

MBA WINNER

Self-determination theory: What is it? How is it used by organizations? How can employees motivate themselves through it? What are the limitations of the theory itself?

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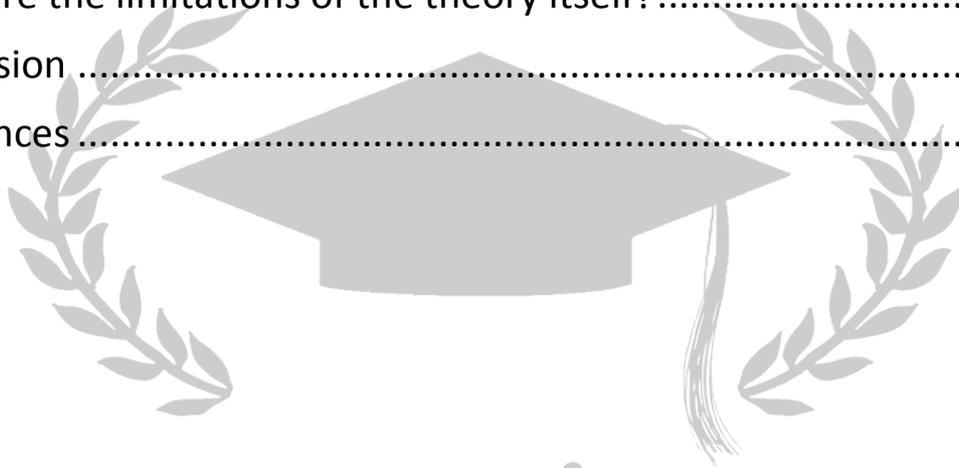
SELF DETERMINATION THEORY



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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Self-determination Theory	5
How can employees motivate themselves through it?	6
What are the limitations of the theory itself?	8
Conclusion	10
References	11



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Introduction

This assignment investigates the case of self-determination theory (Chirkov et al., 2003). It examines how it is used by organizations. Moreover, how and why employees can motivate themselves through it. The assignment also examines the theory's limitations. The first part of the assignment offers a brief overview of self-determination theory itself. This section suggests that the theory offers a cognitive interpretive framework of decision making based on the conception of individual perceptions (Kuvaas, 2008). The constitution of individual needs and goals are important constructs for understanding how motivation and determination are created in the mind of the individual (Latham and Pinder, 2005). The second part examines how employees can use the principle of self-determination for themselves and in order to benefit it from its principles within the working environment. This section suggests that self-determination is heavily regulated by the constitution of self-visualisation, an exercise that enables employees to perceive a situation and its outcomes differently and during different periods (Lunnan and Haugland, 2008). The final section discusses the theory's limitations. It suggests that this, theory does not account for the reflexive and interpretive practices with which opportunities and obstacles are interpreted. It offers a rationalistic explanation of goals based on purpose and the will for attainment. However, it does not account how and why specific thought-processes carry a deeper impact on the individual's experiences and in light of one's life circumstances. The study of self-determination theory constitutes an important area of study for understanding individual dispositions of behaviour in the work place (Pelletier et al., 2001). Challenges and opportunities remain a daily reality to which individuals need to make decisions. Hence, understanding

thought-process can remain crucial for interpreting human behaviour at work.

Self-determination Theory

Self-determination theory emerged as a reaction to the behaviourist approach where human behaviour was thought to be determined by the changing conditions in the environment (Vansteenkiste, et al., 2008). Bandura (1986, 1997) suggested that cognitive and emotional processes remains important for understanding how the individual is seeking to regulate the environment according to his/her needs. Hence, self-determination theory emerged from the belief that the development of human motivation is dependent on cognitive and emotional processes with which the individual is able to make decisions about a given set of circumstances. Bandura's (1993, 2000) efficacy theory provided an organized framework for understanding the relationship between the individual and the environment. He suggested that human decision making is regulated by one's perception of end-outcome and the perceived capacity to attain them.

