

Vessels and Zombies:

The Effect of Extrinsic Motivations on Satisfaction and Productivity

Alice Pearl

Writing 50

Dr. Gina Vallis

October 26, 2009

ABSTRACT

Extrinsic rewards often have a major influence on the activities and goals that individuals choose to pursue. This paper examines how individuals value extrinsic rewards and what effect this emphasis has on their satisfaction level and productivity. Specifically, it discusses how extrinsic rewards are used in modern culture in regards to the fields of education and careers. The results showed that activities undertaken for extrinsic rewards typically resulted in less satisfying and less productive work, findings that held true even if the activity in question was by nature intrinsic (play). In addition, today's society highly emphasizes extrinsic motivators and, as such, students and employees are losing interest and satisfaction in their respective fields. Due to these conditions, they are experiencing negative emotional and mental symptoms as well as decreased productivity and creativity. The presentation of this concept showcases the need for the encouragement of and social acceptance of promoting intrinsic interest, beginning in education and translating into the workplace.

Every decision in an individual's life is influenced by multiple factors, from both the personality of the individual as well as the outside world. The influence of outside factors can be found in the idea of work: that is, doing something that one does not necessarily want to do for an outside reward. Work is typically morally obligated, something someone needs to do in order to make money and advance in a way that does not break the law. While these ideas are commonly accepted, there is also the idea that individuals should have a job in which he or she does what they love. If work is doing something one is obligated to do for an external reward, and doing what you love is done for its internal rewards, then by definition these beliefs cannot be reconciled. In today's society the emphasis placed on doing "work" is often chosen over the idea of doing something that one loves. This is usually a practice instilled early on in an individual's life.

Since work can be understood as something that is undertaken for a purpose other than internal satisfaction, then play can be understood as doing something for its enjoyment and internal value. Work and play are opposites by definition: work is something that others force you to do and play is doing what you want (Graham, 2006). It is commonly understood that play, doing something enjoyable, is not productive, while work is. These ideas of work and recreation (play) were capitalized on by the US government in order to make workers more productive by offering them the external rewards of recreation time and money. This distinction between work and play soon translated into all aspects of individuals lives, beginning in schools and extending into careers, and can be further understood through the idea of extrinsic (work) and intrinsic (play) rewards.

However, this distinction is not always clear-cut and often times determining

whether something is extrinsically or intrinsically motivated depends on the situation. On the surface, intrinsic value is defined as doing something for its inherent value/pleasure, and extrinsic value is defined as doing something for its external/imposed rewards.

However, the reality of the definition is much more complicated. By this definition extrinsic rewards would include grades, money, fame, security, approval, and social acceptance. Intrinsic rewards would include the satisfaction of curiosity, being of service, loving what you do, being good at what you do, personal satisfaction, and pleasure.

However, sometimes these motivators can overlap, such as when being a firefighter has an intrinsic reward, being of service, and extrinsic rewards, such as a paycheck and social approval. To further complicate matters, sometimes a motivator can begin as one type and become another type. For example, sometimes a student wanting to do well in school begins as an extrinsic motivator for parental approval, but becomes an internal motivator when the student begins to take pleasure in seeing herself as smart. A final way that the definition can be complicated is when a motivator can be both internal and external, such as social recognition-which is extrinsic due to its approval factor, and intrinsic due to its effect on how the individual self-identifies. Due to these complications surrounding the issue, and though most motivators are clear-cut, it is necessary to examine the situation and individual to determine which type of motivator received the most weight in any one decision.

Since extrinsic motivators play such a large role in individuals' lives, this paper will explore not only the effects of valuing extrinsic rewards over intrinsic ones in terms of individual satisfaction, but also how this value affects productivity and learning capacity. In particular, it will focus on the effect this value system has on individuals in

the fields of education and careers. In order to determine the origin of this system in response to the former subject, it is necessary to examine the early stages of an individual's education.

One of the places where the dependence on extrinsic motivators is highly prevalent is in the field of education. There is a great deal of importance attached to how students develop to use extrinsic rewards because "it is impossible to separate successful learning from healthy development" (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008). The field of education presents a sharp dichotomy between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators when it asks students to both learn for a grade or teacher/parental approval, and yet still retain interest in the subject. Students are expected to memorize and then retrieve information on command, regardless of their interest or effort in studying the subject; it is their ability to regurgitate information that is rewarded. Students are considered empty receptacles, and "the more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are" (Freire, 1997). However, that idea presents the power relationship between student and teacher as "all knowing" and "all ignorant," respectively, not only stating that the teacher has no room for improvement, but also stating that everything the students know or can surmise for themselves is insignificant when compared to what the teacher deems important for them to learn. This forced introduction to a subject removes all the genuine experience, and thus interest, in a subject.

