics

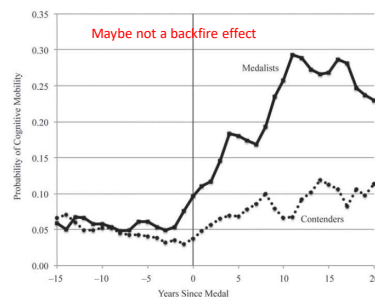


Figure 2
The probability of cognitive mobility for the Fields Medal recipients and the contenders (three-year moving average)

Notes: The group of "contenders" is composed of persons who were awarded at least one of six other mathematics prizes (the Abel, Wolf, Cole Algebra, Bôcher, Veblen, and Salem Prizes) and have above-median per-year citations during the eligibility period for the Fields Medal but were not awarded the Fields Medal. Cognitive mobility indicates if a paper published at any point during the mathematician's career differs from the "baseline fields" in the eligibility period for the Fields Medal. The "baseline field" is defined by the set of the two medal fields and all related fields in which the mathematician published during the eligibility period. We smooth out the trend by using a three-year moving average centered on the middle year in the interval.

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