

15 Self-Starting Behavior at Work: Toward a Theory of Personal Initiative

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In this article we would like to look at the importance of self-starting behavior, particularly in future work settings. After we have established its importance we will try to understand it. Self-starting behavior has traditionally been framed within concepts of intrinsic motivation. We think that there are several conceptual problems when using intrinsic motivation in applied settings. We present the personal initiative theory with which we seek to overcome some of these problems. The personal initiative theory attempts to resolve the theoretical contradiction that exists in the occurrence of self-starting behavior in the context of externally given tasks; it allows for the simultaneous occurrence of extrinsic *and* intrinsic motivation for a behavior, and it enlarges our understanding of the role of positive and negative affect in the enactment of a self-starting behavior.

The Future of Work and the Relevance of Self-Starting Behavior

Both scientific and popular writing indicate that the domain of work is undergoing large-scale changes (Bridges, 1995; Howard, 1995; Rifkin, 1995). Advancing globalization and technological developments strongly influence and alter the demands placed on those at work. We will briefly present a general idea of the changes to come.

In the Western world, the number of available jobs in large companies is declining due to technological development and global competition. In some cases, complete business sectors and industries are becoming superfluous. This requires more activity to find a job—or even to create one's own job. It also makes the "cradle-to-grave" concept of employment—to be trained and to stay in one profession for one's whole working life, probably in the same organization—untenable. This changing job market might force people to

hold different occupations over their lifetime. Life-long learning is then critical to keep up with the changing demands (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Individuals now need to be responsible for their own careers; they have to observe and respond to changing job demands and job markets to maintain or increase their employability.

Increasing worldwide competition promotes a faster rate of innovation. This continuous change of job content requires the "users" of an innovation (e.g., job incumbents who work with new computer software) constantly to learn new skills. There is also an increasing use of management systems that delegate responsibility to lower levels of the organization (Womack, Jones, & Roos, 1990). These empowering strategies require individuals to act more independently. Innovations and improvements to technology, organizational processes, and procedures are no longer brought about solely by higher management and change experts, but by regular employees who have good ideas about what and how things can be improved. This requires one to be able to realize one's ideas independently.

What is needed to participate successfully in this world of changing demands? We argue here that individuals need to show more *self-starting behavior*. Self-starting means to develop one's own goals deliberately and to execute them without external order or demand—to initiate actions without external pressure. To better understand what enables people to deal with this changing world and how they can be enabled, we need to study theories explaining self-starting behaviors. Self-starting behavior in terms of voluntary action has been described in the field of intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic Motivation

Behavior is intrinsically motivated if it is done freely because of the inherent interest, satisfaction, and enjoyment in doing the activity. Behavior is extrinsically motivated if its purpose is to gain material or social reward, that is, when the goal of the activity is the pursuit of a valued outcome and not the activity itself. Several theoretical approaches have been developed over time that seek to account for the bases of intrinsically motivated behavior. There are theoretical perspectives that stress stimulation, optimum level of arousal, incongruity, and discrepancy motives (Berlyne, 1966; Hunt, 1965). They are distinctly different from theories emphasizing the experience of effectance and mastery (White, 1959). A third group of theories focuses on self-determination, personal causation, and personal control (deCharms, 1968; Deci,

1975; cf. Heckhausen, 1991; Malone & Lepper, 1987). The different approaches have in common—despite their diversity—"that intrinsic behavior occurs for its own sake or for the sake of closely connected goal states, that it is not merely a means to a different purpose" (Heckhausen, 1991, p. 456).

One approach fruitfully integrated the themes of competence and personal causation to account for the origin of intrinsic motivation: the cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to this theory, intrinsic motivation is rooted in humans' innate needs for competence and self-determination. Similar concepts are the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1954), growth need (Alderfer, 1969), effectance motivation (White, 1959), and need for autonomy (Murray, 1938). These intrinsic needs energize a broad range of behaviors, with which the individual seeks and tries to master optimal challenges. A challenge is optimal for a given individual if it requires the stretching of that person's abilities. The rewards of intrinsically motivated activities are the experience of effectance and autonomy (hence, the satisfaction of the two needs), and the experience of positive emotions such as enjoyment and excitement. Sometimes, people experience flow when intrinsically motivated (Csikszentmihayli, 1975).