This reliance on extrinsic rewards diminishes anything that the student might have found intrinsically enjoyable about it. This claim can find support in the results of a study in which some students played because they wanted to while others were told to play for an external reward. Students who played for the reward engaged in hurried and less

productive play, and at the end they felt less satisfaction from the play (Loveland & Olley, 1979). Therefore even activities that are by definition done for their intrinsic value (play) can be made less enjoyable and less productive by the institution of extrinsic rewards.

Despite these findings, extrinsic rewards are still used as the main incentive for studying in the educational system. The best example of this is the grading system. Grades are a prime example of extrinsic rewards building on each other and thus becoming stronger and stronger motivators until it becomes virtually impossible to value the intrinsic reasons for studying something over its extrinsic value. Grades themselves are not necessarily a strong extrinsic motivator- the letter on the paper is insignificant without the other extrinsic motivators behind it giving it tremendous value. The most common extrinsic motivators associated with grades can be broken down into approval, improved self-image, and financial rewards. The approval that comes with grades includes instructors and other students thinking you are smart, hard working, and doing well. Pretty soon, being smart and getting good grades is so rewarded that you want to continue doing it and it becomes a part of your identity. This notion reinforces the idea of doing well but not necessarily doing what you love. All classes begin to look the same, merely as opportunities to do well, and the student soon has a hard time deciding which subjects he or she enjoyed for the material.

Grades can also have the opposite effect. If students don't receive good grades they often feel stupid and stop trying, even if they could have untapped potential. These self-labels often carry over into work, where a higher belief in one's abilities leads to higher levels of work success, thus dooming students who do not do well under the

grading system (Judge & Hurst, 2008). Often parents will offer financial rewards as incentives for grades. The student gets good grades and in return they get most of the creature comforts they desire. Soon they begin to see it as part of a contract- “I do well in school, and you go to work to support me.” These socially prescribed motivations for doing well produce the potential for total anxiety, interference, and lack of confidence, whereas self-imposed intrinsic reasons for doing things often boost confidence and satisfaction (Stoeber, Feast, & Hayward, 2009). Therefore, extrinsic rewards can often have negative effects on an individual’s belief in her self-worth, as well as the potential for negative mental and emotional effects. Even when students get good grades they often feel insecure and unsatisfied, despite the fact that, according to the grade, they learned and mastered the material.

Perhaps the biggest motivator behind getting good grades is having the ability to go to a good college. Attending a good college means a good job, a good job means a high-paying job, and a high-paying job means early retirement with lots of material possessions. The extrinsic motivators behind this decision are very strong because they include both social acceptance and financial reasons. The social acceptance factor behind this decision is the better grades you get, the more prestigious college you attend, and the shock and awe accompanied by the information that you got into Harvard is certainly worth all the time and effort. Financial motivation arises from the idea that individuals, through a good education, can get a higher paying job later in life.

However, a major problem with the reliance on extrinsic motivators as the reasons behind going to college is that by then, students are supposed to choose a major-an area of study which they particularly like and are interested enough in to study for the next

four years. The packaging of the graded education removes the genuine experience of the information and reduces the student to being unable to recognize her own creativity and ideas (Walker, 1954). Students have not been trained to focus on what interests them, so most make this decision like they have all the others: based on extrinsic motivators. They examine which majors will offer lucrative careers, which majors will not require an overly demanding amount of work, and which majors will elicit respect from their fellow students and potential employers. Those few students who are lucky enough to know what they want to do because they are intrinsically motivated by their enjoyment or interest in a field often cannot choose that major due to extrinsic influences. These influences include the pressure to find work after school, pressure from parents who pay for school, and a worry that they should not study something simply because they enjoy it.

