



Overjustification Effect

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The Felt Tip Marker Study

The overjustification effect happens when an external incentive like a reward, decreases a person's intrinsic motivation to perform a particular task. Lepper, Greene and Nisbett confirmed this in their field experiment in a nursery school.

Overjustification effect is manifested in cases where giving an external incentive to a person decreases his intrinsic motivation to perform the task.

When we do a certain task, there are two types of motivation present: intrinsic and extrinsic. It can be either or even be both, depending upon what causes or gives the person the drive to do a particular task.

Lepper, Greene and Nisbett conducted an activity to find out if giving rewards which is a form of extrinsic motivation, decreases the intrinsic motivation of a person.

The salience of extrinsic motivation, or the motivation to perform an activity because it leads to something else like getting rewards and benefits, over intrinsic motivation, or the desire to perform an activity out of the enjoyment derived from the activity itself, is the basis for the overjustification effect.

To define the phenomena, the overjustification effect occurs when an external incentive like money or prizes, decreases a person's intrinsic motivation to perform a task.

What will consequently matter more for the person is the incentive they receive, instead of the enjoyment and satisfaction they get when they perform the activity. There will be a shift in motivation to extrinsic factors and an undermining of preexisting intrinsic motivation.

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Statement of the Problem

The problem originates from Deci's theory which led to the hypothesis that once an activity is associated with an external reward, a person will be less interested or inclined to participate in the activity in the future because of the absence of incentive.

Methodology

The researchers went to a nursery school and observed the children's intrinsic interest in various school activities. The 3- to 5-year old children were made to play and draw using felt-tipped pens and were at the same time, put into one of three different conditions for the experiment. These are:

- **First Condition: The Expected Award Condition**
In this condition, the children were promised to receive a "Good Player" ribbon for participating in the activity where they will be drawing with the use of felt-tipped pens. Take note that the kids have already been doing this activity ever since, and with pure intrinsic interest.
- **Second Condition: Unexpected Award Condition**
In this condition, the children were not told about the reward they would be getting until they actually finished the activity.
- **Third Condition: No-Reward Condition**
Lastly, in this third condition, the children were not told or given any kind of reward. This group of kids served as the control group, since extrinsic rewards were not involved either before or after the said activity.

Later on, the children were again observed in a free-play setting to find out whether there is a significant difference in the number of children participating in the same activity, this time, without any promise of a reward.

Results

The researchers found out that the children who were promised to get a reward during the first part of the experiment played significantly less with the pens.

In accordance with the Overjustification Effect hypothesis, the children in the Expected-Reward Condition noticeably lost their interest in their activities since the introduction of rewards.

However, there was no change in the interest of the group who received the reward unexpectedly since these children didn't know about the reward until after performing the activity, and therefore attributed their behavior to an enjoyment of the activity. Coherently, those who did not receive any reward at all also did not show any change or decline in interest as a result.

Conclusion

The experiment proved that an individual's interest in an activity will most likely decrease by inducing them to engage in the activity as an explicit means to some extrinsic goal.

Lepper, Greene and Nisbett then arrived at a conclusion that expected rewards undermine the intrinsic motivation of people in previously enjoyable or worthwhile activities.

Application

The researchers' findings are important especially for parents and educators, when it comes to instilling intrinsic motivation and drive to children. They should rely on intrinsic motivation and preserve feelings of autonomy and competence as much as possible.

When it comes to tasks that are undesirable or something not worthwhile, and intrinsic motivation is insufficient, this is when extrinsic rewards are safe to be introduced. Examples of such activities that individuals may not find pleasurable are household chores.

In conclusion, when control is imposed on individuals by offering them rewards and incentives, the long term effect of this will be loss in intrinsic motivation followed by a decline in performance. This is applicable in the classroom setting, in sports teams, and other environment and settings. We should be reminded that when incentives and rewards are present, we are most likely looking into a risk of losing the enjoyment of the activity for itself.

Sources

[Wikipedia: Overjustification effect](#) ^[1]

[Psychwiki.com: Overjustification effect](#) ^[2]

[How Rewards Can Backfire and Reduce Motivation](#) ^[3]

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overjustification_effect

[2] http://www.psychwiki.com/wiki/The_Overjustification_Effect

[3] <http://www.spring.org.uk/2009/10/how-rewards-can-backfire-and-reduce-motivation.php>