The cognitive evaluation theory assumes that external events that initiate or regulate behavior differ in their capacity to enhance or decrease intrinsic motivation. Two types of situational aspects are seen as important precursors for intrinsic motivation: First, the degree of self-determination for the activity allowed by the context affects the individual's perceived locus of causality (deCharms, 1968). When an individual perceives oneself as the cause of an activity, for example, one's own interest, one is said to have an internal locus of causality for the action; this promotes intrinsic motivation. In contrast, if an individual perceives the activity to be executed for a reason external to oneself, for example, to obtain a reward or to escape negative experience, one has an external perceived locus of causality; this decreases intrinsic motivation. Situational aspects that affect locus of causality relate to the degree of self-determination. If they reduce self-determination, they are called *controlling aspects* of a situation. Rewards, constraints, one's self-esteem being at risk, or surveillance and punishment are considered controlling aspects because they pressure people to behave in a certain way. This reduces self-determination. In contrast, choice allows self-determination, promotes an internal locus of causality, and enhances intrinsic motivation.

Second, aspects of external events can influence intrinsic motivation by means of affecting one's perception of one's own capacities and how they are related to the task. If an individual faces a challenging situation, intrinsically

motivated behavior is more likely if one perceives one's capacities to be high. Environmental aspects that are *informational*, which provide feedback about effectance and performance, promote intrinsic motivation. In contrast, environmental aspects that convey that goals cannot be achieved are *amotivational*. This is the case, for example, for persistent negative feedback or continuous failure; they negatively affect the perception of capacity.

To summarize, according to the cognitive evaluation theory, humans have an innate need for competence and self-determination. As a consequence, individuals develop an intrinsic motivation for an activity if the activity allows an internal perceived locus of causality, if they feel a high competence for the task, and if the task allows a stretching of the competencies. Additionally, the activity must be interesting. Central to the cognitive evaluation theory, however, are environmental variables that influence intrinsic motivation. Environmental aspects are cognitively evaluated, thereby influencing how much a person experiences itself in a given situation to be self-determined and competent. It is this evaluative process that makes intrinsic motivation contingent on the environment. Situational aspects that have the capacity to regulate behavior are informational, controlling, and amotivating aspects (cf. Deci & Ryan, 1985).

The overjustification effect—central for research on intrinsic motivation—is used to describe situations in which there are detrimental effects of rewards and when extrinsic rewards corrupt intrinsic ones. Results of recent meta-analyses predominantly confirm the negative effect of rewards (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Eisenberger & Cameron, 1996; Rummel & Feinberg, 1988; Tang & Hall, 1995). It appeared that rewards do not always decrease intrinsic motivation; the overjustification effect depends on the interplay of many factors, such as type of reward (praise vs. tangible reward), predictability of the reward (expected vs. unexpected), and condition for the reward (reward obtained for participation in the study, performance level, or for executing the task), to name a few. The overjustification effect appears robustly (i.e., independently of type of sample, research design, and operationalization of intrinsic motivation) if study participants obtain a material, expected reward that is given contingent on doing a task (Tang & Hall, 1995; see similar results in Eisenberger & Cameron, 1996). Most of the results conform to the predictions of the cognitive evaluation theory.

Intrinsic motivation has received a high degree of attention since it is seen as an important motivator of learning and growth in competencies, and it is associated with flexibility, persistence, and performance (cf. Deci & Ryan, 1985). This has made intrinsic motivation relevant for a diversity of re-

search areas, such as education, developmental psychology, sports psychology, and work psychology.

Intrinsic Motivation and Cognitive Evaluation Theory in Work and Organizational Psychology

The cognitive evaluation theory has found wide application in sports psychology and educational psychology (cf. Ambrose & Kulik, 1999). Unfortunately, to our knowledge there has not been a direct test of the theory in an organizational setting (Ambrose & Kulik, 1999; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Some of the predictions in the cognitive evaluation theory regarding the occurrence of intrinsic motivation can be found in one of the most influential theories of work motivation: the job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The job characteristics theory states that several core job characteristics lead to three specific psychological states, which in turn promote organizationally highly desirable outcomes such as internal work motivation, satisfaction with work, quality of work performance, low absenteeism, and low turnover. Internal work motivation was defined as "the degree to which the employee is *self*-motivated to perform effectively on the job—that is, the employee experiences positive internal feelings when working effectively on the job ..." (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p. 162, emphasis in original). Intrinsic work motivation according to Hackman and Oldham implies enjoyment of performance of a task (in the context of organizational behavior) under the condition that performance is high; this is similar to the general concept of intrinsic motivation.