Even though the individual might not have actual evidence of his/her capacity for achieving a desired outcome, Bandura (1997) argued that cognitive processes provide a neglected dimension about one's identification when facing a challenge. Bandura (2000) suggested that behaviour is not conditioned by the environment as initially thought. Instead, the individual is conditioning the environment depending on his way of perceiving his capabilities in relation to the difficulties for attaining an outcome. This argument offered a new understanding on the development of human capability and the individual determination for pursuing a course of action. Following Bandura's work additional emphasis was placed on the constitution of the personal values and their

emergent (Engelen and Brettel, 2011). Put differently, the development of self-determination is argued to depend on the capacity to legitimise a course of action despite difficulties and obstacles the individual is facing. Additional research paid attention to the management of emotions (Patrick et al., 2007) but also to the somatic reactions generated from stress, fear and anxiety. Studies done on cases of phobia in the context of technology indicated that individuals are hesitant to utilise advanced methods of computing because of the fear of failure (Bandura, 1993). Such studies indicated that people exert a creative role on the management of their emotions and for influencing their thinking. Moreover, stereotypes and biases in the context of one's early experience showed to have a drastic effect on whether the individual is able to overcome future challenges in the workplace (Lui and Ngo, 2004).

It is argued by Van der Hijde and Van der Hident (2006) that a current and dynamic conceptualisation of self-determination theory is still missing in the literature and for how it affects human behaviour in the workplace. Vansteenkiste, Lens and Deci (2006) argue that managers are viewed as the principle organizational members capable of providing direction and purpose in the organization. Pursuing a set of goals is interpreted as the result of ongoing support and the interpersonal relationship the individual develops with the community of workers. However, Wittekind, Raeder and Grote (2010) suggest that further research is needed in order to understand how employees make use of their own experiences in the workplace and seek to attain objectives by altering their perception of a situation.

[How can employees motivate themselves through it?](#)

The use of self-determination theory can be used for motivating the employees themselves in three ways. The first way concerns the

management of expectations. According to Vroom (1994) the management of expectations concerns the way individuals envisage specific outcomes resulting from their actions. A change of expectations does not undermine the members' capability for action. Instead, it underlines the cognitive processes with which projections are made by individuals for what they seek to achieve and how. Expectancy theory helps illustrate how self-determination is dependent on how end-goals are set and how they are contrasted with the individuals' perceived capabilities (Wittekind, Raeder and Grote, 2010). This means that organizational members need to become reflective on which organizational objectives they expect to achieve and how these are determined. Baard, et al., (2004) suggest that members often experience disappointment in the organization because they do not challenge or/and filter how managerial expectations are communicated onto them. By adopting a set of ideals as envisaged by other members, employees can run the risk of experiencing the 'burndown syndrome' (Kuvaas, 2008). This syndrome is defined as the experience of exhaustion after continuous and repetitive efforts for achieving a particular outcome. Hence, employees need to monitor the emergence of expectation as they are generated by their own superiors but also by their own selves (Latham and Pinder, 2005).

A second way of creating self-determination concerns the development of self-capabilities that can enable the individual to meet existing experience and skills-gap (Patrick et al., 2007). Lunnan and Haugland, 2008) argue that the development of capacity-building requires access to resources. Such resource might not be directly available but can become accessible by the employees. Baard, Deci, and Ryan (2004) argue for how the attainment but also negotiation of resources can

constitute the first step for accessing a self-determination capacity. This view is also supported by Bandura's theory (1993, 1997) who argues for the progressive development of momentum and how expectation meeting carries a dynamic effect. This means that by meeting small goals employees can feel determination for achieving bigger goals with the result of creating a cycle of similar expectations.

The third way is the management of emotions through the management of self-reflexion. Self-reflectivity is discussed in the literature as a key component for developing self-awareness. That is, awareness about the situation but also about one's self. Chrikov et al (2003) suggest that reflexivity is crucial for the development of self-determination because it forces the individual to identify his/her perceived and actual capabilities. The management of emotions is a key prerequisite for exerting reflexivity as self-determination remains always socially contingent.

