

**Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci:**  
*Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*  
New York 2017: Guilford Press, 756 pp.

Motivation, a topic that has captured human attention for centuries, has been theorised in numerous books. During the last century two different positions of motivation theories have evolved: need (or content) theories and cognitive (or process) theories. Whereas need theories (e.g. from Maslow, Alderfer, or McClelland) focus on internal factors to explain behaviour, cognitive theories (like Vroom's expectancy theory or equity theory) make human decisions responsible for it [Pratap 2016]. This book criticises the fact that the primary concern of these dominant motivation theories is to control human behaviour instead of understanding and describing it, which is what they are aiming to. Additionally, this book distinguishes itself from others because of its different approach to motivation, considering it from the perspective of self-determination. Richard R. Ryan, a professor of clinical and social science in psychology, and Edward L. Deci, a professor of social sciences, both of whom work at the University of Rochester, argue that the extent of self-determination is responsible for the quality and persistence of our actions. This implies our volition and the degree of self-regulation that we experience. The authors, like in Maslow's idea of physiological needs, assume that three basic psychological needs are responsible for the degree of self-determination: the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

The book opens with the theoretical foundations of self-determination theory. Based on Jean Piaget's perception of organisations, Sigmund Freud's concept of the ego, and Robert W. White's idea of an independent ego, Ryan and Deci developed a notable theory over the last decades. They posit that satisfying these three basic psy-

chological needs depends on motivation, which is energised by a high level of self-determination.

The heart of this book starts in chapter six, where the authors present their theory, split up into six mini-theories, demonstrated in multiple chapters. Deci and Ryan describe intrinsic motivation as a spontaneous, natural motivation that comes from inside. In the following chapters they add different types of extrinsic motivation (integration, identification, introjection, and external regulation), distinguished by their degree of autonomy. Various examples help to explain their differentiation. The authors demonstrate, for instance, external regulation by imagining an adolescent girl who does not drink alcohol in front of her parents because they would punish her for it. In contrast, if her motivation were introjected, she would control herself (e.g. by feeling ashamed for drinking). Deci and Ryan investigate those types of motivation and confirm their assumption that competence, autonomy, and relatedness are essential for the quality of behaviour with lots of evidence—for instance, with experiments illustrating that free choice shows better performance than control, or with studies that demonstrate the influence of social environments on learning outcomes. The theory defines competence as the feeling of being able to solve tasks effectively, autonomy as a situation where behaviour is in line with someone's own interests, and relatedness as social integration, where others provide a person with the feeling of being part of them. Readers familiar with these elements of the theory can deepen their knowledge by means of mini-theories that describe the importance of social environments for motivation.

Besides a theoretical explanation of their study, the authors also provide an understanding of how their theory can be applied to different domains. Unlike other, exclusively theoretical papers, this part adds value to the book for practitioners. In

chapters thirteen to twenty-four, the authors show, for instance, the importance of autonomy-support in school environments, the possible problems of external rewards at work, or findings of cultural differences within motivated behaviour (i.e. experienced self-determination varies culturally).

I highly recommend this book, whether the reader's interest lies in exploring it as a whole or focusing on certain parts of it. Its logical structure makes it easy to follow the authors' arguments. Information from previous chapters supports the understanding of the upcoming content (e.g. learning about the types of motivation makes it easier to understand the subsequent mini-theories in the book). Their propositions are supported by numerous empirical studies that show the strength of their theory and manage to bring the authors' thoughts alive. Many years of experience in finetuning their theory have allowed Ryan and Deci to turn this book into a theoretical milestone.

What could possibly have added some orientation for the reader would be a brief guide with suggested chapters for differ-

ent types of readers in the preface or at the beginning of the introduction. Also, I couldn't find an explicit definition of self-determination. This diverse book addresses a wide range of readers. Researchers of different disciplines will find theoretical knowledge for understanding and describing motivation. Practitioners are provided with exemplary field work and suggested subjects of interest (like sport, education, health care, etc.). This cross-domain work enriches perspectives of psychology, sociology, economy and history and is addressed by the authors as a bridge between different disciplines, which they have accomplished very well. In conclusion, this book should be a standard for everyone engaging with motivation.

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#### References

Pratap, A. 2016. *Content and Process Theories. The Distinction between Content and Process Theories of Motivation*. Retrieved 19 April 2018 (<https://www.cheshnotes.com/2016/10/content-process-theories/>).