The five core job characteristics were hypothesized to lead to the following psychological states: skill variety, task identity, and task significance promote the experienced meaningfulness of one's work; work autonomy leads to experienced responsibility for work outcomes; and task feedback leads to knowledge of actual results of work outcomes. The relationships between the core job characteristics, the psychological states, and the outcomes are conditioned on the degree of a personality variable: the individual's growth need strength. The job characteristics theory posits that the relationships only hold for individuals with high growth need strength. Many studies have supported the assumption of the job characteristics theory that the core job characteristics affect internal motivation; the relevance of growth need strength has also been substantiated (cf. meta-analysis: Fried & Ferris, 1987).

The job characteristics theory and the cognitive evaluation theory make similar assumptions about the factors promoting intrinsic motivation. The job characteristics theory posits that work autonomy promotes intrinsic motivation; according to the cognitive evaluation theory, having autonomy at work allows a high degree of self-determination, leading to a high internal locus of causality, which in turn promotes intrinsic motivation. Task feedback is another determinant of intrinsic motivation in the job characteristics theory; this is similar to the assumption in the cognitive evaluation theory that informational feedback (i.e., learning how well one is performing in comparison to others) promotes intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the role of an individual's growth need strength in the job characteristics theory is similar to the postulate of humans' need for growth in the cognitive evaluation theory. The job characteristics theory has received considerable empirical support (Fried & Ferris, 1987); we suggest that this can also be seen as indirect support for the assumptions of the cognitive evaluation theory.

Intrinsic Motivation: A Theory of Self-Starting Behavior at Work?

While there is empirical evidence as discussed above for intrinsic motivation, there are conceptual problems and paradoxes that make it difficult to apply intrinsic motivation concepts at work. We think that there are three major problems.

First, at work, one usually gets to do tasks. These tasks are most of the time externally given and not self-developed. Therefore, one cannot speak of work being "done freely" as required in definitions of intrinsic motivation.

Second, as in most applied settings, on the job behavior is affected by a multitude of factors. Some of these are external rewards (e.g., money) and some of them are internal (e.g., interest in a certain type of task). However, one very important motivator at work is probably money. People expect (and usually obtain) a monetary reward. Withholding the salary would reduce the behavior to zero (people usually do not come to work if they are not paid). This would occur even if someone enjoyed her job very much. Many other extrinsic rewards are involved in work, for example, receiving approval from a supervisor or colleagues, getting a promotion, or exerting power over people.

According to the intrinsic motivation literature, the overjustification effect implies that there is a reciprocal relationship between internal and external rewards. The more one gets extrinsic rewards, the smaller is the intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the ubiquitous presence of extrinsic motivators in the

domain of work excludes the possibility of work behavior being truly intrinsically motivated.

Third, the hallmark of intrinsic motivation is the experience of positive feelings such as enjoyment, satisfaction, and pleasure. Using intrinsic motivation as a framework to understand self-starting behavior at work requires self-starting behaviors to be accompanied by positive emotions and positive affect. This is untenable. There are some, albeit small, positive relationships between positive emotions at work (i.e., job satisfaction) and work behavior (i.e., performance) (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985); but it is sometimes a negative emotion, for example dissatisfaction, that leads to self-starting behavior. Sometimes dissatisfaction causes behavior because someone wants to change something for the better.

The concept of intrinsic motivation has certain difficulties in being applied to the domain of work. We think that our theory of personal initiative may be more useful to understand self-starting behaviors at work.

Personal Initiative Theory

The concept of personal initiative was developed in the context of research in East Germany initiated after the fall of the wall. East Germany's economy was in a poor state. Technological reasons such as outdated technology and mismanagement were held responsible for this; additionally, employees' behavior contributed to the poor economic performance: they were lacking initiative. We developed measures of personal initiative and have shown their validity and usefulness (Frese, Kring, Soose, & Zempel, 1996; Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997).

