

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING LEADER TRAINING

MOTIVATION IN THE WORKSHOP: HOW CAN LEADERS USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

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Getting students motivated to engage with the material in the workshop setting has proven to be one of the main difficulties for me as a workshop leader. For the workshop model to be effective, it is imperative that the students begin working with each other, asking questions, and moving through discussion to reason to some kind of answer. One of the roles that the workshop leader plays is to provide the initial energy to motivate the students to begin engaging with the workshop problems. Past this point, however, the unfolding of a successful workshop session involves the development of self-initiated participation by the students over the course of the semester. If we as workshop leaders had a better idea of the conditions required for the development of self-motivation, *intrinsic* motivation, to take place, then we could use this knowledge intentionally to cultivate those conditions favorable for the growth of students' active participation. The central questions posed for this endeavor then are to determine 1) what conditions facilitate the development of self-motivation in people, and 2) what are some testable strategies to realize these conditions? An answer to the first question comes from motivational psychologists Ryan and Deci's *self-determination theory*. A comparison of my own anecdotal observations of workshop dynamics to the ideas in self-determination theory will address the second question, and can hopefully guide the workshop leader's interactions in the workshop setting towards the facilitation of intrinsic motivation.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation that focuses both on the social and environmental conditions that either facilitate or undermine intrinsic motivation, and on the developmental processes in human beings leading from external to intrinsic motivation. These two directions are elaborated by two sub-theories, Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), which examines those circumstances that either satisfy or neglect three psychological needs required for intrinsic motivation: *autonomy*, *confidence*, and *relatedness*; and Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), which is a model describing both the developmental process whereby external motivators can be integrated into a person's being, and the different types of motivation along a continuum from amotivation to intrinsic motivation. It is a fundamental assumption of SDT that intrinsic motivation is an innate tendency in human beings. Evidence for this is readily apparent from even casual observations where children exhibit natural curiosity, exploratory behaviors and play in the absence of any externally derived rewards. Furthermore, this innate tendency can be either facilitated or undermined depending on the social contexts in which a person is placed. We will consider both sub-theories in turn.

CET affirms the common-sense assertion that social contexts which support a person's perception of his/her own *competence*, the ability to perform a task well, is instrumental in facilitating intrinsic motivation. Examples of such supportive conditions include positive performance feedback, optimal challenges, and freedom from demeaning evaluations (Ryan and Deci, 2000). A person must also experience his/her competence as self-determined, by a sense of *autonomy* (Black and Deci, 2000). In other words, the source for motivation to act comes from within, whereas a controlling social context places the source for motivation externally. Consider the following situation illustrating competence without autonomy: when questions are posed, Mary is always able to contribute a part to finding an answer. However, it takes calling on her directly to participate. Mary is competent but she doesn't have a strong sense of autonomy for the given tasks. Support for autonomy means creating conditions where a person has a "sense of *choice, volition, and freedom* from excessive external pressure toward behaving or thinking in a certain way" (Ryan and Deci, 2000, italics added). Finally, CET points to a third psychological need, *relatedness*. Children working on an interesting task in the presence of an unresponsive adult stranger displayed a very low level of intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Support for relatedness can be described as making authentic attempts to "be there" for someone, or being prepared to invest one's attention in another.

OIT both articulates a continuum of types of motivation from the most externally regulated (amotivation) to the most internally regulated (intrinsic motivation) and details the context which fosters or hinders the movement from external to internal regulation of behaviors. The spectrum of motivational conditions is also intimately related to the value invested in the action; the more a person internalizes and integrates the value for particular actions, the closer that person comes to intrinsic motivation. The delineated types are:

1. Amotivation-Either the lack of action or unintentional action can arise when a person does not value the action, does not feel competent for it, or does not expect the action to yield a desired outcome.
2. External regulation - Motivation that is elicited purely by contingency of reward or external demand, and lacks any internal motivational component.
3. Introjected regulation - This is the least internalized form of motivation where a person acts out of fear of failure, or necessity to succeed to maintain self-esteem.
4. Identification-This form of motivation involves conscious recognition of the value of an action which is accepted or identified with and is more autonomous and self-determined.
5. Integration - The most autonomous extrinsic motivation when the value of an action is fully integrated into a person's core sense of self, having been evaluated and accepted as important.
6. Intrinsic Motivation - Above and beyond the integration of values, this form of motivation is characterized by feelings of inherent pleasure in the performance of the action.

Among the determining factors for the development of more integrative and intrinsic motivation are support for perceived competence, relatedness as "belongingness and connectedness with others" (Ryan and Deci, 2000), and finally, the positive experience of autonomy. Ryan and Deci's comments

on this topic are worth quoting: “Contexts can yield external regulation if there are salient rewards or threats and the person feels competent enough to comply; contexts can yield introjected regulation if a relevant reference group endorses the activity and the person feels competent and related; but contexts can yield autonomous regulation only if they are autonomy supportive, thus allowing the person to feel competent, related, and autonomous.”

