



Cooperation goals, regulatory focus, and their combined effects on creativity



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the co-activation of cooperation versus competition goals with regulatory focus, and tested whether the combined effects on creativity are interactive or additive. An experiment with 192 adults showed two main effects, such that participants with a cooperation goal and a promotion focus (i.e., focus on ideals) demonstrated the highest levels of originality of ideas, whereas the combination of a competition goal and a prevention focus (i.e., focus on duties) led to the lowest originality. These findings indicate that the two motivational constructs have additive effects which lead to the highest originality if a promotion focus and a cooperation goal are co-activated, whereas a prevention focus and a competition goal may diminish originality. In conclusion, the concurrent activation of multiple motivational constructs should be considered when investigating the situational effects of cooperative/competitive settings on creativity.

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1. Introduction

Much research has investigated the consequences of cooperative and competitive settings on performance and creativity. While one line of research has found a positive effect of cooperation goals on achievement (see Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Skon, & Nelson, 1981; Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008), another line of research has looked at creativity, reporting both positive and negative effects of cooperation on creativity (see Amabile, 1996). Several studies found competition to be detrimental for creativity (e.g., Amabile, 1982; Deci, Betley, Kahle, Abrams, & Porac, 1981; McGlynn, Gibbs, & Roberts, 1982), but besides these negative effects, a few studies found competition to be beneficial for creativity (e.g., Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987; Cummings & Oldham, 1997; Raina, 1968). While research aimed to shed some light on possible reasons for these contradictory effects (e.g., Bechtoldt, Choi, & Nijstad, 2012; Goncalo & Duguid, 2012), these studies typically did not control for additional motivational factors, such as regulatory focus. In some situations, it is possible that regulatory focus and cooperation or competition are activated at the same time, and may change subsequent creativity. For example, in an educational setting where competition prevails, a further effect can be expected of the motivational regulatory focus that people experience simultaneously. By contrast, in situations where regulatory focus is not co-activated, cooperation or competition may induce fewer changes in creativity.

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The present study takes a closer look at the motivational processes that may boost creativity together with cooperation goals. In this context, cooperation goals refer to social settings where people strive for the success of the group, whereas competition goals represent striving for one's personal success and trying to be successful by outperforming others (De Dreu, Nijstad, & Van Knippenberg, 2008; Deutsch, 1949, 1962; Johnson, Johnson, & Maruyama, 1983; Simmons, Wehner, Tucker, & King, 1988). For creativity, it has been shown that the presence of others can be detrimental in situations where co-acting others are associated with evaluation expectancy (Amabile, 1979; Amabile, Goldfarb, & Brackfield, 1990). A possible explanation for this effect could be that evaluation expectancy leads people to hold back their creative ideas in social settings.

Although prior research has addressed the role of motivational effects for creative performance, these effects were usually studied in isolation. Therefore, the current study aimed to address the combined effects of two activated motivational orientations: cooperation/competition goals, and regulatory focus. Both concepts have previously been studied as individual predictors of creative behavior, but little is known about their effects if they are co-activated in an orthogonal design. Specifically, we were interested to draw conclusions about the question whether their combined effects are *interactive* or *additive* in enhancing originality.

1.1. Assessment of originality

Creativity has been conceptualized to consist of several different facets: fluency, originality, and cognitive flexibility (Guilford, 1967). Fluency is often assessed in divergent thinking tests that measure people's ability and productivity in generating nonredundant ideas (Amabile, 1996; Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008). In addition, idea generation tasks can be employed to examine originality, another facet of creativity, which consists of the ability to come up with new, unusual ideas that go beyond common knowledge (Guilford, 1967). Originality is considered to be one of the most characteristic dimensions of creativity, and tends to be correlated with other facets, such as fluency and flexibility (Amabile, 1996; Baas et al., 2008; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999; Storme & Lubart, 2012). In the present study, we chose to further investigate originality, because this facet of creativity was not included in prior studies on cooperation (Carnevale & Probst, 1998), or regulatory focus and creativity (Amabile, 1982; Higgins, 1997). Moreover, separate studies have shown that originality relates to both, regulatory focus (Baas, de Dreu, & Nijstad, 2011), and cooperation/competition goals (Bechtoldt, De Dreu, Nijstad, & Choi, 2010).

Creativity is increasingly investigated as a goal-directed, and even strategic, activity. Thus, rather than approaching creativity as a personality characteristic, creativity is being studied as a function of the specific goals people pursue in a given situation, and the strategic choices people make during goal pursuit (e.g., Baas et al., 2011; Litchfield, 2008; Litchfield, Fan, & Brown, 2011; Shalley, 1991, 1995). Moreover, creative ideas can be enhanced in social settings (Amabile, 1996) that may provide instructions and situations which are beneficial for creativity.

1.2. Multiple goals

Goals represent desirable end states that give direction to peoples' behaviors. For example, conscious and nonconscious cooperation goals have been found to increase subsequent cooperative actions (Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001). According to goal systems theory, motivation is the result of a dynamic system of multiple goals and means that lead to action (Kruglanski et al., 2002). Because goals and means are connected, goal activation results in action plans and the execution of corresponding behaviors that aim to complete the activated goal (Chun, Kruglanski, Sleeth-Keppler, & Friedman, 2011; Kopetz, Kruglanski, Arens, Etkin, & Johnson, 2012; Kruglanski et al., 2002).

However, research has shown that there are different types of goals: personal and social goals (Shah, 2003a,b). For instance, parents have personal goals for themselves, but also have educational goals for their children. Children are supposed to learn to act cooperatively and be a team player, but they are also expected to outperform others and be better than their competitors. The present study focused on these conflicting goals because their consequences on creativity are highly relevant for group settings in education and the workplace. These settings can even activate specific goals in individuals, such that work environments where competition prevails may activate competition goals in workers. For this reason, it is crucial to know which situations are beneficial for creativity. If companies aim to support their workers in being creative and innovative, it would be necessary to provide motivating environments that enhance creativity. This is an important strategy, because companies nowadays strive to raise the creativity of their workers in order to be innovative and successful (Anderson, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2004).

1.3. Creativity and cooperation

Several studies provide evidence of a positive relationship between creativity and cooperation. In a classic paper, Carnevale and Probst (1998) showed that participants who expected a cooperative interaction performed more creatively (Study 1) and formed broader mental categories (Study 2) than participants who expected a conflict situation. These differences were due to changes in cognitive information processing, such that the participants in the cooperation condition grouped things together and integrated information to a higher degree than the participants in the conflict condition. Therefore, it was concluded that cooperation is associated with more holistic information processing, whereas conflict is related to local processing.

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