Three Aspects of Personal Initiative: Self-Starting Behavior, Proactivity, and Persistence

Showing personal initiative means being self-starting, proactive, and persistent. *Self-starting* implies that an individual pursues a goal without having been explicitly told to do so. Furthermore, the goal pursued goes beyond the formal requirements of the job (e.g., as implied in the job description) and beyond the explicit work role. Responding to the job description is not considered to be self-starting. *Proactivity* often implies that one develops self-starting goals. Proactivity means not waiting until one *must* respond to a demand.

Instead, there is a long-term focus on work that enables the individual to consider things to come (new demands, new or reoccurring problems, emerging opportunities) and to proactively do something about them.

Imagine, for example, a secretary of a university department who books tickets for the travels of her boss. The secretary's formal task is to phone the travel agency with which the university has negotiated discounts in order to book the tickets. On one occasion, she is not satisfied with the service and finds the discount unattractive. Therefore, she decides to find out whether she can get a better deal somewhere else. She phones different agencies, checks options on the internet, negotiates, and finally comes up with a better agency. This secretary has taken initiative: She self-started an activity, because she went beyond her role and the formal requirements. The secretary acted in a proactive manner, since she anticipated that she will have to take care of the travel arrangements in the future and that service and prices will not improve by themselves. This example also illustrates that personal initiative affects changes in the environment.

Taking initiative requires self-setting a goal. This goal can be based on an idea developed by the person but it is also indicated when someone takes charge of an idea or a project that is based on a well-known idea in a given context but that had not previously been put into action. In other words, personal initiative often requires that somebody really takes charge of an idea that has been around for a while.

When taking initiative, *persistence* is often necessary to reach one's goal. Generally, personal initiative implies that something is being changed: A process, a procedure, or a task is added. These might be minor changes (as in the case of the secretary), but personal initiative can also bring about major changes. Changes never work out perfectly from the very beginning; they often involve setbacks and failure. People affected by the changes may not like that they have to adapt to something new and that they are forced to abandon their routines. This requires persistence from the person taking initiative in order to master technical barriers and to overcome others' resistance and inertia. Sometimes, persistence also has to be shown in dealing with supervisors, who may not like it if their subordinates go beyond the boundary of their authority.

Thus, self-starting implies that one has long-term goals that are usually proactive and that one takes future problems and opportunities into consideration. Since personal initiative changes the environment and since changes make it difficult to use old routines, personal initiative leads to difficulties and barriers. These barriers may be caused by the person itself who has shown

personal initiative (own routines do not work and one has to relearn how to do things), by other people, or by organizations.

These three aspects of personal initiative reinforce each other to a large extent. A proactive stance leads to developing self-starting goals because an active orientation toward the future makes it more likely to develop goals that go beyond what one is expected to do. Self-starting goals lead to the need to overcome barriers because of the changes inherent in the implementation of these goals. Overcoming barriers also leads to self-starting goals, because unusual solutions often require self-starting behavior. Finally, self-starting implies that one looks at potential future issues and, therefore, there is a higher degree of proactivity.

On the other hand, there is no automatic relationship between these three aspects. One may be self-starting and still not overcome barriers and not be proactive. For example, one might start to change something at work but back down from the initiative when problems arise. Sometimes personal initiative is also simply reactive, for example, when one takes over work because another person has been sick. In this case, there is little proactivity. Still, there is a tendency for these three issues to co-occur (Frese et al., 1997). Therefore, we propose that there is a relationship between these three aspects of personal initiative: self-starting, proactive, and overcoming barriers.

Self-Starting Behavior in the Context of Organizational Goals and Tasks

At work, people are usually confronted with tasks embedded in an organizational structure. How do people at work generate self-starting goals? We propose that personal initiative is the result of a deeper analysis of these tasks. Imagine a white-collar worker who learns that the company he works for will be taken over by an American organization. He anticipates that it will be useful to have a solid knowledge of the English language in the future. He convinces his colleagues that learning English will be a worthwhile investment and organizes professional English lessons for all of them. Additionally he persuades the supervisor that part of the English course can be done on company time. This is an example of initiative taking: The person is not responding to an immediate but to a future demand. At the moment when personal initiative is shown, it is based on a self-set goal, however. Thus, a deeper task analysis implies that one sees the implications for one's tasks when changes occur and that one proactively develops knowledge and skills to deal with future task demands.

