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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Quested, E, Cumming, J & Duda, J 2010, 'The Nature of Motivation: A Question of 'Why?' *Music and Dance Scheme Infosheet Series*, no. 4, pp. 1-4.

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Music and Dance Scheme

Promoting health and wellbeing in young dancers and musicians

The nature of motivation: a question of 'Why?'

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Summary

To train and perform as a musician or dancer requires high levels of effort, commitment and determination. There is little doubt that it 'takes a certain something' to rehearse and train for hour upon hour, as well as bounce back after unsuccessful auditions or periods of injury. These qualities are often captured by the term 'motivation'. Motivation can be defined as the 'drive to strive' and is often inferred by the apparent effort and intensity directed towards a targeted behaviour. This infosheet explores the subject and offers strategies to sustain or improve the quality of your motivation.

When referred to in everyday speech, motivation is most often considered as a quantitative entity: the focus is on how much motivation one has. For example, in performing arts contexts, we may be able to identify artists whom we perceive as 'high' or 'low' in motivation. These judgements are usually based on what we observe at the time: for example, how well the dancer performed, or how many hours a soloist trains per week, or how 'in the moment' a pianist appears to be during the performance. However, considering motivation in terms of quantity only tells us part of the story. Motivation can also vary in terms of quality. The 'quality' aspect of motivation captures the why of behaviour, or in other words, why a dancer's performance is optimal (and how likely this is to continue!), why the soloist trains long hours and why the pianist is focused during the performance.

Why am I doing this activity?

Understanding the importance of quality motivation

To understand what is meant by 'quality motivation' we need to consider the reasons why a performer is investing time and effort in their training and performance at any one moment in time. Traditionally, motivation has been categorised as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motives to train and perform include enjoyment and the inherent satisfaction associated with the activity. Extrinsic motivators might include performing to receive payment, public prestige or an award, or because someone else tells us we must, or if we are fearful of what may happen if we do not.