Unfortunately, the education system is one that does not promote true or genuine learning because students only retain information for as long as they need it, basically until they are tested and can achieve the extrinsic reward. It does not promote enjoyment, for by the time students are asked to enjoy their studies they no longer know how. This lack of enjoyment and true learning is made clear when students are told to read novels for class. Often students are asked to read works of great importance and value which were greatly held in awe by the first people who willingly read them. However, being forced to read causes the novel to lose any genuine interest or knowledge it could have held for the student, who is instead focused on how many pages she has left to read and which details are going to be on the test. Thus, the extrinsic reward of doing well on the test will dissipate and the intrinsic value, which could have caused the novel to be greatly

esteemed by the reader, is never realized. Once the extrinsic reward runs out, whether it be getting good grades or doing well on a test, the reward eventually dies out and people are stuck in the equally extrinsically motivated field of work and careers.

The word career is often used synonymous with work, which as demonstrated earlier is a duty performed to achieve a specific reward. However, a career is different from a job in that a job is “how I make my living” and a career is “what I am.” Thus, the idea of a job in itself is that a job is by definition an extrinsic motivator, something that you do purely for its extrinsic value. A career, however, has elements of both intrinsic and extrinsic values: extrinsic because it is a financial enterprise and intrinsic because it plays into people’s views of their identity and how they see themselves. However, simply because a job is usually held as a way to support oneself and others does not mean that all jobs are interchangeable, nor that all people in that job contribute to or feel as equally satisfied in their work. A job can become a career when a person places an intrinsic value on his or her profession and sees it as a part of his or her identity. Those who choose a job that they are interested in typically are more satisfied and productive in the workplace, and thus the job becomes, from an individual’s point of view, a career.

Regardless of whether individuals consider their work a job or career, productivity is important to work because a more productive employee is a better employee. Studies examining how to make employees more productive discovered that by getting employees more involved in the workplace and stimulating creativity employees would become more productive (Pun, Chin, & Gill, 2001). Employers hoped that this creativity would stimulate interest and curiosity, one of the key intrinsic motivators, realizing that the intrinsic motivation was more motivating than any extrinsic

reward they could offer. Extensive studies explored the tools used by both the company and its management in stimulating interest solely through extrinsic rewards (Diamond, 2000). However, the use of extrinsic motivators cannot encourage employees to want to do a good job; in fact, the emphasis on the importance of the job's external value can sometimes have an opposite effect. This idea of behaviorism, being "paid for performance," often backfires and leads to decreased productivity, as well as a lack of motivation to do well at work (Kohn, 1993). If employers stimulated intrinsic motivators, employees would become more concerned with doing interesting work and less with how much they will be receiving in their paycheck. This is in the individual's as well as the company's best interest, since the employee is interested and the company gets a more productive employee.

In fact, intrinsic motivators, such as providing a service, loving what you do, and being good at what you do, all play an important part in job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is important not only for its positive effects on the individual but also because employees that are satisfied perform better, care more about their job and are more willing to sacrifice for the good of the company. Companies often turn to management to inspire such satisfaction. Although good management can encourage individuals to perform better, the employees are only working hard out of respect for the manager (Dinkmeyer, 1996). While this can increase performance, managers can be transferred or can choose to leave. In the event that the manager does stay, she can only motivate the employees for so long until her approval becomes an extrinsic reward, and the effects of her approval are diminished. Therefore, while other factors can encourage productivity, they do not maximize the same potential as intrinsic rewards.

This emphasis on extrinsic rewards causes problems not only for individual satisfaction and productivity but also for how society views different workers. Since the main form of extrinsic rewards in jobs and careers is money, individuals who make less money are often viewed as part of a lower class. The jobs held by this class are often seen as easier, and the people as easily replaceable, which leads to certain members of society enjoying undeserved extrinsic rewards while others bear a heavy burden (Halttunen & Perry, 1998). This creates a stratified society in which the goal of individuals is to enter into the top tiers of this system, and the way to accomplish this is to make the most money. This desire for social approval and financial stability are both extrinsic rewards that often become the main focus of employees. If the individual does manage to advance, they often are not interested in the work they do because it is merely a stepping stone to prestige. If an individual's goal is to be successful and rich then it is difficult to know when to stop because the goal, whether it is money or power, is the only thing keeping the individual motivated. This further undermines the intrinsic potential of the job, and thus the satisfaction of the individual and productivity in the workplace.

