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Relationship between Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation for Learning – Researches Review

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Abstract

In this paper, we review some of the initial researches, conducted during the 70's and later, about the potential role of external rewards on intrinsic motivation for learning. This is considered from different theoretical approaches such as self-determination theory, cognitive approach, attribution theory, general interest theory, behaviorist approach. The review is divided into three parts. Firstly, we review researches related to the effect of external reward on reducing internal motivation for learning and some research which is opposite to them. Secondly, we discuss the benefits of motivation for improving creative achievements. Thirdly, a significant part of this paper refers to analyzing the interests, as a part of students' intrinsic motivation, which are not given enough attention in literature. Finally, we draw conclusions from the researches review. In the summary, analyzing these early researches, we can say that there is a good evidence that rewards have a strong influence on the students' motivation for learning and high creative outcomes which is opposite to some initial researches (although this depends on the type of undertaking rewards). Considering these early researches indicates that producing negative effects requires combining specific conditions that are not characteristic for activities in everyday life, especially in school life and the idea that rewards disturb intrinsic motivation of individual requires a more detailed analysis. We believe that rewards are not harmful, which is proved by some researches, and that there is a certain interrelation between external motivators and task-oriented motivation which is confirmed by the cognitive approach. Future researches should be oriented towards the examination of the impact of different types of interests on learning and the variety of personal motives, examining the interactions between motivation and cognitive constructs, but also on how to develop personal interests and motivational constructs.

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1. Introduction

Pedagogues and psychologists have long recognized the importance of motivation for supporting students' learning. In literature, motivation has been repeatedly reported as a key element for students' success in learning and people working, so motivation is often considered as an inner drive for behaving or acting in a certain manner. In the middle of the 70's, a different definition of intrinsic motivation has been proposed and in this paper, these definitions will not be thoroughly discussed and analyzed, but the focus will be directed towards the relationship between external and internal motivation, ie, rewards and intrinsic motivation for learning. There is a great deal of research that investigates the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation, from those who indicate that reinforcement can undermine intrinsic motivation, lowering intrinsic interest in students, to those who indicate that external reward programs do not have a detrimental effect on students' intrinsic interest. In this review we will revise the initial researches related to external rewards and intrinsic motivation conducted during the 70's and later, based on different theoretical approaches.

2. Effects of external rewards on intrinsic motivation – different approaches

Deci defined intrinsically motivated behaviours as those that are engaged in for their own sake, in other words, for the pleasure and satisfaction of performing them (Deci, 1971). These are the activities that people voluntarily perform in the absence of material rewards or constraints (Deci & Ryan, 1985). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation pertains to a wide variety of behaviors where the goals of actions extend beyond those inherent in the activity itself. Therefore, there are behaviors that are engaged in as a means to an end and not for their own sakes (Deci, 1975; Kruglanski, 1975). Originally, it was considered that extrinsic motivation refers to behaviours performed in the absence of self-determination and thus which could only be prompted by external contingencies. In order to consider the relationship between reward and intrinsic motivation for learning we shall review some initial researches and theoretical approaches. Deci and his associates conducted laboratory studies in early 70's. According to these studies, under certain conditions extrinsic rewards could decrease intrinsic motivation. So, on the basis of these studies, to explain the obtained results they developed cognitive evaluation theory as a sub-theory of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Deci confirmed that extrinsic motivation should not be used just because it "deprives" human interest and pleasure in activities. He presented his reason with the aim to scientifically prove that the rewards and positive reinforcement can "harm" internal motivation. The results from these studies are often cited as evidence that rewards and positive reinforcements can backfire, or as Kohn stated, that the positive external incentives based on the use of rewards can cause pervasive negative effects (Kohn, 1993). The general conclusion derived from these studies is related to the fact that the system of rewards and positive corroborating has extensive negative effects. This conclusion has soon taken place in the public and continually repeated in elementary textbooks of psychology, pedagogy and business management. When the completion-contingent rewards and intrinsic motivation are in question, Deci and his associates (Deci et al, 1999) on the basis on their meta-analysis proved that empirical results showed that for interesting activities performance-contingent rewards have a detrimental effect on the persistence of free choice and completion-contingent rewards have also detrimental effect on intrinsic motivation, and further, that the use of such rewards in school can adversely affect the intrinsic motivation of students. Deci et al. (1999) argued that these findings supported Deci and Ryan's cognitive evaluation theory, which assumes that events leading to greater perceived self-determination or perceived competence increase intrinsic motivation, whereas events that decrease self-determination or competence lessen intrinsic motivation. Deci et al. argued that reward lessens perceived autonomy, leading to reduced intrinsic motivation. Reward for intrinsically motivating activities in everyday life, according to them, reduces intrinsic motivation.

In the line with cognitive evaluation theory is the attribution theory - the "overjustification" effect. According to the representatives of this theoretical approach, intrinsic motivation can be decreased by extrinsic incentives. This perspective argues that people make retrospective attributions about their own behavior based on what they did and the social context in which their behavior occurred (Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett 1973). The theory suggests that rewarding people for an interesting activity leads them to attribute their behavior to the extrinsic reward rather than to their intrinsic interest in the activity. Thus, intrinsic motivation is lower if there is no extrinsic reward. The over justification effect is manifested in decreased interests in an activity as a result of having been rewarded for

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