



## Managerial motivational profiles: Composition, antecedents, and consequences



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 7 December 2014

Available online 13 December 2014

#### Keywords:

Motivation

Self-determination theory

Person-centered approach

### ABSTRACT

Using a person-centered approach, we identified managers' ( $N = 321$ ) motivational profiles and tested a model of the antecedents and consequences of these profiles. The profiles were based on four motivational types delineated by self-determination theory (i.e., external, introjected, identified, intrinsic). Latent profile analysis revealed six distinct motivational profiles. One of these was a self-determined profile (high identified and intrinsic motivation, moderately low introjected motivation, and low external motivation). Four other profiles combined average levels of external motivation with either very low, low, moderately low, or high internal (i.e., introjected, identified, and intrinsic) motivation. The final profile involved moderately high levels of all four motives. The antecedents of profile membership examined were perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational politics. The career-related outcomes of profile membership were work attitudes and promotability. The self-determined and high internal motivation profiles were associated with the most favorable work attitudes, followed by the moderately high motivation profile. The low internal motivation profiles were associated with the least favorable attitudes. Promotability did not differ across the profiles. With respect to the antecedents, low levels of supervisor support and high levels of politics increased the odds that a manager would exhibit profiles that were less desirable than the self-determined profile. Our findings provide initial information about managers' motivational profiles, as well as the antecedents and consequences of these profiles. Further, these results demonstrate the promise of a person-centered approach for advancing motivation research and management development.

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The motivation literature, particularly research on self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002), suggests that the type, not simply the quantity, of work motivation influences employee outcomes (Van den Broeck, Lens, De Witte, & Van Coillie, 2013). SDT provides a taxonomy of possible types of motivation that are not mutually exclusive, but co-occur as part of daily work life. Our interest is in understanding the different profiles or combinations of motivational types that managers commonly experience, and in considering the antecedents and consequences associated with these profiles.

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Researchers employing SDT typically focus on four types of motivation: external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic (e.g., Gagné et al., 2010; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). These types reflect different reasons for acting. External motivation involves acting because of external pressures (e.g., rewards, punishments). Introjected motivation involves acting because of internal pressures, especially the need to maintain one's ego and self-worth. Identified motivation entails pursuing activities because they are important for one's values and goals. Intrinsic motivation entails pursuing activities because they are pleasurable or interesting. External and introjected motivation represent controlled motivation – behavior feels obligatory. Identified and intrinsic motivation represent autonomous motivation – behavior feels self-initiated and authentic. Scholars posit that the authentic nature of identified and intrinsic motivation makes them more beneficial than external and introjected motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Further, they often assume that the benefits of identified and intrinsic motivation are diminished by the presence of external and introjected motivation (e.g., Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005).

SDT researchers have typically used a variable-centered approach that examines the relationships between the motivation types and other variables (e.g., job attitudes) across employees (Moran, Diefendorff, Kim, & Liu, 2012). Recently, some researchers (i.e., Moran et al., 2012; Van den Broeck et al., 2013) have noted that the variable-centered approach does not provide insight into the combinations of motives that characterize individuals in the workplace. To this end, they have used a person-centered approach to explore patterns of the motives; providing initial knowledge about non-managerial employees' motivational profiles and highlighting the importance of looking at the mix of motives possessed by the employee.

We extend the literature by identifying the profiles or combinations of motivational types exhibited by a sample of U.S. managers and testing a model of the antecedents and consequences of these profiles. Managers' jobs are extremely demanding and cognitively complex; the nature of their motivational profiles may be important in determining their outcomes (Graves, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Weber, 2012). We have three goals: 1) identify managers' motivational profiles using a person-centered approach (i.e., latent profile analysis), 2) explore the situational factors that may lead managers to exhibit particular profiles, and 3) examine differences in career-related outcomes across the profiles. Our study broadens the literature by studying motivational profiles rather than separate motivational types and by simultaneously testing the linkages between antecedents, profiles, and consequences. We strive to understand the optimal patterns of motives and the conditions under which they occur, potentially stimulating additional research and enhancing management development practices.

## 1. Theory

The central part of our theoretical framework is managers' motivational profiles; these profiles are based on combinations of external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic motivation. We consider two potentially critical antecedents of the profiles – perceived supervisor support and perceptions of organizational politics and four outcomes – the manager's promotability (i.e., likelihood of success in higher-level positions), job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and intent to turnover. Promotability assessments play a critical role in organizations' human resources decisions and are heavily influenced by factors related to motivation (i.e., willingness to seek challenges, job dedication; De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, & Klehe, 2009; Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). The remaining outcomes are career-relevant work attitudes. Although not a focus of our study, we also test the direct links between the antecedents and outcomes. In the sections below, we discuss the expected profiles and their potential antecedents and consequences.

### 1.1. Motivational profiles

Although some studies have explored motivational profiles in academic and athletic settings, the unique nature of the workplace (e.g., reliance on financial rewards) makes it necessary to assess profiles in work settings (Moran et al., 2012). To date, there has been limited research on employees' motivational profiles. In their 2012 study of Chinese employees, Moran et al. assessed five motivation types (the four types described earlier plus the more rarely-studied integrated motivation type) and found five clusters of employees. Two of the clusters reflected different levels of motivation (i.e., high levels of all five motives; moderate levels of all motives). The other three clusters reflected different combinations of motives (i.e., low levels of external motivation and high levels of all of the other motives; low identified and intrinsic motivation; low introjection). Generally, individuals who had moderate to high levels of all motives, or low levels of external motivation and high levels of all the other motives had the highest performance ratings. There was no evidence that controlled motivation diminished the beneficial effects of the more autonomous forms of motivation.

In their study of Belgian employees, Van den Broeck et al. (2013) identified four clusters of employees based on combinations of autonomous and controlled motivation: high–high, high–low, low–high, and low–low, respectively. Employees in the high autonomous clusters experienced more positive attitudes (e.g., work engagement, job satisfaction) than employees in the low autonomous clusters. Moreover, employees in the two high autonomous clusters had similar attitudes. Again, high levels of controlled motivation did not seem to interfere with the benefits of autonomous motivation. Both of these studies found that examining motivational profiles provided a more nuanced understanding of the reasons employees act.

Given the limited evidence, we do not offer formal hypotheses about managers' motivational profiles. However, based on past research, we expect to uncover profiles that represent different amounts of motivation (e.g., high or low on all four motives), as well as different mixes of the four types of motivation. We also anticipate that one profile will be a theoretically desirable self-determined motivation profile that is high in identified and intrinsic motivation and low in external and introjected motivation.

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