[What are the limitations of the theory itself?](#)

According to Vansteenkiste, Lens and Deci (2006) Latham and Pinder (2005) the limitations of self-determination theory concern the role of individual experiences on thought development. Even though organizational members are believed to carry a strong sense of rationality with setting and pursuing goals, at the same time, it is suggested that members are subconsciously driven by emotions which are difficult to predict or manage. The management of one's prior experiences and its implications into one's life remains difficult to identify as a theoretical construct (Engelen and Bretter, 2011). This is because events have become part of the person's perception of reality and regulate his/her ongoing behaviour. Self-determination theory explains the development of one's perceived capacity as a rationalised process dependent on key

mental processes (Patrick et al., 2007). However, this view emphasises an almost cause-effect relationship that does not account for the complexities of human behaviour. Hence, a key limitation of the self-determination theory is explaining how and why key emotions interact with specific thought processes and for generating specific behavioural outcomes. Moreover, how decisions can affect the perceived state of one's well-being (Pelletier, et al., 2001). Studies on employees suffering from burned down syndrome indicated that the experience of one's critical incidents have had a dramatic impact on changing one's perception. For example, Van der Hijden (2002) and Wittekind, Raeder and Grote (2010) examined the case of longitudinal commitment in employees. They identified the close relationship between self-determination and commitment because of the ongoing presence of one's wellbeing in the organization. This means that members are not necessarily looking for jobs that offer the highest salaries but jobs that offer a combination of interpersonal and environmental factors that can exert a sense of reward and recognition on their efforts. A complimentary limitation to the theory concerns the collective behaviour of the community of workers and how it can impact on the individual's perception of competence and determination (Chirkov et al., 2003). Even though studies have focused on what the individual can accomplished little is known about the interactive relationship between the individual and members as a collective body. Research by Vansteenkiste, et al (2008) and Kuvaas (2008) demonstrate that the internalisation of external objectives is dependent on socialisation. Paradigms of thinking are subconsciously adopted by members in the organization with the result of seeking to exert power onto others. This is a theme not sufficiently addressed in current research. Hence, a limitation of the theory is how and why the individual

can challenge accounts of self-determination found in others or encourage others to develop determination when they are lacking it.

Conclusion

This assignment examined the case of self-determination theory, its relevance to organizations and how employees can use it for themselves. The assignment argued that self-determination theory is highly relevant in the current literature for understanding how motivation is created within the individual (Patrick et al (2007)). The theory proposes that goal setting remains a cognitive and emotional process where the individual is perceived as capable of regulating the environment. Bandura (1993, 1997) remains a seminal contributor for understanding the role of self-efficacy and how behaviour is self-led according to cognitive projections. The assignment identified that a key limitation of this theory concerns the management of emotions and critical incidents in one's life history that can carry unpredictable dispositions onto human behaviour (Pelletier et al 2001). Moreover, the theory remains limited in explaining the collective effect of organizational members on one's individual's behaviour. Hence, further research is required for investigating how and why individual perceptions of determination are regulated in the context of collective interpretations of determination and as these are contained in the implicit/explicit behaviours of the other members (Kuvaas, 2008).

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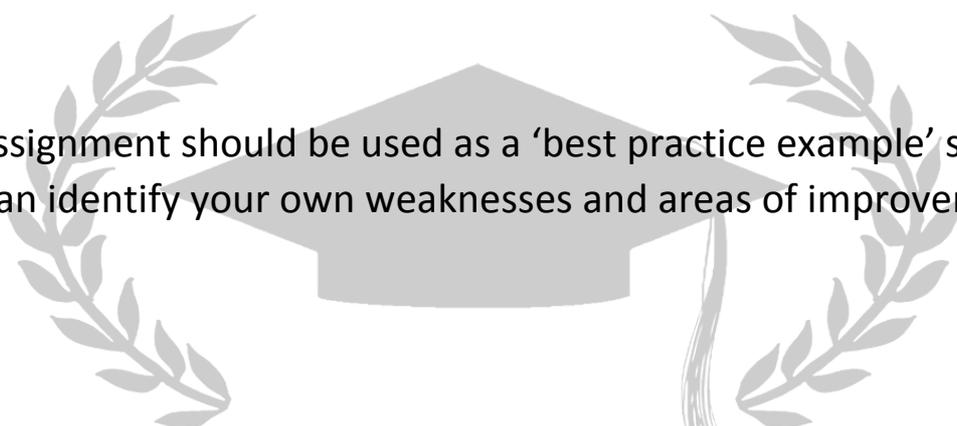


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