One could argue that this is not self-starting in the true sense of the word. After all, the example implies a response to future task demands. Just responding to a task is not self-starting. A similar problem for the concept of self-starting appears when certain jobs demand personal initiative as part of the job requirements. For example, higher managers and entrepreneurs have as an explicit task to anticipate future challenges, opportunities, and threats and to act accordingly (proactively). In their case, they are required to show personal initiative, and since personal initiative is then an in-role behavior it does not seem to be self-starting. On the other hand, high-ranking managers and entrepreneurs need to be described on the dimension of personal initiative as well, and many show it to a high degree.

These problems have led us to conceptualize self-starting to mean that there is a great psychological distance from some path taken as part of personal initiative and the "normal" path. If something is obviously going to happen in the future, the psychological distance to take appropriate steps now is not high. However, if it is something not obvious or is difficult to do, the psychological distance is high. If a high-ranking manager takes up an innovation that is "in the air," that other managers also talk about, and that has been discussed in manager magazines, it is not personal initiative. The psychological distance is small in this case. However, if the same suggestion comes from an assembly line worker, the psychological distance is much higher and this would, therefore, constitute personal initiative. It is also personal initiative if the high-ranking manager takes an approach that is unusual (at least for the industry of the company concerned), because there is also a high psychological distance in this case between the course taken by the manager and the normal one.

It is sometimes easier to describe the other pole—non-self-starting behavior. If a task is prescribed in detail and the person follows the prescription, there is no self-starting behavior. The more the person deviates from the prescription, the more the person shows personal initiative.

The Functional Value of Personal Initiative

A self-starting action has to have functional value for the individual (or the group) showing this self-starting action; otherwise it is not considered personal initiative. As pointed out, the more a person deviates from the prescription, the more the person shows personal initiative. However, we require that personal initiative has to show functional value, which means that the task

needs to get done well or even better than when just following the prescriptions; otherwise the deviation from the prescribed path is due to inefficiency or mistakes.

People can also take initiative that has functional value for them but that is at the same time harmful for the organization. If a hairdresser who is employed in a shop offered to give his or her clients the same haircut as usual in his or her off-work time at home, charging them a discount price, the hairdresser would be pursuing a self-starting goal. It would be proactive if the hairdresser intended to open his or her own business. As the hairdresser harms his or her employer's business there is no functional value for the organization, therefore it is not personal initiative. For the time being, we take the perspective of the organization—a self-starting goal must have functional value and must not be harmful to the organization. Personal initiative is task related and we only measure personal initiative that is conceptualized to help do the tasks and/or to help advance the group or the organization.

We propose that initiative taking is energized by the expectation of several outcomes or results; each occurrence of personal initiative may have its own pattern of motivators. Consider the person organizing the English language course for his colleagues and himself. He can anticipate several positive outcomes of his doing so: He might have a feeling of increased job security because he is well prepared for the new organizational culture to come, or he might anticipate social rewards in the form of appreciation by his colleagues. Hence, in terms of psychological needs (Maslow, 1954) he satisfies his needs for security or "belongingness" and love. The secretary searching for a new travel agency expects to gain better service when booking tickets, which makes her work easier, and positive feedback from her supervisor, since she managed to reduce travel costs. There are many other outcomes motivating individuals to take personal initiative; presumably making one's work easier and being prepared for the future are outcomes frequently involved.

In a few cases of personal initiative there are monetary rewards involved. For blue-collar workers who work on assembly lines (or similarly constrained workplaces; cf. section on antecedents of personal initiative) it is very difficult to take initiative. Many companies have introduced suggestion schemes to which workers can submit their improvement suggestions. This is one case of initiative (cf. Frese, Teng, & Wijnen, 1999). When an improvement suggestion is implemented, it is usually rewarded. Even if there is no official suggestion scheme, bringing about an improvement is often rewarded (e.g., a bonus or better career opportunities). Thus, an external reinforcement can sometimes play a role in personal initiative.

