

# A Different Perspective on Self-Determination Theory: A Suggestion

Vaezi M and Shahgholian M\*

Department of Psychology, University of Kharazmi, Iran

\*Corresponding author: Mahnaz Shahgholian, Department of Psychology, University of Kharazmi, Tehran, Iran, Email: mshahgholian@khu.ac.ir

Received Date: November 28, 2024; Published Date: December 10, 2024

## Introduction

According to the self-determination theory [1,2], humans are innately and intrinsically motivated to turn to activities that are interesting, optimally challenging, and inherently satisfying. This theory assumes that meeting fundamental psychological needs (e.g., autonomy or independence, competence, and relatedness or connection) is necessary for motivation, efficient internalization of behaviors, psychological development, coherence, and well-being. The need for autonomy refers to experiencing a sense of choice, confirmation and power to initiate, continue, and terminate behavior. The need for competence addresses feeling of effective in interacting with the physical and social world, and the need for coherence indicates receiving attention, intimacy in interactions, and acquiring a general sense of belonging and dependency [2].

Accordingly, Deci EL, et al. [1] divides this construct into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with respect to different objectives and reasons for embarking on an action. The

paramount distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is that the manifestation of some behaviors in intrinsic motivation is due to their innate attractiveness and pleasure, while engagement in activities in extrinsic motivation is rooted in their different outcomes. Put differently, they are accomplished not because they are interesting and attractive but because they accompany outcomes sought by the individual. According to this theory, humans are born with intrinsic motivations, which become extrinsic during the development process, and sometimes, extrinsic motivations change into motivation. The shift from intrinsic motivation to extrinsic is an inevitable process that, willingly or unwillingly, takes place more or less.

Based on the self-determination theory, motivation can be considered a continuum (a horizontal vector) from intrinsic to extrinsic motivation and, finally, to a motivation. Figure 1 illustrates this linear model. It seems that such a continuum can statistically be regarded as an X=a vector (here, X denotes motivation).

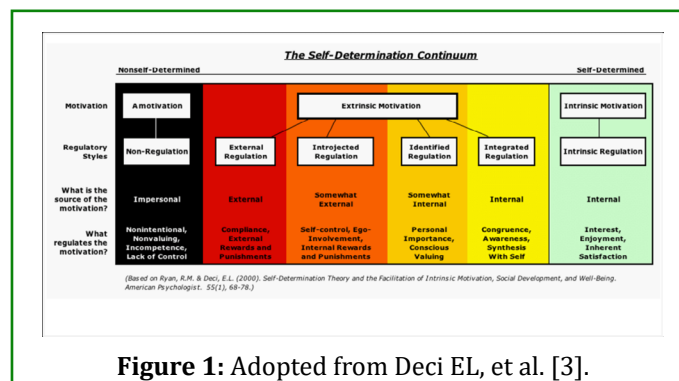
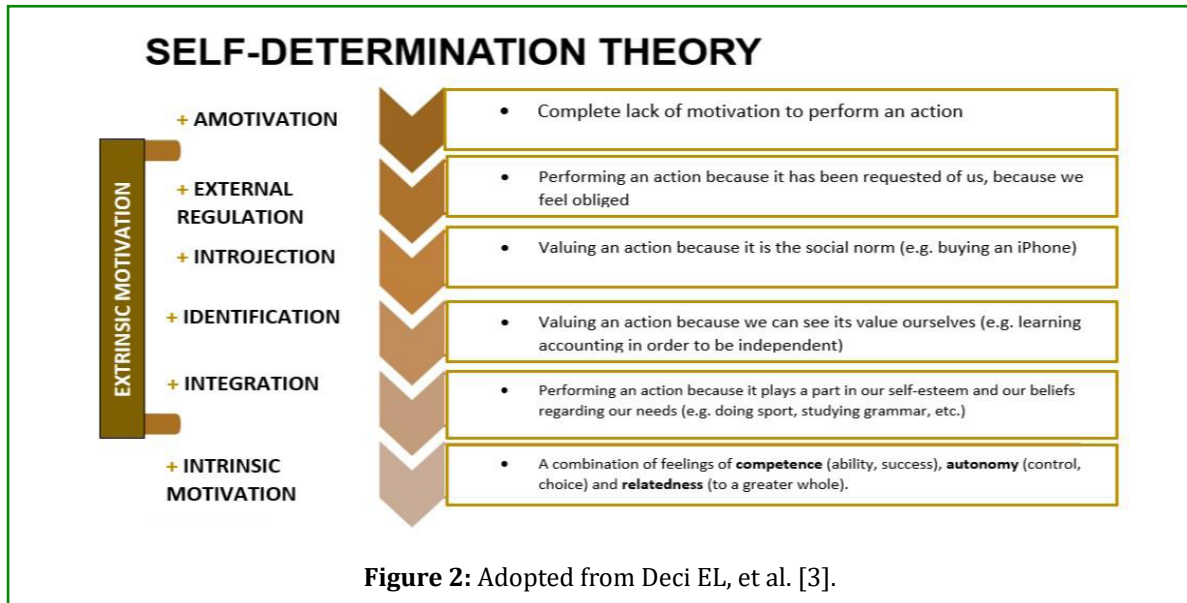


Figure 1: Adopted from Deci EL, et al. [3].

Figure 2 displays the discussed continuum vertically from a different aspect.



In Deci and Ryan's theory, motivation is considered a horizontal or vertical vector over time (the development process). On this vector, the individual moves from intrinsic to extrinsic motivation with four integrative, identified, interjected, and external regulation levels and finally reaches a motivation. How journeying on this trajectory can be decelerated or prevented and how one can travel in an opposite direction, i.e., from a motivation to external motivations, have long been favoured by the advocates of this theory and targeted by researchers in this domain.