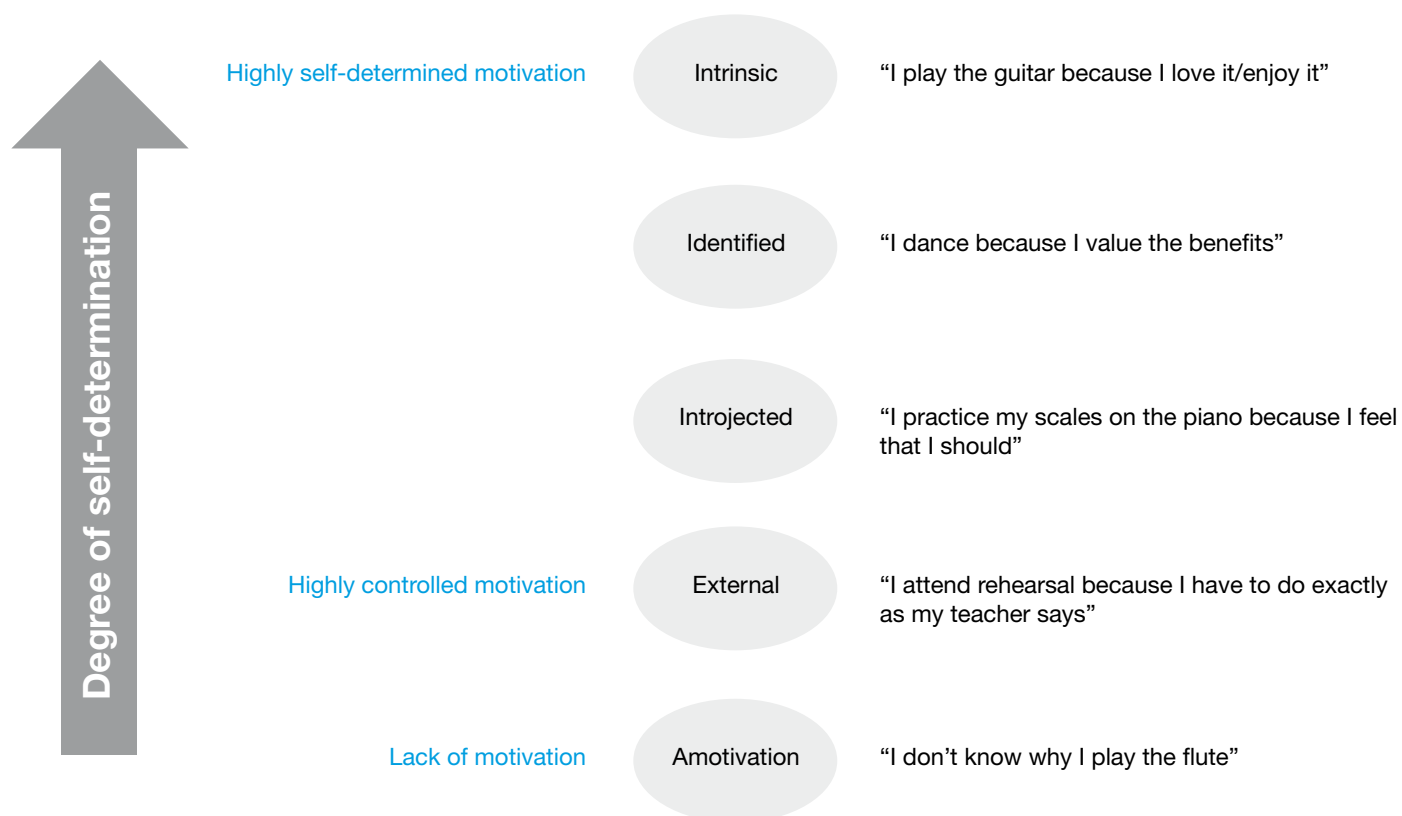
Motivational theorists recognise that in between the intrinsic and extrinsic extremes, reasons to train and perform can vary in the extent to which they are self-determined (or autonomous) or more externally controlled in respect to the impetus to participate. For example, sometimes a dancer may volitionally engage in a core conditioning exercise, not because they find the exercise particularly stimulating, but because they recognise it will make them a better performer, and consequently enable them to enjoy dance and excel as a dancer. This type of motivation is known as *identified*. On other occasions a pianist may really not feel like they want to go to rehearsals, but do not want to let down the rest of the orchestra. In circumstances like this, the pianist goes along to appease feelings of guilt that would be associated with non-attendance. This is known as *introjected* motivation.

Performers will be most likely to flourish and excel when they feel a sense of 'voice and choice'

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The diagram below illustrates a continuum of motives that vary in their degree of self-determination.



A continuum of motivation, illustrating varying degrees of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Just because a performer exhibits quantity of motivation (ie 'high' levels of motivation), this does not necessarily mean that the motivation is good quality (ie more self-determined). This distinction is important, as research tells us that the quality of motivation underpinning participation in activities such as dance and music is a key determinant of variability in outcomes associated with good health and performance. More specifically, the quality of the motivation will be an important determinant of whether the performer is maximising their potential in training, and is likely to play and perform in the long term. The quality of the motivation underpinning participation will also impact on whether engagement in dance or music enhances or distracts from the performer's wellbeing and personal growth.

Motivation and learning and performance

The traditional atmosphere in some dance and music classes can be highly authoritarian and sometimes performing artists engage in training activities primarily to avoid reprimand from the instructor. When such a controlling atmosphere predominates, performers in these classes are more likely to feel that their participation is underpinned by less self-determined and more controlled or extrinsic reasons. However, it is a common myth that for performers to reach the highest levels in their activity, training should be low in self-determination and be highly controlled. Research tells us that, regardless of whether an artist is performing in the West End or at the recreational level, they will experience better quality learning, and more fulfilling performance experiences, when motivation is more self-determined. Evidence also suggests that performers will be most likely to flourish and excel when they feel a sense of 'voice and choice', enjoy engaging in the activity and look forward to long-term participation.