We propose that personal initiative is motivated by multiple goals: the outcome itself (i.e., facilitation of work, an improvement, the functional value of personal initiative, as described in the previous section), effects directly related to the outcome (an increase in competencies as in the case of the English language course), and "side-effects" of the outcome (the satisfying feeling of achievement, pride, recognition of valued others, such as co-workers, supervisor).

We assume that the biological functionality of personal initiative developed alongside work. Humankind has always lived in a continuously changing environment (with periods of slower and faster changes). This requires a steady adaptation to the altering environmental situation. We assume that personal initiative increased the long-term survival chances of genes. The most immediate mechanism responsible for such a development may have been the following: Personal initiative increases the survival value of genes through providing a higher and a more steady degree of food for the offspring due to proactivity and future orientation. A self-starting and proactive stance allows an individual to find and catch food at places that other people do not know or find.

Antecedents of Personal Initiative

Aspects of the workplace and individual difference variables are antecedents of personal initiative. At the workplace, the most important factors promoting personal initiative are control at work and complexity of work (Frese et al., 1996). Having control means that the individual can make relevant decisions, for example, over the timing of work and over how to do the work. Task complexity is high if one is, for example, required to make difficult decisions and to increase one's qualifications. Lack of control and complexity imply that people are told in detail of how they have to do their job. This tight regulation of work makes it difficult to show self-starting behavior since there is no stimulation to engage in deeper task analysis. Furthermore, with narrow task prescriptions it is not functional to show personal initiative (e.g., personal initiative is not functional on an assembly line because one cannot try out another way to do one's work—the only possibility is to propose a formal suggestion). Job-related qualifications are antecedents because people need to know their work well before they can develop better strategies to do their work.

In the area of personality, we think a proactive personality is an important antecedent of personal initiative (Fay, Böckel, Kamps, Wotschke, & Frese,

1999). Proactive personality is defined as a "relatively stable tendency to effect environmental change" (Bateman & Crant, 1993, p. 103). Proactive persons are believed to be change agents; they grasp opportunities to influence and change their environment instead of adapting to or enduring the environment. Beyond specific job qualifications, people need general mental abilities (intelligence) to handle successfully a departure from routine paths of work and to show personal initiative (Fay, 1998; Frese, Krauss, & Friedrich, 2000). Finally, personal initiative needs to be feasible. This implies that one should expect positive outcomes (outcome expectancy) and that one is able to show the necessary actions (self-efficacy) (Bandura, 1997).

We propose that there are resources in the workplace (control, complexity) and in the person (qualifications, ability, expectancies, proactive personality) that increase the chances to show personal initiative. Personal initiative does not exist in a situation of low control and complexity, in which detailed instructions of what to do are given, as long as the person conforms to the instructions.

Consequences of Personal Initiative

Our studies have supported the notion that personal initiative has positive outcomes for the person exhibiting it, and that personal initiative contributes to the overall effectiveness of an organization. Unemployed persons who have a high degree of personal initiative get a job faster than those with a low degree of personal initiative (Frese et al., 1997). Personal initiative is related to developing clear career plans and to executing them (Frese et al., 1997). Personal initiative is positively related to individual performance: For example, in a sample of university students, those with higher personal initiative had the better high school grades (Fay et al., 1999). Students with high personal initiative are more self-reliant and independent when they have to acquire new knowledge. In an experiment, the students had to learn a computer program from exploration. Students with a higher degree of personal initiative sought less help and reassurance from the trainer and tried to overcome problems by themselves (Fay & Frese, 1998). Furthermore, personal initiative benefits organizations when it is widespread within a company. Small-scale business owners' personal initiative is related to their firms' success in East Germany (Zempel, 1999), in Uganda (Koop, De Reu, & Frese, in press) and in Zimbabwe (Krauss, Frese, & Friedrich, 1999). In a sample of medium-sized German companies, a pro-initiative climate was substantially related to

the profitability of the company. This means that a widespread use of personal initiative in the organization makes the organization better able to deal with challenges. One particular challenge is the introduction of process innovations (e.g., process re-engineering or just-in-time production). Those process innovation efforts resulted in higher profitability only when the company also showed a high degree of a pro-initiative climate (Baer & Frese, 1999).

