What Motivates You? Feeling Good, Feeling Right, or Both?

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What Motivates You? Feeling Good, Feeling Right, or Both?*

This study examined factors that influence motivation during goal pursuit. Hedonic experience has a motivational effect on goal pursuit. This subjective experience encompasses the pains or pleasures of the goal, or the “feeling good” aspect. However, there must be more to motivation during goal pursuit. In addition to feeling good about the goal pursuit or its outcome, a growing literature demonstrates that “feeling right” (i.e., regulatory fit), within the manner in which one pursues a goal, can also motivate goal pursuits. Thus, this study examined whether hedonic experience and regulatory fit have independent or interactive influences on motivation during goal pursuit. There are two types of motivational orientations: a promotion orientation that focuses on ideals and aspirations, which in the context of a goal pursuit heightens sensitivity to potential accomplishments, and positives that signal goal pursuit progress. By comparison, a prevention orientation focuses on duties and obligations, which in the context of goal pursuit heighten sensitivity to obstacles and potential losses that signal impediments to goal pursuit progress. Importantly, distinct regulatory orientations also dictate which goal pursuit means are more effective for goal attainment. A promotion orientation promotes eager means, which creates fit by sustaining the orientation, while a prevention orientation encourages vigilant means. Regulatory fit enhances motivation, performance, value, and enjoyment.

We also examined whether regulatory fit – which results from consistency between one’s motivational orientations and means – occurs when self-construals are considered as motivational orientations. There are two main self-views, or construals, that people hold. An independent self-construal is characterized by distinctiveness and autonomy of the self from others and is commonly demonstrated by those in Western cultures. An interdependent self-construal emphasizes a harmonious connection and obligation to a larger group of people, which encompasses a value for belonging. This type of self-construal is commonly encouraged by East Asian cultures. Research on these self-construals suggests they are one mechanism underlying cultural variations in cognition, emotion, and behavior. Research also supports that self-construal can be temporarily activated, or primed, regardless of the chronic self-construal of the individual. This study experimentally manipulated self-construal, motivational means, and hedonic experience, measured perceived performance, actual performance (speed x accuracy), and task value, and difficulty and enjoyment during goal pursuit. The results confirm that fit can be created from consistent self-construals and motivational means, which enhanced both perceived and actual performance. Additionally, the data demonstrate an interactive effect of regulatory fit and hedonic experience. When fit (nonfit) is experienced, hedonic experience is more informative when gauging the value (difficulty) of a task. Discussion will center on implications and future directions.

*This scholar and faculty mentor have requested that only an abstract be published.