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Motivation and health

For a number of years, research has indicated that quality of motivation may have implications for athletes' health and wellbeing. For example, more self-determined reasons for sport participation have been associated with athletes reporting higher self-esteem and greater vitality. Recent investigations in the dance domain have indicated that the degree of autonomy that dancers feel in relation to their dance participation may be an important determinant of the performer's physical and psychological welfare. Studies have shown that when vocational dancers sense a feeling of ownership over their dance participation, and feel that they have a voice and opportunities for choice, they are more likely to experience positive mood states and less likely to be at risk of experiencing burnout over the course of a school year. On the contrary, more controlled motivation has been found to predict dancers' anxiety about others viewing their physique.

Empower yourself with strategies for improving the quality of your motivation

For a healthy and happy career as a dancer or musician, it is important to develop strategies that are effective in sustaining or improving the quality of your motivation. Believing in yourself and feeling that you choose to participate in activities because you want to, not because you have to, are two key ingredients for personal empowerment. This will result in you not only enjoying the work you do more, but also feeling more confident and sure about your capabilities, being more focused and self-directed in your efforts.

Being empowered is a skill that you can learn, but like any new skill, you need to work at it. A good starting place is to reflect on the reasons why you are involved in dance or music. Ask yourself whether you participate for self-determined or more controlled motives, or are unsure of the reasons why you engage in dance/music anymore. If your answer is one of the latter two, consider changing your perspective by thinking about what you do value or enjoy about your participation. Make a list of the three to four self-determined reasons that come to mind and remind yourself of these routinely. Focusing on these more autonomous reasons, particularly during difficult or stressful times, will help you to maximise rather than limit your potential. This thinking pattern will lead you to invest more effort, be more curious about and interested in the work you do, and persist even when things get difficult.

Exercise:

Ask yourself, what do I value or enjoy most about this activity?

- >> 1. _____
- >> 2. _____
- >> 3. _____

Another empowering strategy is to set goals for those aspects of your performance which are primarily under your personal control to achieve. The most personally controllable types of goals tend to be those involving some process of your physical or mental performance. For example, you could set a goal to develop a new skill, refine an existing one or break an old bad habit. Regardless, these goals should be self-challenging, and provide you with real opportunities to strive for personal excellence and feel successful by the improvements you make.

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Further reading

- Duda, J.L., Cumming, J. & Balaguer, I. (2005). Enhancing athletes' self regulation, task involvement, and self determination via psychological skills training, in D. Hackfort, J.Duda & R. Lider (eds.), *Handbook of Applied Sport Psychology Research*. Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Quested E. & Duda, J.L. (2009). Setting the stage: Social-environmental and motivational predictors of optimal training experiences, *Performance Research Journal* (invited review paper for special issue 'On Training'), 14 (2), 36-45.

Effective goals follow the **SMART** principle: they should be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ddjustable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-based. It is also important to:

- >> enjoy the goals you pursue
- >> feel ownership over them
- >> avoid setting too many goals, which may spread your efforts and attention too thinly

First, decide on your priorities by first thinking about all areas of your performance, including those of the physical, psychological, technical and/or artistic nature.

Second, use this information to remind yourself of your strengths as well to set two to three **SMART** goals that will excite you and test your current limits.

Third, decide on an action plan to pursue these goals with consideration made to potential barriers you might face and strategies to overcome them.

Together, these strategies can foster a sense of personal control over your dance or music experiences and provide opportunities for you to build confidence.

Checklist for effective goal setting:

My goal is: _____

- >> *will you enjoy pursuing this goal?*
- >> *is your goal clear and well-defined?*
- >> *how will you monitor your goal progress and measure whether your goal has been achieved?*
- >> *is your goal flexible so that you can adjust it if necessary?*
- >> *will this goal challenge you, but be realistic to achieve given your current skills, potential and available resources?*
- >> *what is your deadline for achieving this goal?*

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Publication date: April 2010

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