Thus, we propose that exhibiting initiative brings about positive outcomes both for the individual and for the organization because personal initiative means dealing actively with the world, which furthers individual self-development and contributes to organizational success. At least in those environments in which it is necessary to deal with a changing world, personal initiative is important.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to find a theoretical framework for self-starting behaviors at work. The discussion of intrinsic motivation showed that intrinsic motivation has conceptual problems when applied to work and organizational settings. We think that the personal initiative theory allows us to overcome some of the conceptual problems that beset intrinsic motivation and the cognitive evaluation theory.

First, the personal initiative theory is not worried about the fact that there are tasks at work. Whereas the execution of an externally given task causes us to question attributing this performance to intrinsic motivation (in the sense of the behavior being shown freely because of its inherent interest), externally given tasks do not exclude the occurrence of self-starting behavior. Self-starting behavior is possible if the tasks are not spelled out in detail. The specification of the task given must allow for a psychological distance between the task and the completion by the job incumbent. The more tasks are spelled out, the less there is the possibility of self-starting behavior.

Second, both intrinsic as well as extrinsic rewards can be related to self-starting behavior. This seems to stand in contrast to intrinsic motivation theory. However, we suggest a departure from the dichotomy of behavior being extrinsically or intrinsically motivated. Furthermore, we suggest studying the overjustification effect from a different perspective. The overjustification effect is probably contingent on the *prescription of specific behavior* and not so much on the external reward. If a reward is given for a certain outcome and the individual is allowed to choose with what kind of behavior to achieve the

outcome (i.e., giving room for self-determination), the overjustification effect might diminish. This agrees with the meta-analytic result that rewards for performance *level* (in contrast to task execution) appear not to reduce intrinsic motivation (Tang & Hall, 1995). However, this is still a speculative account, but it might explain how an extrinsic reward would not counteract intrinsic motivation. Thus, the personal initiative theory allows us to understand that self-starting behavior can be motivated by both intrinsic aspects of the task and extrinsic rewards, such as money.

Third, the personal initiative theory does not demand that people's feelings have to be positive. As a matter of fact, one of the antecedents of personal initiative is stress at work (a negative feeling) (Fay, Sonnentag, & Frese, 1998). It makes sense that we often self-start an action when we find the situation negative but changeable. Consider the person organizing the English language course. Even if he is one of those people who like to organize things and make things happen, it is quite unlikely that he will enjoy all of his actions. Organizing such a course can become quite a nuisance; for example, he must convince everybody of its worth, consider conflicting schedules, and so forth. He will be confronted with social resistance and organizational problems. Showing personal initiative often involves nuisance and one needs stamina and persistence to realize one's ideas against inertia or resistance and sometimes an initiative does not work out at all.

Clearly, there is a large overlap between personal initiative and intrinsic motivation. Many antecedents are similar, for example, control and complexity of the task at hand. We suggest that most cases of intrinsic motivation at work occur when people take initiative. As personal initiative is based on a self-set goal, personal initiative is a self-determined action. Taking initiative means leaving routine paths of action; therefore, one can test and enhance one's abilities and competencies (both work related and non-work related, for example, having the competence to persuade other people to support one's action).

We suggest that the personal initiative theory overcomes some of the problems involved with intrinsic motivation when accounting for self-starting behavior at work. We furthermore propose that concepts of intrinsic motivation need to be revised to make them usable in applied settings: The facts of externally given tasks, mixed motives, and the presence of rewards need to be integrated into the concept.

Obviously we did not mean to be critical of the concept of intrinsic motivation. In contrast, we think it is a very important concept for work psychology as well as for other applied settings. It is, of course, also possible to start

the other way around and to integrate some ideas of the personal initiative theory into intrinsic motivation theory. However, we hope to have shown that it is both possible and necessary to talk about self-starting behavior within the context of task-driven and rewarded behavior and that the most important issue that reduces self-starting behavior is not the reward itself but the tight prescription of behaviors (which often goes along with rewards). We have limited ourselves to work psychology because this is the area of our expertise. However, we think that much of what we have said can also be integrated into other applied settings, for example, the school or even psychotherapy. In all of these settings, professionals are presenting tasks to allow people to be eventually self-starting.

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