The authors of this manuscript suggest adding another vector, namely the rate of consumed energy, to the current vector depicting motivation levels. Traveling from a motivation to intrinsic motivation requires not only dominating inner resistors, recognized as sluggish cognitive tempo and psychological inertia, but also overcoming external resistors identifiable in individuals' living environment and their relationships with others and the world. Since individuals 1) inevitably consume energy and overcome internal and external resistors to proceed in the self-regulation path, 2) experience a motivation in the zero condition with no effort and energy expenditure, perhaps except for survival-pertained cases, and 3) should use high volumes of energy, reasoning, and effort to reach intrinsic motivation, it seems that reviewing the concept of inertia can help elucidate the subject. According to Newton's first law of motion, an object at rest remains inertial, and a moving object continues its movement if not influenced by an external force. The term inertia in Newtonian physics reflects the fact that in the absence of external resistors, a moving object goes on moving in the same direction. Inspired by Newtonian physics, we can employ this term as a metaphor to describe characteristics

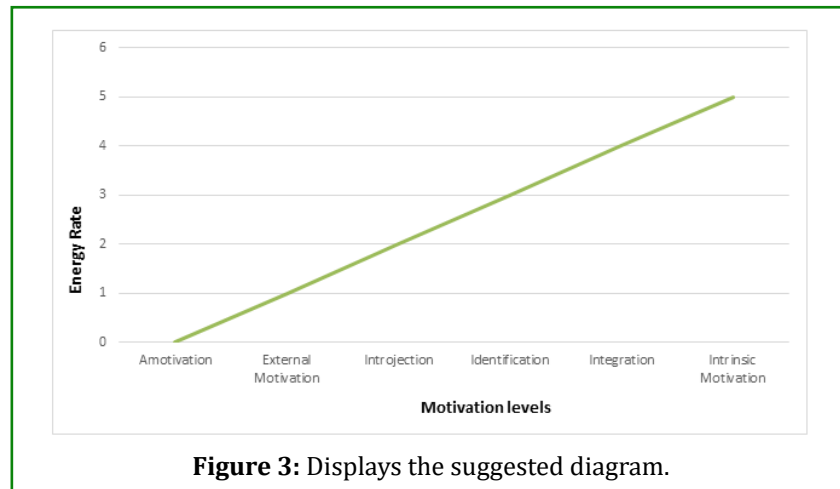
associated with human behavior.

According to the law of psychological inertia, individuals tend to maintain the current condition if not compelled by psychological motivations to alter it. Simply stated, the possibility of improvement may supply the necessary motivation to encourage individuals to change their current condition [4]. As resistance to changes, psychological inertia is an affective human trait by which individuals preserve their direction until an external force is imported. Here, "external" indicates not just something derived from the environment but any impact from other complex interwoven systems [5]. The relationship between inertia and the energy it requires to be overcome during an intervention has been estimated by a model where in  $P_e$  is the inertia vector,  $t$  is intervention vector, and  $||t||$  is the treatment energy. Thus,  $T_o$  is the intervention output obtained by the following formula:  $T_o = ||t|| + ||P_e|| \cos \theta$ , Where  $\theta$  is the angle of vectors  $t$  and  $P_e$ .

Inertia is the decision of a tendency to repeat previous selections (independent of the outcome) and can give rise to insisting on non-optimal alternatives [6]. Inertia has also been described as a disposition to maintain assumptions by repeating a decision (or indecisiveness). One can determine the psychological inertia of a behavior by examining the perceived value of a terminated behavior and not by observing the current behavior [7]. Motivation is the force that changes behavior. When the time for change comes, (sometimes unconsciously) we realize that we are about to face loss, anomaly, inadequacy, uncertainty, confusion, and conflict. With these perceptions of reality, resistance seems completely rational.

Considering what was explained, the authors suggest designing the direction of movement from a motivation to intrinsic motivation in a positively sloped manner. In line

with this objective, the notable point is that the motivation continuum (Y) is better considered a function of force (X).



Indeed, we can assume a linear equation like  $Y=f(X)$ , according to which motivation is a function of consumed energy. Nonetheless, it seems that we should not consider the motivation continuum as a unidimensional vector.

The present manuscript may appear very strange to many. However, it can prompt further investigation and critique of the self-determination theory. It is evident that results in the motivation domain are promoted desirably only when the theories associated with this construct are examined and creatively developed. This manuscript was an effort to view the self-determination theory more inclusively and present more efficient methods for individuals' motivation. The authors will welcome any feedback in this respect.

## References

1. Deci EL, Ryan RM (1985) Intrinsic motivation and selfdetermination in human behavior. Plenum Press, New York.
2. Deci EL, Ryan RM (2002) Handbook of self-determination research. University of Rochester Press, New York.
3. Deci EL, Ryan RM (2000) The "What" and "Why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry* 11(4): 227-268.
4. Gal D (2006) A psychological law of inertia and the illusion of loss aversion. *Judgment and Decision Making* 1(1): 23-32.
5. Bornas X, Noguera M, Pincus D, Buéla-Casal G (2014) Emotional inertia: A key to understanding psychotherapy process and outcome. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology* 14(3): 232-239.
6. Alos-Ferrer C, Hugelschafer S, Li J (2016) Inertia and Decision Making. *Front Psychology* 7: 169.
7. Deemer ED, Derosa PA, Duhon SA, Dotterer AM (2021) Psychological Momentum and Inertia: Toward a Model of Academic Motivation. *Journal of Career Development* 48(3): 275-289.