Jobs with the highest level of job satisfaction often rely heavily on intrinsic motivators. These include being of service, feeling as if the work one does is valuable, which makes the individual in turn feel valuable, being good at what one does, and earning praise and respect. Being good at what you do as an intrinsic motivation is one of the few carried over from the grading system, in which people tend to do things which garner them praise and success. This praise makes them feel good about themselves, a feeling they will work hard to ensure continues. However, these jobs also offer the extrinsic rewards that individuals crave. This shows that while extrinsic rewards

generally undermine intrinsic value, if the job is undertaken for intrinsic reasons and happens to have extrinsic value, individuals can still be happy and productive-meaning that extrinsic rewards are important, but it is necessary to have some kind of intrinsic reward. Extrinsic rewards usually found in an externally motivating job typically include job security, social acceptance, and financial stability. However, most individuals feel morally obligated to pretend they are happy in their jobs and therefore they tell themselves they are (Graham, 2006). This presents problems because the job is still extrinsically motivated by the aforementioned factors, only now the individual is convincing herself that she is or should be happy, which can lead to resentment at having to fake enjoyment.

Society values external motivators but expects individuals to find intrinsic rewards in the activity as well, an ideal that is typically a conundrum. The solution is to take a job based on its intrinsic values, and the productivity caused by such motivation will typically pave the way to extrinsic rewards, such as financial security. Careers that combine both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards offer the greatest job satisfaction and thus the greatest productivity among their workers. The reason individuals crave such extrinsic rewards as well as intrinsic may be because individuals were trained from grade school about the importance of such external rewards so they feel the need to fulfill them. The cycle of productivity and satisfaction is an ever-increasing one as individuals are satisfied by being productive and supplying a good product. Thus, while some individuals are happy with their jobs, it is important to take a job for the intrinsic value it offers because the intrinsic value will always remain. Often, intrinsic rewards pave the way for extrinsic rewards.

Occasionally extrinsic motivators can have positive effects. An example of this is when high school dropouts choose to return to school because they believe that society looks down on them (Sloan, 2008). In this case, the extrinsic motivator of social approval encouraged productivity by causing people to get an education and then get good jobs. However, this was also intrinsically motivated by the desire to have a positive self-identity. Therefore, while extrinsic rewards can encourage productivity, the satisfaction from the activity stems from its intrinsic nature. Consequently, doing activities solely for an extrinsic reward has negative effects on satisfaction and productivity as well as self-image and confidence. It is not always possible to do things strictly for intrinsic rewards, but it is important to try and find an intrinsic motivation in every activity undertaken in order to ensure personal satisfaction and a job well done.

References

- Diamond, Robert M. (2000). *Recognizing faculty work : reward systems for the year*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Press.
- Dinkmeyer, Don C. (1996). *Leadership by encouragement*. Delray Beach: St. Lucie Press.
- Freire, Paulo. (1970). *The Banking concept of education*. Retrieved November 3, 2009, from <http://faculty.dwc.edu/wellman/Friere.htm>
- Graham, Paul. (2006). *How to Do what you love*. Retrieved November 10, 2009 from <http://www.paulgraham.com/love.html#3f>
- Halttunen, K., & Perry, L. (1998). *Moral Problems in American Life: New Essays on Cultural History* (Halttunen, Karen, Ed.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Judge, T. A. & Hurst, C. (2008). How the rich (and happy) get richer (and happier): Relationship of core self-evaluations to trajectories in attaining work success. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(4), 849-63.
- Kohn, Alfie. (1993) *Punished By Rewards : the trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A's, praise, and other bribes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Loveland, K. & Olley, J. (1979). The Effect of External Reward on Interest and Quality of Task Performance in Children of High and Low Motivation. *Child Development*, 50(4), 1207-1210.
- Percy, Walker. (1954). *The Loss of the creature*. Retrieved October 25, 2009 from <http://www.thinkingtogether.org/rcream/archive/old/S2005/Comp/percy.pdf>
- Pun, K., Chin, K., & Gill, R. (2001). Determinants of Employee Involvement Practices in Manufacturing Enterprises. *Total Quality Management*, 12(1), 95-109.

Schunk, D. H., and Zimmerman, B. J. (2008). *Motivation and self-regulated learning : theory, research, and applications*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Sloan, Omideh Kathleen. (2008). The role of social motivation on high school dropouts' decisions to return to school as adults (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (AAT 3316498)

Stober, J., Feast, & Hayward, J. (2009). Self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism: differential relationships with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and test anxiety. *Personality & Individual Differences*, 47(5), 423-428.