Self-Determination Theory informing workshop practice

There are some straightforward general conclusions to derive from SDT that are immediately applicable to the problem of student motivation in the workshop setting. The workshop leader obviously does not want to emphasize external regulation (e.g., contingency of rewards based on performance in the workshop), which could undermine the satisfaction of any of the three psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The acquisition of practical methods to enhance motivation in the unique setting of the workshop session must be gained either through trial-and-error or from experienced workshop leaders. In short, what techniques can one employ to foster conditions beneficial to the posited psychological needs?

In my workshop, I was faced with two situations pertinent to this discussion that have stood out as prime candidates for a SDT-informed interpretation leading to potential techniques for enhancing intrinsic motivation.

A. “The dangling carrot before the donkey” dynamic

Casual discussion with other workshop leaders revealed corroborated observations that more often than not, students would direct questions and responses to the workshop leader rather than to fellow students. In my own experience, this was aggravated by students’ perception that I had the one correct answer “in my head,” thereby making it their job to determine, based on my responses to their guesses, what that correct answer was. This condition invariably led to frustration and diminished motivation. In SDT terms, this non-optimal condition, undesirable by workshop student and leader alike, did not support the perception of their own competence or autonomy because it placed both the answer and the source of motivation outside of themselves. The students, so to speak, were situated in a context where they perceived themselves as chasing after a carrot frustratingly out of reach.

This situation caused me as much consternation initially as it did the students because I felt the dynamic was somehow off-kilter but in the heat of the moment, I had no alternative method to employ. As the semester progressed, it occurred to me that the technique I needed was that of breaking down the large group into two-three person subgroups to solve problems. In addition, I would move between subgroups asking how they were progressing. This freed me from being at the center, allowing me to give more attention to smaller groups of students. Under these conditions, non-talkative students were much more likely to engage in discussion with their classmates. Initially, when students were back in the larger group, the context reverted back in part to the initial condition. However, as students became used to working in small groups, I found that they were becoming more active upon coming back to the larger group. SDT predicts that if you cultivate conditions where competence and autonomy support are present, you will foster greater

internalization of the values of a social grouping (like the workshop) and movement towards more intrinsic motivation. It appears that the small subgroups provided a context which was less threatening to their self-perceived competence by being more secure and personal; the subgroups also supported their autonomy because there was not the (perceived) demand to answer the questions; the small groups gave the members a greater sense of choice and freedom to direct the discussion. This finally provided support for relatedness, as the workshop leader was able to exhibit personal attention and interest in the problems and difficulties that each subgroup was encountering. I would predict that had the workshop continued for another semester, or had all the students already had experience in a workshop environment during high school, that this movement towards more active participation and integrated external motivation would have increased indefinitely.

B. “Allowing the voice of students’ autonomy to speak”

I have come away with two techniques to foster autonomy support in the workshop, one of which emerged directly from my experience as a leader. Both techniques entail creating situations where feedback in both directions-between the workshop leader and students-can take place.

First and foremost, the workshop is comprised of participants, including the workshop leader who plays a facilitation role. Just as a healthy democracy fosters a socio-political environment which encourages its participants to find their voice by being active and empowered, a workshop where the students can voice their complaints, pose questions asking for justification for the philosophy governing the workshop, and make suggestions to improve the workshop environment are ideas supportive of student autonomy. As participants who have a say about how the workshop setting can be conducted, students will be much more likely to place value in the activity and engage in the material with more energy. I discovered this serendipitously midway through the semester when I opened up the floor to anyone who wanted to make comments regarding the mid-semester workshop evaluation. A flurry of discussion ensued, resulting in a clarification for them about why I conduct some things the way I do, clarification for me about what frustrated them, and new agreements and suggestions about how we could get more out of the workshop experience. Following the discussion, the students were highly energized; and it turned out to be one of the best workshop sessions of the semester for me. Regarding this technique, I later recognized that its success could be dependent upon the “personality” of the group as a whole. One of the workshop groups responded very positively, while my other workshop group did not. It cannot hurt to try this exercise as it might help improve the workshop dynamic.

The second technique, along the same lines, lauds the benefits of initial (and ongoing) discussion about the philosophy and goals of the workshop and what a workshop entails (e.g., the role of the leader, the role of the students). I found out late in the course that students signed up for workshops with some correct and some incorrect notions about what it would be like. I wish that I could have known this at the beginning of the semester so that I might have facilitated a good introductory discussion about the roles that we each are supposed to play, workshop leader and student alike. Also, this could have established from the first session a much more personal environment by saying more about ourselves so that we could establish a positive identity in the group.

The one thing that I have realized that I truly appreciate about workshops is that as a workshop leader facilitating both discussion and environment in which discussion takes place, I can obtain instant feedback regarding the dynamic of the group if any variable is changed. The workshop leader is in a direct position either to promote social contexts that further the development of intrinsic motivation, or interrupt its expression. By possessing the right tools and theory to inform the use of those tools, workshop leaders can change the world, a few students at a time.

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References

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